



On the Land Education

Deh Gáh Elementary and Secondary School

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Nurturing Capacity
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Preface

Nurturing Capacity: Building Community Success

Indspire supports communities to improve educational outcomes through the documentation and evaluation of their innovative practices. This community-led process is supported by an Indspire-funded Indigenous scholar, who works with programs on the ground to provide training on data collection and evaluation methodology.

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Abstract

Located at Fort Providence in Deh Cho Territory in the southeastern corner of the Northwest Territories, Deh Gáh Elementary and Secondary School is implementing a successful On the Land Education initiative. By making fundamental changes to scheduling of the school calendar year, adjustments to the curriculum and program of study, Indigenous students are increasingly graduating from high school to pursue post-secondary education opportunities. Evidence continues to come forward as students involved with the program are currently enrolled in universities, colleges and work force opportunities across Canada. Supported by long-term partnerships with the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, Government of Northwest Territories, Deh Cho Divisional Education Council and Deh Cho First Nations, Deh Gáh Elementary and Secondary School is leading the way. The Deh Gáh Elementary and Secondary School has strategically focused on the support of teaching and the learning of Dene language, culture, heritage and lifestyle. Specific outcomes include increased school attendance, course completion rates, number of credits earned as well as increased student performance and retention.

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Executive Summary

Deh Gáh Secondary and Elementary School is located at Fort Providence in Deh Cho territory in the southwestern corner of the Northwest Territories. In comparison to the Northwest Territories as a whole, the population in the Deh Cho territory is young and growing. Concerns in the community include low graduation rates, literacy challenges, and limited supports available to high school graduates.ⁱ About 600 students attend nine schools in the region^{ii iii iv} and a majority of these students are Indigenous, the descendants of Dene and Métis families.

The Dene Zhatie six-week Immersion On the Land Camp was held at Shih k'eh Tue (Willow Lake) for the first time in 2011. The camp is one of several On the Land initiatives facilitated by Deh Gáh Elementary and Secondary School. Students engage in experiential learning, learning the Dene Zhatie language, and participate in Dene Kede curriculum activities through infused educational programming. The students participating in the land based program learn hunting, fishing, trapping, gathering, and food preparation activities. The positive results in this educational approach has led the school programming to engage in long-term sustainable partnerships. The school as a result has received funding from a variety of sources including the Dec Cho First Nation, Deh Cho Divisional Board of Education and Government of Northwest Territories Department of Education, Culture and Employment.

The success of On the Land Education at Deh Gáh Elementary and Secondary School is attributed to systemic and structural changes to the academic school year and program of study based on student needs.

Specific changes included:

- Year-round school calendar
- Four terms per year
- Seasonal breaks adjusted to:
 - October (nine days)
 - Christmas (three weeks)
 - March (two weeks)
 - Summer (five weeks)
- Adjustments to the curriculum schedule that meet the specific needs of the youth and community
- One academic course per term

Every student within the program spends four to six weeks on the land during fall, winter, spring and summer. By the time a student graduates, he or she will have spent

fifty weeks on the land. The experience grounds students culturally by connecting them to the land and community - knowing who they are and where they come from. Building partnerships and investing in infrastructure of the programming over an extended period of time has resulted in reduced budget costs and ensured program capacity.^v

Outcomes as a result of the program introduction include increased school attendance, course completion rates, number of credits earned and increased student performance and retention. Currently, there are twenty-three students who are graduates of Deh Gáh Elementary and Secondary School attending post-secondary education institutions throughout Canada. Deh Gáh Elementary and Secondary School is the only school in the Northwest Territories to operate on a year-round basis.

Deh Gáh Elementary and Secondary School: On the Land Education

Description of the Program

Deh Gáh Elementary and Secondary School in Fort Providence, which offers kindergarten through Grade 12, is one of three larger schools in the region and has an enrolment of roughly 150 students.^{vi} Deh Gáh is the only school in the Northwest Territories to operate on a year-round basis and offer extensive experiential land-based programs, immersion programs and multi-day on-the-land trips. The goal of Deh Gáh School's On the Land programming is to provide students with "experiential, culture-based learning" that helps them to develop respect for the land and empower them through strengthening skills and knowledge, and providing them with positive role models.^{vii} The On the Land programming additionally contributes to higher academic success and an increase in high school completion and transition into post-secondary programming.

Timetable for On the Land Programming

Student Group	Time on the Land	Trip Types
Grades K-3	8 weeks	Day Trips
Grades 4-6	3 weeks	1 week Day Trips 1 week Overnight Trips (x2)
Grades 7-9	3 ½ weeks	10 day Rites of Passage Camp 1 week Winter Overnight Camp 1 week Spring Camp (Day Trips)
Grades 10-12	3 weeks	Students choose from: 3-week Science Camp 2-week Canoe Trip 1 week Forest Ecology Camp 1 week Winter Camp

Context

There are an estimated 44,088 people in the Northwest Territories living in thirty-three communities. Slightly less than half (21,183) reside in Yellowknife, the remainder in the five regional centers.^{viii} Based upon the most recent statistical data, close to half of the population is Indigenous.^{ix} x Of these, in 2014, one-third (15,740) were under twenty-four years of age, and 1,950 were over sixty-five years of age. The median age for Indigenous people is younger (32.3 years) than the median average (40.6) in Canada.^{xi}

Of the total Indigenous population,^{xii} ^{xiii} for levels of education, 12% had less than Grade nine, 31% did not have a high school diploma, 29% had either a certificate or diploma, and close to 5% had a university degree.^{xiv} Of the 463 students who graduated from high school in 2014, more than half (259) were Indigenous (Dene 164, Métis 41, Inuit 54) in comparison to 204 non-Indigenous students, a trend consistent since 2009.^{xv} The Department of Education, Culture and Employment shares responsibility for delivering elementary and secondary education for forty-nine schools in thirty-three communities. There are eight Divisional Education Councils or School Boards composed of community-elected representatives and a regional Superintendent. In the Northwest Territories, language and culture education, school curriculum and teacher education are identified by the Government of the Northwest Territories as important to culture and heritage.^{xvi}

In 2016, the grade distribution of the 8367 students enrolled in school in the Northwest Territories was:

- 2385 in Grades 10-12
- 1625 in Grades 7-9
- 3615 in Grades 1-6
- 642 in Kindergarten
- 99 in Pre-Kindergarten^{xvii}

Deh Cho Territory

Deh Cho First Nations represents ten First Nations and three Métis Councils in the negotiation of land, resources and governance rights in the region. Guided by the “Dene Declaration of Rights” and Dene laws, principles and values,^{xviii} the vision of Deh Cho First Nations is to maintain the integrity of the land and Dene/Métis traditions through self-government and sustainable economic development.

“The land and waterways of the Deh Cho territory are sacred to the Deh Cho people. They have provided sustenance, shelter and medicine for generations.”^{xix} Deh Cho First Nations envision land, water and resource management, development and conservation in their traditional territory to reflect the “*stewardship shown by the Deh Cho people*

through their interdependent relationship to the land,” to “language, culture and life on the land.”^{xx} ^{xxi}

Dene Zhatie, historically referred to as South Slavey, is the language spoken in the Deh Cho region.^{xxii} ^{xxiii}

In 2006, there were 1,285 Dene Zhatie language speakers who understood and/or spoke the language throughout the Northwest Territories. Of these, about 145 were children and youth under the age of twenty-five years.^{xxiv} By 2014, there were 1,443 individuals over the age of fifteen years able to converse in the Dene Zhatie language.^{xxv}

Located in Fort Simpson, the Deh Cho Divisional Education Council is composed of a Regional Superintendent and community elected representatives. There are 64 teachers and administrators in the district.

