

# XI. National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation Scholar Survey

## Overview

The *UAPS* also includes a pilot survey of National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation (NAAF) scholars.

The NAAF study aims to identify and measure experiences and success in the lives of NAAF scholars who have pursued, or are pursuing, post-secondary education.

The results of the NAAF pilot survey are based on an on-line survey with a sample of 182 current and past NAAF scholarship recipients (see Chapter I for a description of the survey methodology).

Where appropriate and when subsample sizes permit, key differences between First Nations and Métis NAAF scholars are highlighted, as are differences between demographic subgroups.

The following points summarize the main findings around NAAF scholars' educational experiences:

- **The NAAF scholarship played a key role in scholars' decision to pursue post-secondary education.** Half of scholars say it had a substantial influence, second only to the level of influence parents are reported to have had in the decision.
- **Funding is the major obstacle that NAAF scholars say they must overcome to complete their post-secondary education.** And less than half of NAAF scholars currently in school believe they have enough financial support to get them all the way through their education.

## About the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation

The National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation (NAAF) is a nationally registered, non-profit organization dedicated to raising funds to deliver programs that provide the tools necessary for Aboriginal peoples, especially youth, to achieve brighter futures.

The NAAF is the largest non-governmental funding body for First Nations, Inuit and Métis post-secondary students across Canada. Bursary and scholarship awards are provided to First Nations, Inuit and Métis students across a diverse range of disciplines.

Since 1985, the Foundation through its Education Program has awarded more than \$37 million in scholarships and bursaries to more than 9,800 First Nations, Inuit and Métis students nationwide.

The NAAF's key initiatives include: The National Aboriginal Achievement Awards (NAAA), a national annual broadcast celebrating 14 achievers in a multitude of career areas, including a special youth award and an award for lifetime achievement; Taking Pulse joins the NAAF with industry to present career options in specific growth sectors through a series of short documentaries and supporting curriculum materials with the aim of recruiting First Nations, Inuit & Métis youth; and Blueprint for the Future (BFF) a series of one-day career fairs that motivate and inspire First Nations, Inuit and Métis high school students with valuable resources and information on career opportunities. Over 30,000 students have attended these exciting youth-oriented events to date nationwide.

*Source: NAAF; National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation, Annual Report, 2007-2008.*

- **The large majority of scholars say they would have found a way to pursue their post-secondary education even without the NAAF scholarship.** This speaks to the tenacity of these students rather than any lack of value of the scholarship, given the emphasis these scholars place on funding. In fact, the NAAF scholarship is only one of a mix of sources NAAF scholars have used/are using to fund their education, including employment income, government student loans, and (in the case of First Nations scholars) Band or other Aboriginal funding.
- **Mentors and/or role models have played an important role in the success of NAAF scholars.** After family, the greatest encouragement NAAF scholars received to pursue post-secondary studies came from a role model. There is also widespread belief among those who have or had a mentor, particularly for men, that this person made a significant contribution to their education. Finally, scholars recognize the value of role models for the next generation, with a large majority believing they have a big impact on Aboriginal youth due to their post-secondary education experience.
- **Almost half of scholars believe the NAAF scholarship had a noticeable effect on their identity as an Aboriginal person.** This effect is attributed to having greater pride in being Aboriginal, being recognized as an Aboriginal student, demonstrating the success of Aboriginal students, or a resulting desire to be more involved in the Aboriginal community.

## 1. NAAF scholars' educational attainment

Among the NAAF scholars who are currently completing their post-secondary education (68% of the scholars surveyed), some six in ten are completing Bachelor/undergraduate degrees or teacher's college (51%) or are completing degrees in Medicine, Dentistry, Veterinary Medicine or Optometry (8%). Three in ten are completing post-graduate degrees (Masters – 20%; Doctorate – 8%). The remainder are in community college, CEGEP or nursing school (10%); or trades/technical college, vocational school or business school (2%).

The profile of educational attainment among NAAF scholars who have completed their education (32% of the scholars surveyed) is fairly similar to that of NAAF scholars currently in school. Most completed undergraduate or medical degrees (39%), or post-graduate degrees (34%), while two in ten completed their technical, vocational or CEGEP diploma.

