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## NEWS RELEASE

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Office of the Premier  
Ministry of Advanced Education

### **STRATEGY TO IMPROVE ABORIGINAL ACCESS, ACHIEVEMENT**

VICTORIA – The Province has launched a new \$65-million Aboriginal post-secondary strategy to help Aboriginal students to start, stay in and succeed in post-secondary education and training, Premier Gordon Campbell announced today.

“We know that Aboriginal people are the fastest-growing population in Canada but, right now, just four out of 10 complete a post-secondary education, 20 per cent fewer than non-Aboriginals,” said Campbell. “We are honouring the commitments made in the Transformative Change Accord to close the education gap and, through this strategy, Aboriginal people will have the higher learning opportunities they need to take their places in B.C.’s thriving economy.”

The strategy addresses the barriers to education by increasing access and participation through financial support to students and institutions, improving literacy skills, and creating culturally relevant programs that will help Aboriginal students succeed in post-secondary education and beyond.

The strategy’s actions will help Aboriginal students by:

- Reducing financial barriers through \$10.3 million in scholarships for Aboriginal students, starting in September 2008/09;
- Increasing access, retention and success by investing \$14.9 million to create three-year service plans between public post-secondary institutions and Aboriginal communities that identify interests and educational needs of Aboriginal students and create programs that meet those needs;
- Providing over \$12.1 million to increase programs that are designed, in conjunction with First Nations communities, to be culturally appropriate in content and delivery, such as language and university preparation programs;
- \$12.8 million to encourage more transitions from high school to programs offered by post-secondary institutions in fields like health, social work and business; and
- Investing \$15 million over three years to create gathering places that reflect Aboriginal culture at public post-secondary institutions.

“This strategy recognizes many of the barriers First Nations face in achieving higher level education and training, and it begins to address the glaring divide between First Nations aspirations and realities,” said Regional Chief Shawn Atleo of the BC Assembly of First Nations. “I feel encouraged by this step forward as First Nations’ socio-economic well-being must include the strengthening of capacities and skills.”

There were almost 16,500 Aboriginal students at public post-secondary institutions in 2006, an increase of more than 10 per cent since 2002. According to B.C. Stats, a non-Aboriginal person is five times more likely to have a university degree than an Aboriginal person living on reserve and almost three times more likely than an Aboriginal person living off reserve.

“This strategy gives Aboriginal people in B.C. more opportunities to plan for the future by getting the education they want,” said Murray Coell, Minister of Advanced Education. “Our Aboriginal partners helped us create a strategy of actions to support students by engaging institutions and communities to work together and improve post-secondary completion rates.”

In November 2005, the Province, the federal government and the Leadership Council representing the First Nations of B.C. signed the Transformative Change Accord to close the gap in the areas of education, health, housing and economic opportunities between First Nations and other British Columbians. Improving quality and choice in education and developing further partnerships with First Nations are also key pillars of the province’s Pacific Leadership Agenda. The Aboriginal post-secondary education strategy helps meet that commitment by focusing efforts and working collaboratively to improve the quality of life of Aboriginal people in B.C. over the next 10 years.

1 backgrounder(s) attached.

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