About 600 students attend nine schools in the Deh Cho region of the southwestern Northwest Territories.^{xxvi} ^{xxvii} ^{xxviii} A majority of the students are Indigenous, the descendants of Dene and Métis. In comparison to the Northwest Territories as a whole, the population in the Deh Cho is young, with statistically higher unemployment rates and lower than average personal incomes. Concerns in the community are identified and include drop-out rates, graduation rates, reading challenges, and limited supports available to high school graduates.^{xxix} Challenges to health and well-being in communities include addictions, mental health, rates of crime, and violence in the form of spousal assaults.^{xxx}



Deh Gáh Got'ie Koe

Located in the southwestern Northwest Territories in Deh Cho territory, the community of Fort Providence is referred to as Deh Gáh Got'ie Koe (Home of the River People).^{xxxi} The Indigenous people of the region included several clans and peoples:^{xxxii} the Red Knife, Mink Lake and Moose Point clans and Echaot'i (Land of the Giants), Horn River, Big Point and Jack Fish Point peoples.^{xxxiii}

Historically, Old Fort Providence was originally founded in 1786 as a supply and trading centre for the North West Company and Hudson's Bay Company. The region was visited by explorer Alexander Mackenzie in 1789 during his journey to the Arctic Ocean. Throughout the 1800s and into the 1900s, subsequent travellers who journeyed north through the Mackenzie valley introduced a series of disease epidemics that would decimate the Indigenous population by up to ninety percent in some regions.^{xxxiv}

In the North, the earliest schools were opened to provide care and education to “unwanted, orphaned and diseased children.”^{xxxv} Established as a boarding school and orphanage by the Grey Nuns of the Oblate Mission in at Fort Providence in 1867, Sacred Heart Residential School was the first residential mission school in the Northwest Territories to be attended by Dene and Métis children from throughout the North until its closure in 1960.



Deh Cho Region, Northwest Territories^{xxxvi}

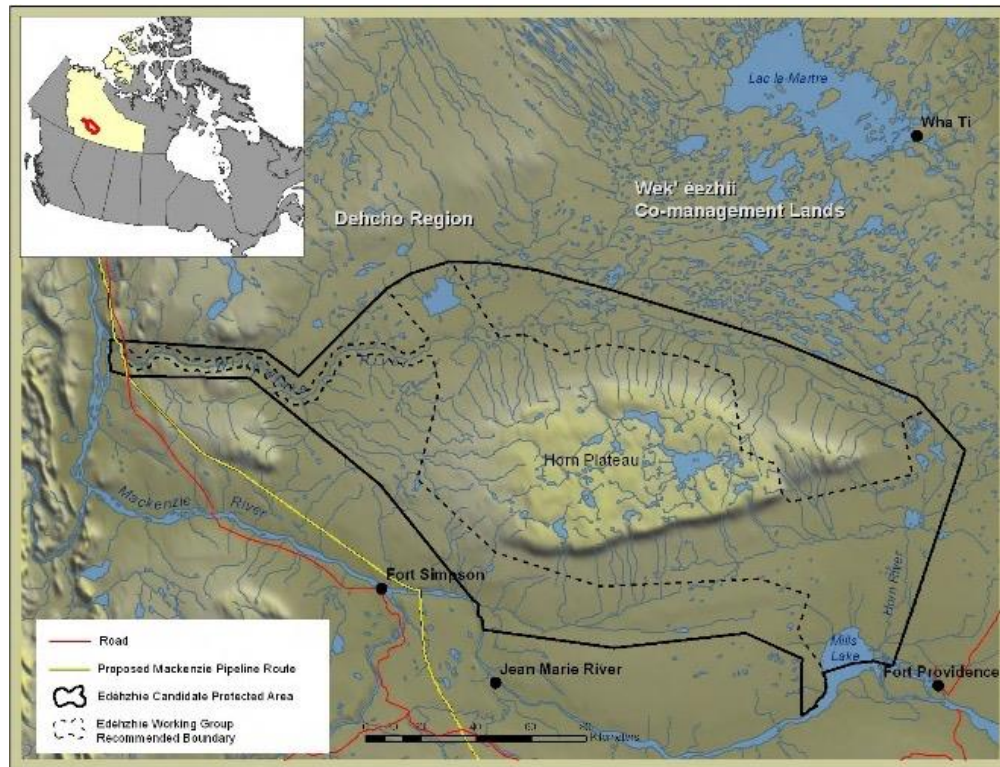
The hamlet of Fort Providence, established in 1867, is home to about 800 people today.^{xxxvii} Close to 700 are Indigenous.^{xxxviii xxxix} Slightly more than half of community members hunt and fish and about a quarter of the population produce local arts and crafts.^{xl}



Programs and services in Fort Providence today include:

- Deh Gáh Elementary and Secondary School,
- Fort Providence Community Learning Centre,
- Zhahti Koe Public Library, Deh Cho Health and Social Services,
- Fort Providence Residential School Society,
- Zhahti Koe Friendship Centre,
- Fort Providence Hamlet,
- Fort Providence Housing Association,
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police,
- Fort Providence Métis Council, and
- The Deh Gáh Got'ie Dene Council.^{xli}

In 2014, half of the community members held a high school diploma or higher level of education. About one-third of Indigenous people were employed. One of three larger schools in the region offering kindergarten through Grade 12, Deh Gáh Elementary and Secondary School in Fort Providence has an enrolment of about 150 students attending Kindergarten through to Grade 12.^{xlii}



Edéhzhíe, Willow Lake, Horne Plateau, Deh Cho Region, Northwest Territories

Through the land based programming students focus is on experiential learning, students speak the Dene Zhatie language and participate in activities from the Dene Kede curriculum together with their families.^{xliii} In the program, students attend Science and Dene Zhatie language sessions. They learn skills and facts about the local area such as wildlife and plants. They also participate in hunting, fishing and trapping, gathering and food preparation activities. Families are provided with a tent and a basic food kit when participating in the program.^{xliv}

Brief History of the Project

The first six-week camp was held in 2011 and it included eighteen teenagers, four children, six Elders and eleven adults. Participants practiced the Dene Zhatie language with Elders, went hunting and fishing, and learned how to prepare food. While challenging, the experience was described as having a significant impact on students.^{xlv}

In 2013, in partnership with Indigenous Head Start in Fort Providence, Deh Gáh School began offering a Dene Zhati language immersion program to four-year olds in the community.^{xlvi} The initiative is described as a demonstration site for Junior Kindergarten in the Northwest Territories.^{xlvi} The language immersion is key to this programming and demonstrates both capacity building within the community as well as strategic partnering. In recent years, a total of twenty-eight students have graduated from Deh Gáh School and students have doubled the number of credits previously obtained during a school year.^{xlvi}

Former Deh Gáh School Principal, Lois Phillip, is often credited with the school's success. Indigenous to the region and named "2013 Canada's Outstanding Principal", Principal Phillip is described as a driving force behind the success of students at Fort Providence.^{xlvi} "Through her leadership at the Deh Gáh Elementary and Secondary School since 2004, the school has evolved from a community school with cultural infusion to a school that is truly culture-based."

