

**Deputy Mayor Diane Colley-Urquhart
Presentation to Aboriginal Conference
Mount Royal College**

If The City of Calgary is to be a vibrant and healthy community for all citizens, each community member must have the opportunity to both participate in and contribute to the social and economic environment in which we all live. Future prosperity for all people is found in the equitable access in the building blocks of a meaningful life of choices, opportunities, along with the capacity to dream.

While there are many barriers to these building blocks, education and the skill building it provides is an essential key. Without educational choices related to employment, housing, recreation and mobility, are severely limited. When basic life choices are limited so is the potential to participate – and so is the capacity to dream.

Too often, discussion and policies relating to Aboriginal people are usually premised in negative terms; high unemployment, low educational attainment, poverty and so on. However, the discussion is shifting significantly to building upon achievements and strengths. What are the resources and opportunities required to enhance these strengths?

Aboriginal people are one of the fastest growing communities in our cities and across our country. While Aboriginal people have long expected to participate in all areas of community life, their demands are being taken seriously by leaders such as myself. They expect to be seen, heard, included and valued. It is essential that the talents and resources of this population be supported and enhanced. Our Aboriginal people must participate in all areas of community life, they must be seen, heard and valued for their contributions. I believe this is well on its way to happening because of conferences such as this whereby we all come together – to learn, and to listen.

Past indicators of educational success have not seen the success we would like for the Aboriginal community, however, Aboriginal youth today are seeking education and meaningful employment at unprecedented rates – they are a force to be reckoned with. In the very near future, our Aboriginal youth will represent one of the largest talent pools

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available as potential employees. No urban center or order of government can afford to not focus or pay attention to the achievements of this generation.

Through envisioning Aboriginal people as our future scientists, teachers, doctors, and leaders, one can also envision communities that are vibrant, diverse and engaging-- where each can enjoy the social and economic opportunities that are an outcome of meaningful involvement, inclusion, participation, employment and prosperity. We need our Aboriginal people in the forefront to continue to build diverse and caring communities.

As self-government and self-governance become inevitable realities, it will be skilled young people that will lead the way for their communities to greater prosperity. This prosperity creates wellness for all people. This, is a social and quality of life vision that we all must embrace.

Symposiums such as today's are an integral part of building educational infrastructures which;

- Improves attraction and retention rates of Aboriginal students
- Improves completion rates for Aboriginal students
- Accommodates the Aboriginal voice in both program and policy design
- Advances knowledge of Aboriginal language, culture, and history .
- Promotes positive Aboriginal identity and individual self esteem
- Champions the integration of traditional and contemporary models of knowing and learning
- Seeks to ensure effective use of resources
- Strives for the equitable access to resources both individual and institutional
- Builds satisfaction with the education system in Aboriginal communities'

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- Engages Aboriginal community representatives in the planning and delivery of programs
- Fosters open and frank dialogue related to policy and institutional barriers to achieve equitable educational supports for Aboriginal people.
- Encourages effective partnerships between the education systems and all orders of government including Aboriginal peoples.

Building such infrastructures requires unprecedented discussions between all orders of government including First Nations. It may require an examination of the current jurisdictional boundaries and of the barriers to equitable access for Aboriginal people. It most certainly will require imagination, inspiration and a collective sense of goodwill to build educational opportunities that benefit all communities. It will also require us to dream about what we could be.

The success of this symposium will rest on the desire of all of you to strive for excellence in terms of creating educational best practices for and with Aboriginal people- and, to view yourselves as leaders in our community who can make a tremendous difference.