Highest level of education

	In school	Completed school
Trade/tech/vocational/business college	2	10
Community college/CEGEP/nursing school	10	8
Bachelor's degree/teachers college	51	31
Degree in medicine/dentistry/veterinary science/optometry	8	8
Master's degree	20	29
Doctorate	8	5
Other	2	8

## 2. The educational experience

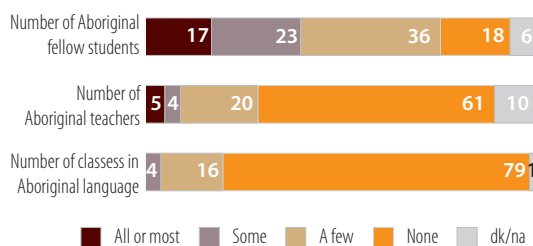
What is the Aboriginal educational experience of NAAF scholars? As they progressed through the education system, from elementary to high school and thence to college or university, how did their educational experience reflect their Aboriginal heritage? To provide some answers to these questions, the NAAF scholar survey assessed the extent to which the scholars' teachers and fellow students were Aboriginal, as well as the number of classes held in Aboriginal languages, and the amount learned about Aboriginal people, history and culture.

### The elementary school experience

**At the elementary level, NAAF scholars had many Aboriginal classmates, but few Aboriginal instructors. Very few classes were held in Aboriginal languages, and little was learned about Aboriginal people, history and culture.**

#### Aboriginal educational experience – elementary school

Please indicate how many of your fellow students/teachers were Aboriginal in elementary school/how many of your classes were in an Aboriginal language.

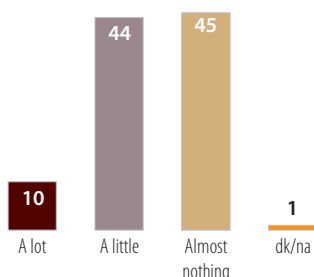


In elementary school, NAAF scholars were surrounded with a mix of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal classmates. Four in ten report that some (23%) or all/most (17%) of their fellow students were Aboriginal, while just over half report that only a few (36%) or none (18%) of their fellow students were Aboriginal. First Nations scholars are much more likely to report that all/most of their fellow students in elementary school were Aboriginal (24%) than are Métis scholars (4%).

Although most NAAF scholars had at least some Aboriginal classmates in elementary school, Aboriginal *teachers* are another story. Six in ten NAAF scholars (61%) report that *none* of their elementary school teachers were Aboriginal, while only one in ten report that some (4%) or all/most (5%) were Aboriginal. There is little difference between First Nations and Métis scholars in terms of number of Aboriginal teachers.

#### Amount learned about Aboriginal heritage – elementary school

Please indicate if you have learned a lot, a little, or almost nothing about Aboriginal people, history and culture at each stage of your education.



With the small number of Aboriginal elementary school teachers, it is no surprise to learn that NAAF scholars had very few classes taught in Aboriginal languages in elementary school. Eight in ten (79%) report that *no* elementary school classes were taught in an Aboriginal language, while only one in twenty (4%) report that some were, and none report that all or most were. Métis NAAF scholars are particularly likely to report that no classes were taught in Aboriginal languages at this level (94%).

Regardless of the number of Aboriginal teachers and students, and the degree to which classes were conducted in Aboriginal languages, it is still possible for Aboriginal students to learn about the history and culture of the Aboriginal peoples. However, the elementary school system as recalled by NAAF scholars did not appear to do a very good job of teaching Aboriginal students about their heritage. While a majority learned at least *something* about Aboriginal people, history and culture, only one in ten (10%) learned a lot. This is true of both First Nations and Métis students.

## The high school experience

**NAAF scholars were even less likely to have Aboriginal instructors or classes held in Aboriginal languages in high school than in elementary school, and even less was learned about Aboriginal people, history and culture.**

NAAF scholars are slightly less likely to report that some (33%) or all/most (9%) of their classmates were Aboriginal in high school, compared to elementary school. As was the case for elementary school, First Nations scholars are more likely to report that they had Aboriginal classmates: half of First Nations scholars (49%) report at least some Aboriginal fellow students, compared to one-third (34%) among Métis scholars, and 12 percent of First Nations scholars report that all/most of their fellow high school students were Aboriginal, compared to four percent of Métis scholars.