In partnership with various organizations, such as Deh Cho First Nations, the Deh Cho Divisional Education Council and Department of Education, Culture and Employment, Deh Gáh School participated in some of the following initiatives:

- Keepers Canoe Trip 2014^{i li lii}
- The Learning Partnership: First Nations Students Working and Traveling Outside of their Community^{liii}
- Queen's Health Outreach: An International Health Initiative, QHO Northwest Territories^{liv}
- Connected North, TelePresence, Cisco Inc.^{lv lvi}

Connection to Indspire Principles

- ❖ **Principle 3:** Indigenous knowledges (ways of being, knowing, valuing and doing), which convey our responsibilities and relationships to all life is a valued and foundational aspect of the learning program for all children and youth
- ❖ **Principle 4:** Cultural/language communities have the right to define success for their own wellbeing.
- ❖ **Principle 5:** Learning is viewed as lifelong, holistic, and experiential, which is rooted in language and culture, is place-based, spiritually oriented, communal and open to multiple ways of knowing the world.
- ❖ **Principle 6:** Programs, schools and systems are responsive to both the aspirations and the needs of Indigenous peoples.

The connection to Indspire Principles is evident as the program has inter-generational reach as it includes nursery, head start, Elders and traditional Knowledge Keepers in the delivery of educational programming. The importance of language as well as identity are key theoretical underpinnings that are consistently reinforced through land-based educational experiences. The programming is contextual to the geographic area and is yearlong in its operational delivery. Programming is designed by the local community and Knowledge Holders who share with youth and families the importance of on the land teachings. The program is unique within Canada and is an example of how land based education can be taken up in communities to meet the needs of youth and families in a holistic approach to education.

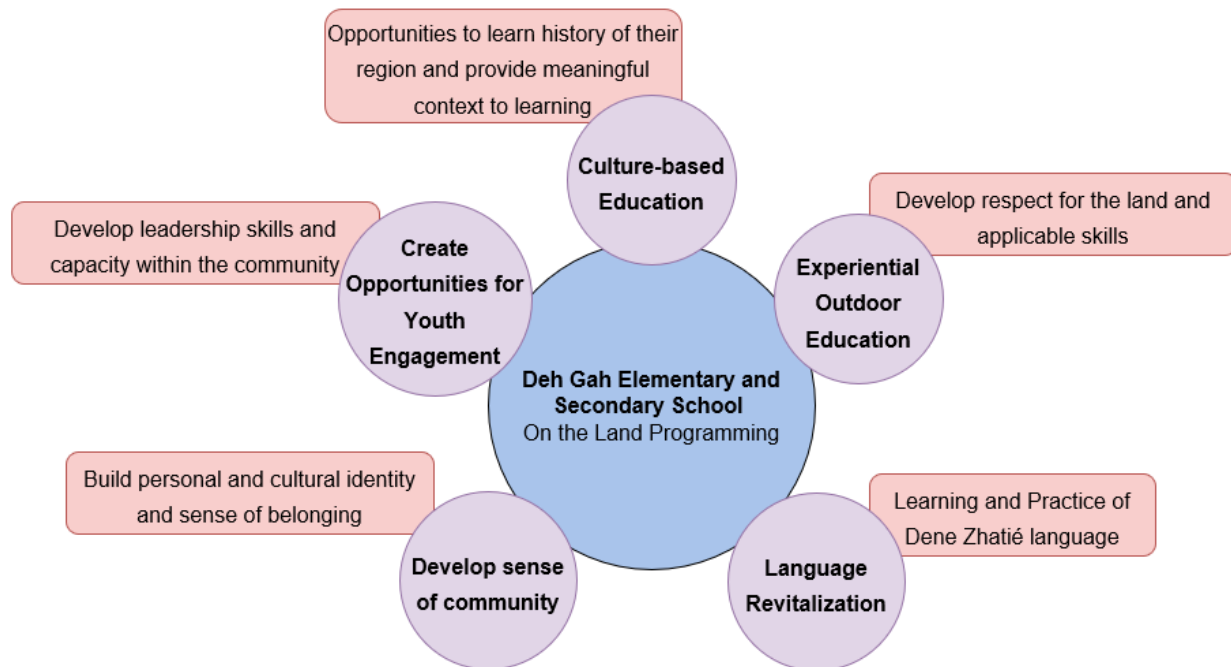
Activities Accomplished

In 2010, the school initiated scheduling changes to the school year intended to increase school attendance, course completion rates, student performance and retention.

Structural and Systemic Changes to the School Year	
Operation	Year-round
Terms per Year	4
Adjustment of School Breaks	October – 9 days Christmas – 3 weeks March – 2 weeks Summer – 5 weeks
Adjustment of Curriculum Schedule	
Academic Courses per Term	1

Materials Developed

Project Model (based on interview with Lois Phillips)



Logic Model Used for the Project

The Logic Model in Appendix 1 identifies project collaborators and include Indspire, the Lead Researcher, Dr. Lois Edge, Deh Gáh Elementary and Secondary School administrators and teachers, the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, Northwest Territories Government, Aurora College, and Dene and Métis youth, parents, Elders and Indigenous Knowledge Holders from Fort Providence, Northwest Territories.

This Nurturing Capacity initiative examined the On the Land program at Deh Gáh Elementary and Secondary School as a community capacity building initiative. The programming serves to strengthen the transmission of Dene language, culture, heritage and land-based skills to youth and contributing to increased rates of retention and successful completion of high school in the community, thereby increasing the number of students accessing post-secondary education opportunities.

Major activities include project planning, comprehensive background research including geography, governance, history, demographic profile, learning environment and identification of Indigenous educational practices in the region.

The highlight of the project was attendance at a six-day camp at Willow Lake on the Horne Plateau about forty-five minutes by air from Fort Simpson from September 18-24, 2016. The lead researcher and student researcher engaged to in data collection in the form of individual interviews, focus group discussions and collection of visual images.

The final major activity involved data compilation, review and analysis, and development of a final report and community presentation of project results for community members in Fort Providence.

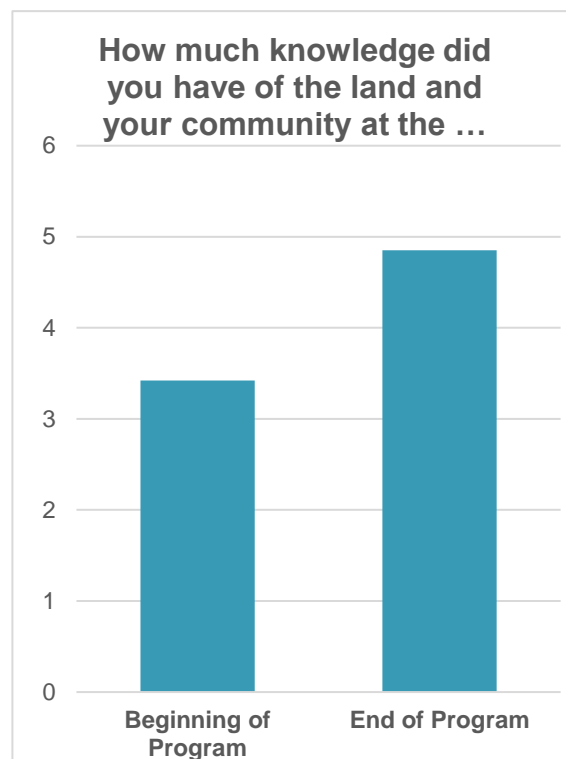
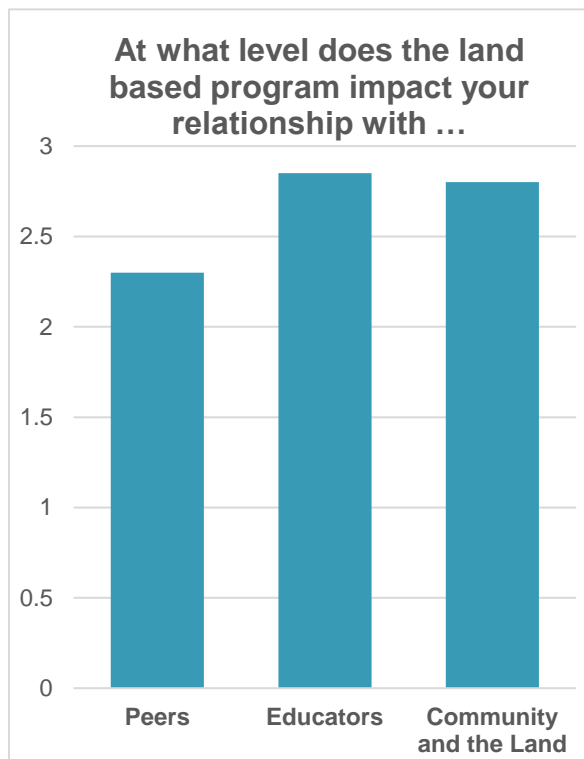
Outcomes or performance indicators include data on the number of students graduating and number of students attending post-secondary education institutions. Additional outcomes specific to conduct of research in the Northwest Territories include Research Ethics approval from Aurora College and a territorial research license from the Aurora Research Institute. This process resulted in hiring of a student researcher from Aurora College.

The ultimate goal of the project was completion of a final report and community presentation highlighting successful outcomes of the Deh Gáh Elementary and Secondary School on the Land Education activities.

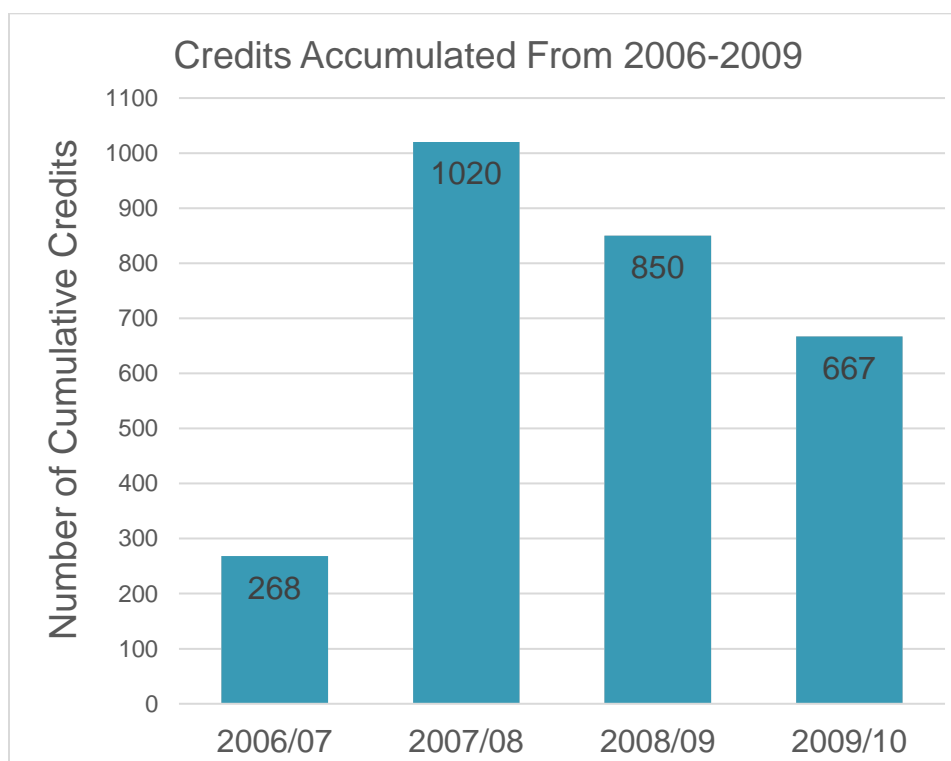
Performance Indicator and Measures

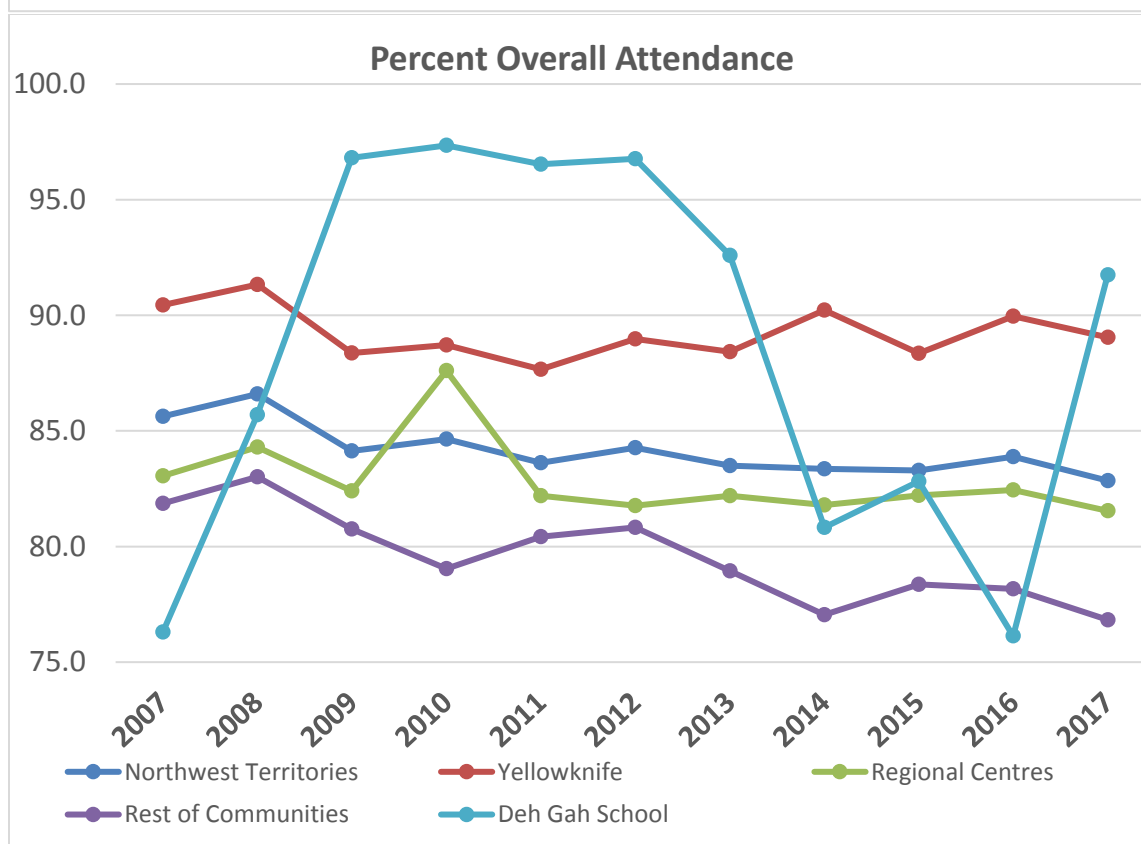
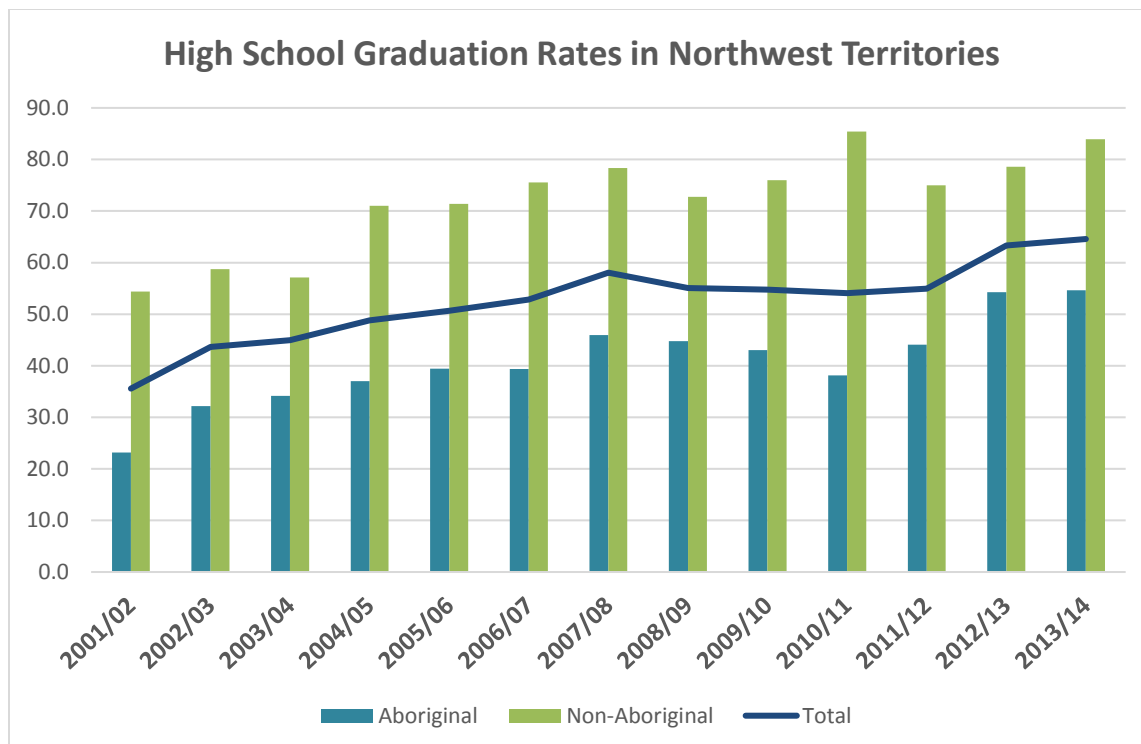
Goal	Measure	Success Indicators
Affirm language and cultural identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews/conversations with students • Application of skills and knowledge developed from participation in On the Land programs • Attainment of certifications such as First Aid, Fire Arms Safety, and Paddle Canada Canoe Levels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased sense of empowerment from students in their identity and knowledge of their ancestral history ✓ Increased student attainment of certifications ✓ Increased knowledge of the Dene Zhatie language
Encourage academic achievement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation of student credit accumulation • Calculated drop-out rates 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ More students on track to graduate each year ✓ Reduced drop-out rates ✓ Increased high school completion
Improved perception of school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff impact statements • Anecdotal reports and interviews 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased student engagement with their education and extracurricular activities ✓ Increased positive outlooks on education and the transition into post-secondary programs
Encourage and support interest in post-secondary programming and entrance into the workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interest and participation in planning for post-secondary • Utilization of leadership skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Increased student transition into post-secondary programming and workforce ✓ More students becoming leaders in the community