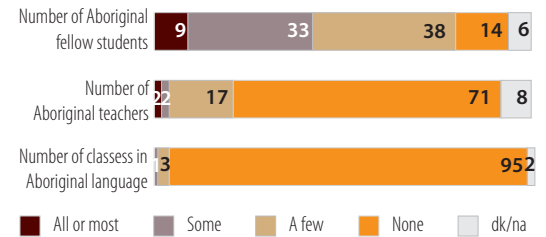
Aboriginal teachers were in even shorter supply when NAAF scholars were in high school than when they were elementary students. Seven in ten (71%) report that *none* of their high school teachers were Aboriginal, while only one in twenty report that that some (2%) or all/most (2%) were Aboriginal. As was the case in elementary school, there is no difference between First Nations and Métis scholars in terms of the number of Aboriginal teachers.

By the time NAAF scholars reached high school, classes taught in Aboriginal languages were almost non-existent. Virtually all scholars (95%) report that *no* high school classes were taught in an Aboriginal language.

The high school system (as recalled by NAAF scholars) did an even poorer job of teaching Aboriginal students about Aboriginal history and culture than did the elementary school system. Only about half of NAAF scholars learned *anything* about Aboriginal people, history and culture and only one in twenty (6%) learned a lot. Among First Nations scholars, things were even worse, with six in ten (58%) learning almost nothing about Aboriginal people, history and culture in high school.

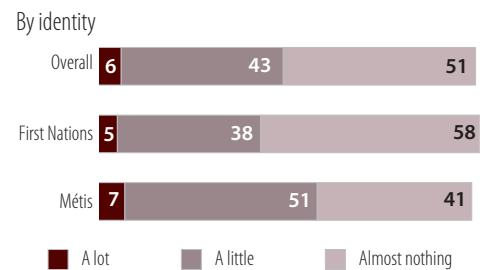
### Aboriginal educational experience – high school

Please indicate how many of your fellow students/teachers were Aboriginal in high school/how many of your classes were in an Aboriginal language.



### Amount learned about Aboriginal heritage – high school

Please indicate if you have learned a lot, a little, or almost nothing about Aboriginal people, history and culture at each stage of your education.

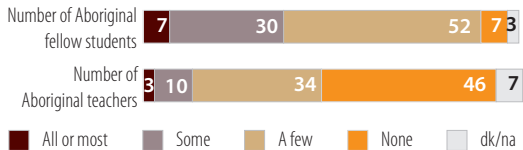


## The post-secondary experience

***NAAF scholars are most likely to report Aboriginal classmates and teachers at the post-secondary level, and are most likely to report learning about Aboriginal people, history and culture at that level.***

### Aboriginal educational experience – college/university

Please indicate how many of your fellow students/teachers were Aboriginal in college/university.



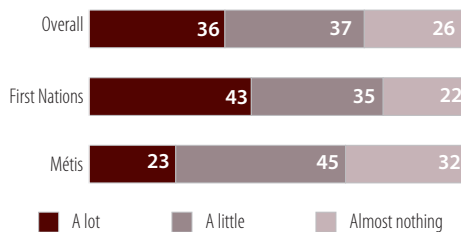
NAAF scholars are more likely to report having Aboriginal fellow students at college or university than at any other level. Although fewer than four in ten report that some (30%) or all/most (7%) of their fellow students were Aboriginal, only about one in five (7%) report that *none* were. As was the case for both the elementary and secondary levels, First Nations scholars are more likely to report that they had Aboriginal classmates in college or university; in fact, one in ten First Nations scholars (12%) report all or most of their fellow students were Aboriginal, compared with only one percent of Métis scholars.

Aboriginal instructors are also slightly more common at the post-secondary level than at the elementary or secondary levels. Just under 15 percent of NAAF scholars report that some (10%) or all/most (3%) of their instructors in college or university were Aboriginal, while less than half (46%) report having no Aboriginal instructors at all. First Nations NAAF scholars are particularly likely to report having Aboriginal instructors, with one in five reporting that some (15%) or all/most (4%) were Aboriginal, compared to only one in twenty Métis scholars (3% – some; 3% – all/most).