Evaluation



*Survey results current students n=15





Source: Education, Culture & Employment, Government of Northwest Territories

Limitations

Notably, there are few academic or government publications focused on the identification of Indigenous performance indicators specific to land-based education initiatives.

Indigenous performance indicators or measures specific to On the Land Education initiatives might include:

- Identification of On the Land activities learned
- Identification of challenges faced or overcome
- Oral testimony specific to attainment of personal growth
- Oral testimony concerning attainment of pride in identity as Dene or Indigenous
- Identification of specific challenges and/or opportunities relating to individual's experience
- Demonstration of deeper level understanding of Indigenous laws, principles, values and beliefs. This includes: respect, responsibility, capability, autonomy as referred to in the Dene Laws,^{lvii} Dene Kede curriculum,^{lviii} and Common Curriculum Framework for Aboriginal Language and Culture Programs.^{lix}

Student Interviews

How would you describe the program in your own words?

- The program is fun and very educational, you get to learn about your culture and stories of the land. The teachers incorporate the lessons with culture, so we get to understand the lessons more.
- It is fun, learning about our culture everyday it keeps it alive!
- I think this program is awesome because you can do field work and indoor work.
- This program is a great learning experience.
- This program itself is amazing, we go out on land and we learn in fun ways and get to spend time with teachers and people we hardly talk with and then we gain that relationship again with them.
- Dene people doing what we love to do like fishing, hunting, learning about the land, and our history and we get school credits is a major bonus. I love the program. We are lucky to have a program like this. It makes school more interesting and it helps me attend.

Does the land based program help keep you connected to school?

- Yes, it makes me more connected to everybody because everybody knows what the land is like.
- Yes, we have the community and the students we all have the same common land and goals.
- Yes, because I rarely go camping and with this program I can and I learn about the territory.
- Yes, by learning and travelling together we get closer.
- Yes, by respecting the land by not littering, cleaning up after yourself and respecting the weather the way it is.
- Yes, I now understand why people do the things they do because of their culture.

At what level does the land based program impact your relationship with your peers?

- Medium, I understand why they act the way they do and we need this to heal our relations.
- Medium, going through all the tough times this bonds us.
- It helps us deal with each other in good ways.
- We need each other and by being on the land it teaches us to work together.
- It provides support in a healthy way with each other.

How does land based education shape the ways in which you think about school and education? In what ways?

- Attendance / do your work without being asked to. We become self-motivated.
- That everything is connected. This is education.
- Attendance / participating.
- Learning difficult things in our culture like how to fish, scrape moose hide.
- Before I went on this trip, I was only going to school in the afternoons, coming here made me think that I have to give it all my effort to be successful.
- It makes school much easier and it helps student in need. It makes them feel better about themselves.
- It shaped the way they think about school and the way they live and the things we love to do.

- Out on the land experience turns in to credits. The program makes me spiritually connected to the land and the way I think about the land. I feel so much stronger just to connect with the land and yourself.
- It shows that the school cares and that they just want the best for you.

What would you like to see the program improve on? How would you make the program even better?

- Get more communities involved.
- Get more Elders involved and parents / family for support and make camp two weeks maximum.
- We need cabins instead of tents especially in Willow Lake.
- Have time for ourselves on the weekends.
- The program is great. Maybe the program can have more events like drum dance and more.
- By looking at more permafrost and water temperature experiences in Science.
- The program can improve on letting high school students go on the trips as well because as people move up a grade and get older they can't go on the trips.

How has the program influenced you?

- By getting up earlier, helping out others who are in need.
- I pay attention to what I am doing in life. I work on listening to those who are speaking and respect people for who they are.
- The program has shaped me by teaching me respect and getting more social.
- The program made me happy and interested in this kind of job on the land.
- Having more respect and helping me out more.
- Cleared my mind, been sober for 3 weeks and I want to keep it that way.
- It makes me happier and more excited about school. I love camping and I am learning so much knowledge out on the land and skills.
- I feel more confident out on the land, about myself and I have a lot of credits, which made me happy because credits are hard to get and it makes me happy because it gives me courage to finish school and have some future dreams.

What advice would you give to students that have never been a part of a program and school like the one you attend?

- That you have to experience this it's so much fun and you learn so much.
- If I never had this program I wouldn't know where I would be right now.
- Try new things, it's good to learning other cultures and traditions.
- The bush and the land is a great place to have fun and learn about different things and have more experiences.
- That students should go and do this program and learn more about the land and themselves.
- Just try your best and honestly that's enough. The staff care more since there's less students, so if someone needs help everyone will help.
- I would encourage these students by saying that this program is a great experience that not all people get to experience.
- This program is all about fresh water systems that are actually tested to see what is living in the water and to see how warm/ cold the water is.

What key teachings have you come to understand by participating in the land based education programming?

- To always respect the land, animals, everything Mother Nature has created.
- By doing science and learning how to use the machines and how to take the temperature of water and permafrost.
- Skinning fish, getting nets, plucking ducks, set snare and make bush tea and survival skills.
- Time is money.
- That this is reality, it gives us an image how our ancestors and grandparents used to live and they still pass on this teaching and knowledge to use that now we have learned and to pass it on. I like this program.

At what level does the land based program impact your relationship with the community and the land? (Describe this)

- By learning new things and learning more about culture it makes me proud of my community.
- By accepting the people who you're working with, getting along with others and respect each other's belongings and keeping what we learn here and take it back to the community with us.

- It makes our community stronger by being together this way.

Key threads from interview:

- Evidence of the connection between learning from the land and education
- Increased motivation in school through the opportunities to learn in a connected hands-on way
- Developing relationships with the land, peers and teachers is important to the youth
- They can begin to see how land-based programming is needed to increase language, culture and affirmed identity

Survey with Parent/Guardians**How has this program impacted your child (the youth)? The community?**

This program is very good, and should be in other communities because it's my first time out here and it's beautiful. My grandchildren are very important to me, they need to know where they came from and who they are. This program helps them understand who they are. Especially learning their culture and language. The program also reminds us to save the land to keep their knowledge strong.

In your opinion why is this program important?

This program is very important for our young generation and to keep our culture, language going for the future. Being Dene is very important to know your identity and your traditional way of life and to keep our language strong for our young generations to come.

Key threads from interview:

- Language and culture matter to families.
- The programming helps increase the connection between youth and their families
- Identity is important in the healthy development of families.
- Land based education should continue to be a priority to schools within communities.

An interview with former Principal Lois Phillip

Opening thoughts

Our literacy is different in the North. We don't live in a literacy rich environment we need to think about other experiences in school. We live on the site of the first residential school. Our community is filled with trauma. Eleven years ago we started our first immersion program. With the breadth of the outdoor program we strive to look at community, culture, language that makes us whole. You need the experience on the land to connect you to the land. The land has a way of healing and it builds relationships between us all. We needed to do something different for the youth to keep hopeful. Doing the same thing in school was not working.

What are the key benefits to the programming?

It gives kids a sense of accomplishment. It might not be at the present but it will come out much later in life. We are a community of eight hundred and we have students in eight or nine different post-secondary institutions across Canada. I have worked in the school for over twenty years. I say go out of the North and come back and tell us the story of what you have learned. This is how we know that it is working they always come back and share what they have learned. Some of these students have travelled to different parts of the world during youth travel exchanges.

Where we struggle, and don't agree with the western paradigm of school is because, it is all about me but this is long-term what we are doing by getting on the land. We are working to redefine the sense of normal. We are changing the way we are in terms of cultural context and in terms of our own personal identity. This is what makes us stronger and more connected in life.

How would you describe the support of this program by parents and the community?

I think I would say we have passive supports. They like what we do but I think the residential school has taken some of the active support out. Elders phone me on quick phone calls and say, "I like this program" and then hang up. We don't have to be bound by what was; let's think of what could be. I really want families to see the importance of experiences both in the North and outside of the North.

What do you see for the future of the program?

I hope we don't lose the momentum. We had a major disruption we lost a number of staff and they had young families so we had to create the community voice that says this is very important. How do we create active engaged community instead of passive because we need the parents and community in the program for it to continue to thrive? Mostly like when we went to Willow Lake we had one teacher and we brought in a retired educator and the other six members were from the community. The members pass on their gifts and the members who have not had many experiences with the land it helps with connecting them to the land.

Describe the beginning of the program

We were bound by the western institutions and when we started in the school there was just two of us. I knew the curriculum and the background I understood what we could do when I became the principal. I have had challenges with some of the western structures. Starting at the beginning of August goes against the time frame that contracts teachers these are challenges. So, it's part of a systemic challenge to keep this going. I would like us in the North to continue on this path. Our families shouldn't have to leave after that is why it is so important to be able to study and learn until 21 years old. Most students graduate at 18 to 19 years old but we have the time to keep kids at home in the community. We don't have that pressure.

What sustains you in your work?

I think it was the idea that I needed to give back to the community and then it was the group of people I get to work with and now it is the needs of the community and that I have to think with this. I want to see the kids through and it continues to change for me. I only signed a one year contract in 96' and this is the first year that I have signed a long-term contract. So now it is an odd situation that I have an ongoing contract so I can see what else is out there.

Key threads from interview:

- Education is on the land not just the western paradigm of school.
- Community is the key to building a sustainable long-term program.
- Language and learning about the land is key to identity.
- Develop a vision where students can see and experience beyond the North.
- Transition to post-secondary is a key component to the program.

Outcomes: Most Significant Accomplishments and Lessons Learned

The program has many significant accomplishments and is leading the way nationally in terms of land-based education. Land-based education has recently seen an increased emphasis due to federal grant based initiatives that encourage this type of programming. However, the key limitation within this type of programming has been a lack of empirical data that measures the overall impact as well as holistic benefits. The distinct difference within this program is the longitudinal sample that they have tracked in terms of credit accumulation and high school completion within the cohorts.

Alternatively, it is also evident that when key factors within programming such as a higher teacher leaving rate within the community, the program was directly impacted with a sharp reduction in attendance and credits attained.

The accomplishments in this program include a year-round school model that is uniquely designed within the community and based on the geography and needs of the community. Another significant accomplishment is the dedicated emphasis to learning at multi levels of engagement including pre-kindergarten to Elders. In this way, this program is a community effort to sustain identity, language and culture. Evidence of the belief in this program is in the strategic partnerships with territorial governments and other agencies that support this larger educational vision. A final and noteworthy accomplishment is the dedication of the administration who have designed and composed the vision over the course of a teaching career. Former students returning to the community are markers of an educational movement that has shaped a community going forward.

Next Steps for the Project

Based upon participants' feedback and recommendations as listed in "Things we would like to see in the future":

- Increased human capacity, with more people responsible for running the camp;
- Clearly defined roles and responsibilities;
- Facilitation of healthy relationships;
- Daily and weekly schedule of activities;
- Increased number and type of activities;
- Mental health worker on site to provide counselling and guidance as needed;
- Strengthening of infrastructure such as services, supplies, and equipment;
- Investment in supplies such as camping gear (tents, stoves, sleeping bags, etc.) and cold weather clothing and personal items;

- Provision of nutritious food items and food options for healthy diet and nutrition. Ideally this would include more fruit and vegetables, variety of fruit and vegetables and a variety of food options;
- Increased funding specific to healing of intergenerational legacy of Indian Residential schools;
- Support from TRCC to assist community members to apply for TRCC funding;
- Indigenous education: impact of intergenerational legacy of Indian residential schools, history of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations in Canada, and anti-oppressive education;
- Strengthening of relations and relationships with parents, grandparents and community members; and
- Transitioning of On the Land Education from school to home and community.

General recommendations in support of On the Land Education include the adoption of year-round program of studies and adjustment of curriculum, investment in infrastructure to support On the Land Education and continued facilitation of On the Land Education opportunities for Indigenous students.