### Amount learned about Aboriginal heritage – college/university

Please indicate if you have learned a lot, a little, or almost nothing about Aboriginal people, history and culture at each stage of your education.

By identity



In contrast to the relatively small increases in the number of Aboriginal classmates and instructors at the post-secondary level, relative to lower levels, there is a dramatic improvement in instruction on Aboriginal history and culture. More than one-third (36%) of scholars report learning *a lot* about Aboriginal history and culture in university or college. First Nations scholars are particularly likely to report learning a lot about Aboriginal people, history and culture at this level (43%). This is in contrast to high school, where First Nations scholars were *less* likely than Métis to report having learned about their culture and heritage.

### 3. The decision to pursue post-secondary education

#### Reasons for pursuing post-secondary education

***NAAF scholars cite a variety of reasons for pursuing post-secondary education, chief among them being the desire for a successful career (both materially and in terms of personal fulfillment) and the desire to give back to their community.***

Why did NAAF scholars decide to pursue a post-secondary education? The survey posed this question in an unprompted manner (without response options offered). For those still completing their education, the benefits of an education in terms of job/career opportunities are uppermost in their minds. Three in ten (28%) mention job opportunities/advancement/career change. The benefits of a job or career in terms of material success and life satisfaction are both mentioned: one-quarter (24%) are pursuing their post-secondary education in order to pursue a career path or work for something they enjoy, while 16 percent cite reasons related to having a better future or being able to buy things, travel or meet people. An equal proportion (16%) specifically mention being able to support or provide for their families. Similar proportions want to give back to their community or help make a difference (15%), or simply enjoy learning or want to learn something new (15%).

Those who have completed their post-secondary education cite reasons similar to those still in school, with job opportunities most commonly mentioned (25%). However, the sheer enjoyment of learning (24%) is mentioned relatively more often among this group, ahead of pursuing an enjoyable career (22%) and giving back to the community (19%).

#### Key influences on the decision to pursue post-secondary education

Parents/guardians and other family members had a major impact on NAAF scholars' decision to pursue post-secondary education.

In addition to the factors noted in the previous section, which individuals or groups most influenced NAAF scholars' decision to pursue post-secondary education? The NAAF scholar survey assessed the contribution of six individuals or groups (as well as the NAAF scholarship itself) to the scholar's decision to pursue post-secondary education or training.

Family is clearly a key influence in the NAAF scholar's decision to pursue studies beyond the high school level, particularly **parents/guardians**. More than eight in ten NAAF scholars (84%) report that their parents/guardians significantly (73%) or somewhat (11%) encouraged that decision, while some three-quarters say that **other members of their family** significantly (49%) or somewhat (27%) encouraged them. (The influence of family can also be seen in the fact that most NAAF scholars were preceded into post-secondary studies by other members of their family, with only one-third – 36% – reporting that they are the first in their family to pursue a post-secondary education.)

It is interesting to note that older NAAF scholars (35 and older) are much *less* likely to report that parents/guardians provided significant encouragement to them (47%) and are correspondingly *more* likely to indicate that they are the first in their family to pursue post-secondary studies (53%).

Next to family, the greatest encouragement for NAAF scholars to extend their education beyond high school was provided by **a role model that they admired** – about two-thirds of NAAF scholars report a role model significantly (46%) or somewhat (21%) encouraged them. It is not surprising to note that those who have a mentor are much more likely to report that a role model significantly encouraged their decision (70%) than are those who do not have a mentor (20%). **Teachers** also provided a great deal of encouragement in this decision, with seven in ten scholars reporting that teachers significantly (41%) or somewhat (29%) encouraged them. Younger NAAF scholars (60% among those under 25 years of age), and those whose most recent NAAF scholarship was in 2008 or 2009 (58%) are particularly likely to report that their teachers significantly encouraged them.

**Friends** also provided encouragement to NAAF scholars in their quest to advance their education; about one-third (36%) of NAAF scholars report that friends significantly encouraged them, while an equal proportion (37%) indicate that their friends somewhat encouraged them.