A recommendation for Next Steps is to develop Indigenous evaluation outcomes and indicators to better evaluate the qualitative element of On the Land Education based upon Indigenous laws, principles, values, beliefs and practices in order to strengthen a broader and deeper level understanding of On the Land Education as “the land as healer” and “healing from the land.”^{lx}

Interactive Tools and Weblinks

Deh Gáh School's Education On The Land

<http://www.ontheland.dehGáhschool.com>

Roundtable on Aboriginal Land-Based and Culturally-Focused Education

<https://vimeo.com/25210099>

Appendix I: Logic Model



Inputs: Resources Human & Financial	Strategies / Major Activities	Outputs or Performance Indicators	Short Term Outcomes or Objectives	Inter-mediate Outcomes or Objectives	Ultimate Goal/ Impact
Resources: - Deh Gáh School - Principal - On the Land Educator - Teachers - Elders and Indigenous Knowledge Holders - Students - Parents - Project Lead - Student Researcher - Aurora College - NWT Gov't: Education, Culture	Planning meeting Background and context research Quantitative data collection Research compilation and analysis Distribute project information and consent forms Qualitative data collection: - Interviews with Administrators, teachers, Elders and Indigenous Knowledge Holders	Draft report - Project background and context - Logic Model Collect project information and consent forms - Focus group discussion and interview summaries - Digital images	Planning meetings Apply for Aurora Research Institute research licence Apply for Aurora College research ethics approval Attend On the Land program at Willow Lake August 14-18 Draft report Quantitative and qualitative data collection	Hiring of student researcher Quantitative and qualitative data review analysis Identification of themes and indicators and success factors Final report development Community presentation development	Aurora Research Institute research licence Aurora College research ethics approval On site data collection Data compilation and analysis Final report Community presentation

Inputs: Resources Human & Financial	Strategies / Major Activities	Outputs or Performance Indicators	Short Term Outcomes or Objectives	Inter-mediate Outcomes or Objectives	Ultimate Goal/ Impact
and Employment (ECE) - Financial: Inspire Nurturing Capacity - Deh Gáh School - NWT Gov't ECE - Lead Researcher	- Focus groups with students and parents - Data compilation and analysis - Final report development				

Endnotes

ⁱ Lutra and Associates. (2009) Deh Cho Regional Investment Plan. Mackenzie Gas Project Impact Fund. Phase 3: Final Report. Deh Cho First Nations.

ⁱⁱ About 3,500 live in ten communities. The communities are: Fort Simpson, Fort Providence, Fort Liard, Wrigley, Nahanni Butte, Trout Lake, Jean Marie River, Kakisa, Hay River Reserve, and West Point First Nations.

ⁱⁱⁱ NWT Education Today, NWTTA and GNWT ECE, February 2016.

^{iv} Programming for high school graduation is based upon completion of 100 course credits including 74 Specified Credits and 26 Unspecified Credits. Specified Credits include: English or French Language Arts, Social Studies, Math, Science, Career and Technical Services, Fine Arts, Physical Education, Northern Studies, Career and Program Planning, Career and Life Management and Community Services. Government of Canada and Government of Northwest Territories. (2010) NWT Education, Training and Employment Guide. Education, Culture and Employment. http://www.immigratenwt.ca/sites/default/files/ece_training_guide_final.pdf

^v Pan Territorial on The Land Summit 2017. Lois Phillip. Retrieved from <https://www.otlsummit2017.com>

^{vi} Deh Cho Divisional Educational Council, 2015.

^{vii} <http://www.ontheland.dehGáhschool.com/about/>

^{viii} Regional centres include Inuvik (3,625), Fort Simpson (1,204), Fort Smith (2,499), Hay River (3,725) and Behchoko (2,104). Bureau of Statistics. (2016) Population Estimates by Community and Region July 1, 2015. <http://www.statsnwt.ca/population/population-estimates/bycommunity.php>

^{ix} Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. (2016) Aboriginal Demographics from 2011 National Household Survey. Government of Canada. <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1370438978311/1370439050610>

^x There are methodological issues specific to the National Household Survey of 2011. The data cannot be compared to previous national census data from previous years. A current national census is in progress in Canada.

^{xi} Statistics Canada. (2016) Population reporting an Aboriginal identity. 2006 Census. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/demo38d-eng.htm>

^{xii} There were 16,837 Aboriginal people in the NWT in 2014.

^{xiii} Bureau of Statistics. (2014) Community Survey. Table 1C. Aboriginal Highest Level of Schooling, by Age, Category and Gender. Winter 2014. Government of Northwest Territories.

^{xiv} Bureau of Statistics. (2014) Aboriginal Highest Level of Schooling, by Age Category and Gender. Northwest Territories. Winter. Government of Northwest Territories.

^{xv} Bureau of Statistics. (2016) Northwest Territories Population - January 2016. Statistics Quarterly. March 16, 2016. Government of Northwest Territories.

^{xvi} Government of Northwest Territories. (2015) Strong Cultures, Strong Territories: GNWT Culture and Heritage Strategic Framework 2015-2025. Education, Culture and Employment. <http://www.assembly.gov.nt.ca/taled-documents/strong-cultures-strong-territory-gnwt-culture-and-heritage-strategic-framework-2015>

^{xvii} Government of Northwest Territories. (2016) newstats, Bureau of Statistics.

^{xviii} Deh Cho First Nations. Negotiations (Archives) http://www.dehcho.org/negotiations_archives.htm

^{xix} Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada. (2003) NWT Plain Talk. Deh Cho Special Edition. <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100025680/1100100025709>

^{xx} Deh Cho First Nations undertook the documentation of oral tradition, storytelling and traditional land use from 500 Elders and traditional harvesters over a seven-year period. A digital map, described by Grand Chief Herb Norwegian, tells the story of the Deh Cho: "It was just like a dreamcatcher... All the lines, dots and circles - like the face of the moon. It was like the signature of the land, since time immemorial, of how it took care of the people. The vibrant flesh of Mother Earth. We were just mesmerized. Stunned." (Grand Chief Herb Norwegian, Deh Cho First Nations, 2016). Described as "one of the best First Nations land use plans in the country... in the midst of a nation-wide conversation around Aboriginal title, reconciliation and the right to free, prior and informed consent... the plan [could] set a powerful precedent for Indigenous-led land management and conservation in Canada." National Observer. (2016) This northern First Nation is teaching Canada how to protect the land. Meagan Wohlberg. News. June 20, 2016. <http://www.nationalobserver.com/2016/06/20/news/northern-first-nation-teaching-canada-how-protect-land>

^{xxi} [Link: <http://www.dehcho.org/home.htm>]

^{xxii} There are classroom assistants and/or an Aboriginal language specialist in each school. Teaching of Dene Zhatie is supported by a Teaching and Learning Centre responsible for programming, literacy courses for instructors, and development and dissemination of multimedia kits to all schools.

^{xxiii} There are eleven official languages in the NWT including nine Indigenous languages, in addition to English and French.

^{xxiv} NWT Bureau of Statistics. (2006) Population by Mother Tongue and Age Group. Northwest Territories. 2006 Census.

^{xxv} NWT Bureau of Statistics. (2014) Population 15 & Older by Age Ability to Converse. Beaufort-Delta and Northwest Territories, 1989-2014. Labour Force and Community Surveys.

^{xxvi} About 3,500 live in ten communities. The communities are: Fort Simpson, Fort Providence, Fort Liard, Wrigley, Nahannie Butte, Trout Lake, Jean Marie River, Kakisa, Hay River Reserve, and West Point First Nations.

^{xxvii} NWT Education Today, NWTTA and GNWT ECE, February 2016.

^{xxviii} Programming for high school graduation is based upon completion of 100 course credits including 74 Specified Credits and 26 Unspecified Credits. Specified Credits include: English or French Language Arts, Social Studies, Math, Science, Career and Technical Services, Fine Arts, Physical Education, Northern Studies, Career and Program Planning, Career and Life Management and Community Services. Government of Canada and Government of Northwest Territories. (2010) NWT Education, Training and Employment Guide. Education, Culture and Employment. http://www.immigratenwt.ca/sites/default/files/ece_training_guide_final.pdf

^{xxix} Existing regional social and economic programs and services in the Deh Cho region are delivered by government departments and agencies, non-government organizations and private sector groups.