The other two groups assessed provided a generally lower level of encouragement. Half of NAAF scholars report that **guidance counsellors at school** significantly (26%) or somewhat (25%) encouraged them in their decision to pursue post-secondary education, while over four in ten report that **a representative from a university, college or apprenticeship program** significantly (21%) or somewhat (24%) encouraged them.

It is also noteworthy that NAAF scholars generally did not feel that any of these groups actively *discouraged* them from pursuing post-secondary studies. In no case did even five percent report that any group discouraged them from pursuing post-secondary studies.

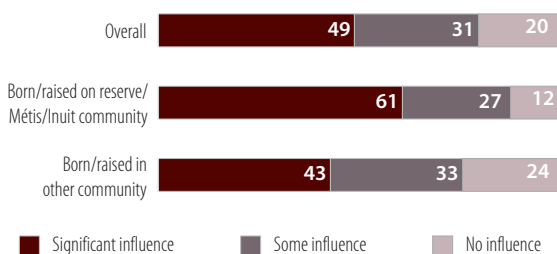
***The NAAF scholarship itself was a key influence on scholars’ decision to pursue post-secondary education.***

In addition to assessing the impact these individuals and groups had on NAAF scholars’ decision to continue their education beyond high school, the survey also assessed the impact of having received the NAAF scholarship itself. Eight in ten NAAF scholars credit the scholarship with some level of influence on their decision, with half (49%) feeling it had a significant influence. This level of influence is second only to that of parents/guardians among the groups assessed on the survey. Those who were born and raised on a First Nations reserve, or in a Métis or Inuit community (of whom the large majority are First Nations peoples) are particularly likely to feel that the NAAF scholarship had a significant influence on their decision (61%).

However, despite the high level of importance scholars attribute to the NAAF scholarship as an influence in the post-secondary decision, the large majority do *not* feel that pursuing a post-secondary education would have been impossible without it. Some nine in ten scholars (88%) believe they would have found a way to pursue their post-secondary education even without the NAAF scholarship. It is important to note that the NAAF encourages students to apply to other sources for funding as there are a limited amount of funds available compared to the amount that students request.

**Influence of NAAF scholarship on decision to pursue post-secondary education**

To what extent did receiving a NAAF scholarship influence your decision to pursue post-secondary education?



## The role of the mentor

**Half of NAAF scholars have a mentor and most (particularly men) feel that their mentor has made a significant contribution to their ability to achieve their educational goals.**

The survey asked NAAF scholars whether or not they have a mentor (which was defined as someone “who acts as a trusted guide or advisor about your education and other important matters in your life”). Overall, half of the NAAF scholars surveyed indicate they have a mentor (or had one when they were in school, for those who have completed their education). Those currently in school are more likely to have a mentor (55%) than are those who have completed their education (41%). Also, those completing (or who have completed) post-graduate studies are more likely to have a mentor (59%) than are those at lower education levels (45%).

What is the value of a mentor? Does having one have any real impact? Those NAAF scholars who have (or had) a mentor were asked to what extent the mentor contributed to their ability to achieve their educational goals. All who have (or had) a mentor feel that mentor made at least some contribution to their ability to achieve their goals (educationally speaking), with seven in ten (72%) feeling the mentor’s contribution was *significant*. Mentors appear to be particularly valuable to men, as virtually all male NAAF scholars who have (or had) a mentor (94%) believe that individual made a significant contribution to their ability to achieve their educational goals.

The value of a mentor, so clear among those NAAF scholars who have one, is not nearly as apparent to those who do not. Those NAAF scholars who do not (or did not) have a mentor were asked to what extent they believe a mentor *would contribute* (or *would have contributed*) to their ability to achieve their educational goals. Although all see some value in a mentor, only one-third (33%) believe a mentor would make (or would have made) a *significant* contribution.