^{xxx} Lutra and Associates. (2009) Deh Cho Regional Investment Plan. Mackenzie Gas Project Impact Fund. Phase 3: Final Report. Deh Cho First Nations. p. 17.

^{xxxi} Meaning “Home by the River”. Piper, (No Date)

^{xxxii} The term Indigenous is defined by the World Health Organization as: identify themselves and are recognized and accepted by their community as Indigenous; demonstrate historical continuity with pre-colonial and/or pre-settler societies; strong links to territories and surrounding natural resources; distinct social, economic or political systems; maintain distinct languages, cultures and beliefs; form non-dominant groups of society; and, resolve to maintain and reproduce their ancestral environments and systems as distinctive peoples and communities. World Health Organization. (2017) Health of Indigenous Peoples. Retrieved from: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs326/en/>

^{xxxiii} Bonnetroug, Joachim P. (No date) An Outline of the History of Fort Providence. Retrieved from http://www.nwtandy.rcsigs.ca/stations/providence_history.htm

^{xxxiv} New illnesses include influenza, measles, chicken pox, whooping and scarlet fever. Government of Northwest Territories. (2014) Bridging the Deh Cho: Canada’s Mighty Mackenzie River: The History, the People and the Crossing. Government of Northwest Territories.

^{xxxv} Prince of Wales Northern Heritage Centre. (No Date) 1850-1899. 1867 Missions Schools: The Beginning of Residential Schooling. Retrieved from http://www.nwttimeline.ca/1850/1867_MissionSchool.htm

^{xxxvi} Map. Deh Cho Health and Social Services. <http://www.dhssa.hss.gov.nt.ca/fr/node/1638>

The Dene Zhatie term for Fort Providence is Zhahti Kue.^{xxxvii}

xxxviii The term Aboriginal is a generic term defined in the Canada Constitution Act 1982 to include First Nations, Métis and Inuit people in Canada.

xxxix Statistics Quarterly, Bureau of Statistics, Government of Northwest Territories. March 2016.

xl In total, 54% of community members hunted and fished, 16% trapped, 27% produced arts and crafts and 58% consumed country food. Bureau of Statistics. (2015) Fort Providence - Statistical Profile. Community Data. Government of Northwest Territories.

xli Lutra and Associates. (2009) Deh Cho Regional Investment Plan. Mackenzie Gas Project Impact Fund. Phase 3: Final Report. Deh Cho First Nations.

xlii Deh Cho Divisional Educational Council, 2015.

xlili Northern News Service Online. (2011) School offers language camp: 23 Deh Gáh School students to spend six weeks at Willow Lake.

http://www.nnsi.com/frames/newspapers/2011-09/sep1_11IME.html

xliv Deh Gáh Elementary and Secondary School. (2013) Willow Lake. On the Land.

http://www.dehGáhschool.com/?page_id=830

xlvi National News Service Online. (2011) 34 days in a Dene village: First Dene Zhatie Immersion Program aims to immerse youth in traditional culture, teach them a language. http://www.nnsi.com/frames/newspapers/2011-10/oct13_11deh.html

xlvi A recent study by the First Nations Information Governance Centre suggests early childhood education programs such as Aboriginal Head Start are meeting with success in the transmission of cultural knowledge and activities in the community. Language, culture and family are strongly associated with Aboriginal people's health and well-being. The social determinants of health such as employment, education, housing, and cultural continuity, systems of education and health, community infrastructure and self-government are linked to Aboriginal people's health. See Reading, Charlotte and Fred Wien. (2009). Health Inequalities and Social Determinants of Aboriginal Peoples' Health. National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health. Prince George, BC: National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health. http://www.nccah-ccnsa.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/46/health_inequalities_EN_web.pdf

xlvi "We are now seeing more confident, self-aware children having fun, exploring, communicating, and working together. They seem to be more socialized and better able to self-regulate," said Principal, Lois Phillip. Northwest Territories. (No Date) Junior Kindergarten in the NWT. Free. Safe. Fun. Optional. Lois Philipp, Principal, Deh Gáh Elementary and Secondary School.

<https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/files/pages/884/gac024ecefreesafefunoptionalloisphilippwr.pdf>

xlvi Open NWT. (2013) Michael Nadli on 2013 Outstanding Principal Award Recipient Lois Philipp of Deh Gáh School. Legislative Assembly of the NWT. Hansard. February 21, 2013. <https://hansard.opennwt.ca/debates/2013/2/21/michael-nadli-1/only/>

xlvi The Learning Partnership's National Academy of Canada's Outstanding Principals. Northern Journal. (2013) NWT principals awarded 'outstanding' title. <https://norj.ca/2013/02/nwt-principals-awarded-outstanding-title/>

l Students aged 14 to 17 years attended a Keepers of the NWT program forest ecology camp hosted by NWT Environment and Natural Resources at Sandy Lake. The program creates experiential learning opportunities for youth to build environmental stewardship and respect for the environment. Deh Gáh Elementary and Secondary School. (No Date) Sandy Lake. On the Land. http://www.dehGáhschool.com/?page_id=1126

li Keepers Leadership Program. <https://keepersleadership.wordpress.com/program/our-history/>

lii Keepers Canoe Trip 2014. <http://keeperscanoe.tumblr.com>

liii in collaboration with The Learning Partnership to provide secondary students the opportunity to travel in the summer to participate in several programs across Canada. The Learning Partnership. First Nations Students Working and Traveling Outside of their Community. <http://www.thelearningpartnership.ca/what-we-do/knowledge-mobilization/innovative-practices/case-studies/case-study-10>

liv To build a culturally sensitive and needs-based health program for the students. QHO NWT. Queen's Health Outreach: An International Health Initiative. <http://www.qho.ca/initiatives/qho-nwt/>

lv To provide young learners with an immersive and interactive education via high-definition two-way video communication system. IT World Canada. (2014) Students in Nunavut connect with Cisco's TelePresence. April 2, 2014. <http://www.itworldcanada.com/article/students-in-nunavut-connect-with-ciscos-telepresence/91045>

lvi Thomas Simpson Secondary School at Fort Simpson is the first school in the NWT to participate in the Aboriginal Youth Initiative Program (AYEP) led by the Martin Aboriginal Education initiative. The program teaches Aboriginal youth at forty-six schools across Canada about business and entrepreneurship, leadership skills, business and personal financial literacy and business plan development. Students who complete the program receive high school credits and are encouraged to go on to post-secondary education. As of 2015, 35 students had enrolled in the program and twelve graduated from high school. Sponsorship for the program includes government, industry and Aboriginal governments. [Link: http://www.maei-ieam.ca/Aboriginal_Youth_Entrepreneurship_Program.html]

lvii Dene Laws. Deh Cho. http://www.dehcho.org/documents/deh_cho_process/Dene_law_posters.pdf

^{lviii} Education, Culture and Employment. (1993) Dene Kede: Education A Dene Perspective. Grades K-6.

http://www.dehcho.org/documents/deh_cho_process/Dene_law_posters.pdf

^{lix} Western Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Basic Education. (2000) The Common Curriculum Framework for Aboriginal Language and Culture Programs.

<https://education.alberta.ca/media/563925/common-curriculum-framework-for-language-and-culture-k-12.pdf>

^{lx} Dechinta Centre for Teaching and Learning. <http://dechinta.ca>