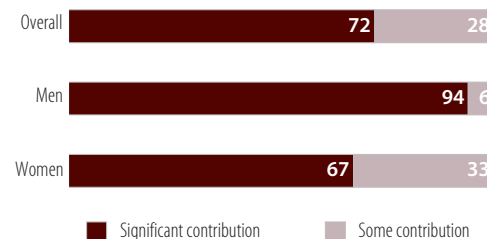
## Obstacles to completing post-secondary education

**NAAF scholars overwhelmingly cite financial obstacles as the main obstacle that must be overcome to complete their post-secondary education. Other obstacles include balancing work, life and school, and having to leave home.**

What do NAAF scholars see as the main obstacles that must be overcome in order to realize the dream of completing a post-secondary education? The NAAF scholar survey posed this question to scholars in an unprompted manner (without response options offered). For those still completing their education, the primary obstacle is financial: six in ten (62%) mention obstacles related to finances, poverty and the cost of living. A number of other obstacles are mentioned, but only four are mentioned by one in ten or more NAAF scholars who are still in school: balancing work, family life and school (16%), the level of commitment/dedication required (13%), having to leave home and move to the city (11%), and having to re-orient study habits and improving work ethic (8%).

### Contribution of mentor to achievement of educational goals\*

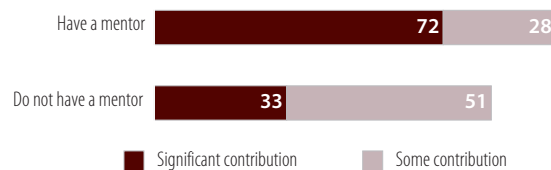
To what extent do you think your mentor/guide/advisor has contributed to your ability to achieve your educational goals?



\*Subsample: Those who have/did have a mentor

### Perceived contribution of mentor to achievement of educational goals\*

To what extent do you think a mentor/guide/advisor would contribute to your ability to achieve your educational goals?



\*Subsample: Those who do not/did not have a mentor



Those NAAF scholars who have completed their education cite similar obstacles, with financial obstacles by far the most commonly mentioned (69%). However, these scholars mention some obstacles more frequently than those still in school. These include being a parent/finding daycare (14%), family/partner issues (14%) and racism (10%).

## 4. Financing post-secondary education

### Sources of funding for post-secondary education

***Funding for NAAF scholars' post-secondary education comes from a variety of sources, key among them are employment income, government student loans, and (in the case of First Nations scholars) Band or Aboriginal funding. The NAAF scholarship is not generally seen as a primary source of funding.***

Once the decision to continue education beyond high school has been made, one of the first and most important challenges students must meet is funding their post-secondary education. How did NAAF scholars meet the funding challenge? The NAAF scholar survey asked scholars to name (un-prompted, without providing response options) all their sources of funding for their post-secondary education, as well as the *primary* source.

#### Sources of post-secondary funding

	Total	First Nations	Métis
NAAF scholarship	77	79	75
Employment/job income	51	40	65
Band or Aboriginal funding	48	72	13
Bursaries	47	41	58
Scholarships (other than NAAF)	43	38	48
Government student loans	41	32	52
Personal savings	35	33	36
Family support	26	18	35
Bank/credit union loan	25	18	35
Personal loans	9	6	14
Government program assistance	2	2	3
RESP/other educational savings plan	2	1	1
Social/income assistance	2	3	-
Other	4	4	4

NAAF scholars make use of a variety of sources of funding to finance their post-secondary education. Not surprisingly, the NAAF scholarship itself is mentioned most frequently (77% mention it). Of course, this means that some one-quarter of NAAF scholars do *not* think of the NAAF scholarship they received as a source of post-secondary education funding (or may have assumed this was obvious and did not need to be re-stated). Indeed, only one in ten (9%) name the NAAF scholarship as their *primary* funding source. This is not surprising since NAAF encourages students to explore all other possible sources of funding to complement any award from NAAF as few applicants receive the full amount of their requests (due to the limited amount of funds available).

Other key sources of funding include employment income (mentioned by 51%, but 65% of Métis scholars), Band or Aboriginal funding (mentioned by 48%, but 72% among First Nations scholars), bursaries (47%), scholarships other than NAAF (43%) and government student loans (41%). In addition, about one-third of NAAF scholars (35%) made use of personal savings, while some one-quarter relied in part on support from families (26%), or loans from a bank or credit union (25%).

It is interesting to note that Métis NAAF scholars are more likely than are First Nations scholars to mention most of the sources named (exceptions are the NAAF scholarship itself, Band or Aboriginal funding, and personal savings). Also of note is the fact that younger scholars are much more likely to mention employment income (74% among those under 25) than are older scholars (33% among those 35 and older).

Three main funding sources are cited as the *primary* source of post-secondary education funding: Band or Aboriginal funding (31%, but 54% among First Nations scholars), government student loans (22%, but 30% among Métis scholars) and employment income (12%, but 22% among Métis scholars).

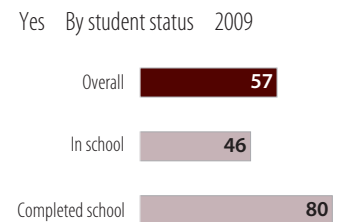
## Adequacy of funding for post-secondary education

**Only a minority of NAAF scholars currently in school believe they have adequate financial support to complete their post-secondary education. Those who have completed their education are much more likely to report having had enough financial support.**

As noted earlier, NAAF scholars report a variety of sources of funding for their post-secondary education. Are these sources adequate to the task? The survey asked NAAF scholars whether or not they believe they have (or had, among those who have completed their education) enough financial support to complete their post-secondary education or training. Findings reveal that a significant proportion of NAAF scholars who are still in school are concerned about having enough financial support to achieve their educational goals. In fact, only a minority (46%) report having secured sufficient financial support to complete their education. On the other hand, the large majority of those NAAF scholars who are no longer in school (80%) report that they did, indeed, have sufficient financial resources to complete their post-secondary education.

### Adequacy of funding for post-secondary education

Do you think you have enough financial support to complete your current post-secondary education or training?/ Did you have enough financial support to complete your post-secondary education or training?



## 5. NAAF scholars' opinions on education

### Importance of education to Aboriginal people

**Virtually all NAAF scholars see formal education as important to the lives of Aboriginal people, with nine in ten believing education is very important.**

It is perhaps to be expected that NAAF scholars see education as important; however, the degree to which they are in agreement is striking. Nine in ten scholars (91%) believe that formal education is very important to improving the lives of Aboriginal people. Only one percent believe it is not important.

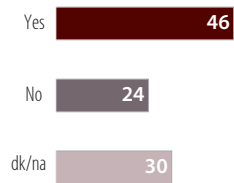
**The large majority of NAAF scholars believe that, as role models for Aboriginal youth, they (and other Aboriginal people pursuing a post-secondary education) have a big impact.**

The NAAF scholar survey asked scholars what kind of impact those Aboriginal people who are pursuing post-secondary education have as role models for Aboriginal youth. Virtually all believe they have at least some impact, with three-quarters (77%) believing they have a big impact as role models. This is true across all subgroups of NAAF scholars.

## 6. Effect of NAAF scholarship on Aboriginal identity

### Effect of NAAF scholarship on Aboriginal identity

Did receiving a NAAF scholarship have a noticeable effect on your identity as an Aboriginal person?



***Almost half of NAAF scholars believe the NAAF scholarship had a noticeable effect on their identity as an Aboriginal person. Most characterize this effect as an increase in their level of pride in being Aboriginal and showcasing the success of Aboriginal students.***

In addition to helping Aboriginal students achieve their educational goals, does receiving the NAAF scholarship have any impact on the scholar's Aboriginal identity? The survey asked NAAF scholars whether receiving the NAAF scholarship had a *noticeable* effect on their identity as an Aboriginal person. Almost half (46%) of NAAF scholars indicate that receiving the scholarship did indeed have a noticeable impact on their Aboriginal identity. About one-quarter of scholars indicate that the NAAF scholarship did not have any noticeable effect on their Aboriginal identity, while a large proportion (30%) cannot answer the question. Thus, among those who give an opinion on this question, two-thirds (66%) believe the scholarship did have a noticeable effect on their identity as an Aboriginal person.

Those who believe the NAAF scholarship had a noticeable effect on their Aboriginal identity characterize this effect in a number of ways. The most commonly mentioned effect is that the NAAF scholarship made them proud to be Aboriginal (36%). One-quarter each mention recognition as an Aboriginal student as an effect of the NAAF scholarship (25%) and believe that the NAAF scholarship demonstrates the success of Aboriginal students (25%). Two in ten (22%) note that the scholarship makes them want to be more involved in the Aboriginal community.