



ONTARIO PUBLIC
SCHOOL BOARDS'
ASSOCIATION

Leading Education's Advocates

**OPSBA FIRST NATION TRUSTEES COUNCIL
RESPONSE TO
PRELIMINARY IMPLEMENTATION REPORT
RE
FIRST NATION, MÉTIS AND INUIT EDUCATION POLICY FRAMEWORK:
“CONTINUING THE JOURNEY”**

The First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework has had a positive impact in school boards and this is demonstrated through increased programming that respects the cultures and histories of First Nation, Métis and Inuit peoples. It is vital that this momentum, which is so important to students' sense of identity and to a holistic representation of the history of Canada, continue and expand. There has been support for many excellent pilot projects but we need to have strategies and funding to ensure their sustainability and to share them broadly across the province.

OPSBA's First Nation Trustees Council has provided the following feedback to Ontario's Aboriginal Education Office (AEO). It has been organized to align with the consultation questions in the AEO's Preliminary Implementation Report.

Q1 Building on the relationships already forged, how can we continue to work together at all levels – locally, regionally and provincially – to further strengthen our connections to address the needs of First Nation, Métis and Inuit students?

- Parent engagement is still a struggle and this is an area where more work needs to be done on effective strategies, e.g., parent symposium, outreach to parents who are fostering First Nation children. A specific area of focus for relationship-building could be around report cards by engaging parents in First Nation communities to provide input on defining terms of assessment. It is suggested that a pilot project that looks at indigenous forms of assessment would be valuable. The early years holistic assessment project in Saskatchewan would be a good example to examine: <https://holisticassessment.gov.sk.ca/about-the-assessment/>
- The connections between school boards and First Nations communities need to go beyond the leader to leader connection and focus strongly on teacher-parent connections. Teachers, through current events, can create teachable moments that build awareness and a sense of community, e.g. discussing the connections between the origins of the Idle No More movement and the environmental provisions of the federal Omnibus Bill. These very concrete and relevant examples help people to get to know each other. When there is no ongoing genuine connection, no shared knowledge of each other, it is easier to complain than to build relationships.

- Some boards have First Nation, Métis and Inuit Student Success Committees with representatives from the local Friendship Centre, and/or a First Nation Student Advisory body that is system-wide. This should be encouraged.
- Some boards have a First Nation Parent Involvement Committee – this has been experienced as a positive step. There should be mechanisms to encourage parents who are already engaged, e.g. providing support for them in drawing in other parents.
- Building goals for the education of First Nation, Métis and Inuit students into Board Improvement Plans would demonstrate system-wide commitment. This already occurs in some boards and should be a province-wide practice.
- Provincial curriculum review is a complex process and it is often difficult for the average person to understand how they can influence it or to see what kind of changes are being made. In recent years revised curriculum has had input from First Nation, Métis and Inuit perspectives and positive changes have been made but they are not readily visible to the average person. A pamphlet or booklet for the public, and particularly for First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities, that provides highlights on how the curriculum has changed as a result of their input, and is changing to incorporate First Nation, Métis and Inuit histories, cultures and world views, would be a positive step forward. The process for engaging representatives of First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities and organizations in the curriculum review process should be examined. It would be helpful to design an engaging and friendly approach to consultation rather than obliging these representatives to fit into the internal processes of the Ministry's curriculum branch. This would build stronger relationships and lead to substantive and meaningful input.

Q2 What specific initiatives, programs and strategies have proven to be successful in creating a positive learning environment and improving the outcomes of First Nation, Métis and Inuit learners?

- Most boards have established a First Nation, Métis and Inuit Advisory Committee and this has been a positive move in monitoring implementation. Some of these committees meet three or four times a year; their effectiveness and sense of influence in the school district would be increased if there were greater numbers of meetings throughout the year.
- Implementation of the Framework has promoted a lot more professional development for teachers and the level of awareness has changed in a very positive way over the last four years. However, there is still a lot more work to be done in ensuring that every teacher has a level of comfort in incorporating aboriginal perspectives and aboriginal resources in their teaching. This kind of professional development needs a higher profile so that it becomes more widespread and administrators, when they are evaluating the work being done in classrooms, should have as a criterion the degree to which First Nation, Métis and Inuit content is being incorporated.
- Initiatives that promote the visibility of First Nation artisans, artists and entrepreneurs in schools is very positive and creates good relations between schools and the First Nation community. The practice of having visiting Elders in classrooms has been very successful and is adopted even by teachers who may not have any First Nation, Métis or Inuit students in their class. The work being done by the Rainy River DSB in embedding culture into learning and teaching is a particularly prominent effective practice, e.g., their Ask an Elder program.
- Support for Alternative Education programs is vital – there are successful examples of programs for First Nation students of school boards being run in First Nation communities.

- It is noted that over the years of implementation of the First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework the Ministry has funded many hundreds of projects designed to further the goals of the Framework. It is highly recommended that the Ministry of Education make available an inventory of effective projects with descriptions and references that would help boards benefit from the successes experienced.

Q3 What new initiatives, programs and areas merit further exploration?

- A few boards have established a First Nation, Métis and Inuit Student Advisory Committee. This is an initiative that should be encouraged. Expanding the ways in which student voices can be heard is important – students are influential, not only among their peers, and can make a profound difference.
- Having a strong focus on transitions is important; the strategy of promoting daily contact with a Native Counsellor adds to the sense of community in the school.
- Increase efforts to support First Nation students in urban communities build on the successes experienced through alternative programs in Indian Friendship Centres and through lessons learned in the Urban Aboriginal Education Project.
- There is an increased need for specific cultural programs in schools with a higher population of students who are struggling – this builds identity, self-esteem and a sense of self-efficacy.
- As previously noted, the work of infusing First Nation, Métis and Inuit cultures and history into the curriculum is critical. This should be well integrated, e.g., history that teaches that the Niagara Treaty of 1764, the alliance between the Crown and 24 First Nations was a vital part of Canada’s constitutional beginnings. 2014 will be the 250th anniversary of the 24 Nations Alliance and represents an ideal time to reinforce the importance both historically and currently of this Alliance.
- There are still difficulties in hiring First Nation, Métis and Inuit staff – it makes a big difference when students see staff who reflect their identity and culture. This applies to all staff but it is particularly important in the recruitment of NSL teachers.
- Language is intricately linked with culture. A movement to increase the amount of time allocated to NSL in schools would be a positive step. More creative ways of promoting First Nation languages should also be pursued. Again, the ground-breaking work being done by Rainy River DSB in this regard is a strong model – online resources, dual language books, offering First Nation language in the timetable (alternative to French) so that it does not compete with physical education or the arts.
- Sharing information on enrolment in Native Studies and Native Languages programs would serve to demonstrate the high level of interest, encourage further enrolment and underscore the need for efforts to support greater numbers of qualified staff in these programs.
- With regard to implementation of safe school policies, there needs to be more work done on strategies to support suspended or expelled students within the First Nation community.
- Again, we emphasize the points made in the previous section: strengthen the professional learning opportunities for all teachers so that they are comfortable teaching First Nation perspectives; this could extend back to pre-service teacher education with faculty courses in FNMI education including treaty education. (Note: in Saskatchewan universities all students have a compulsory credit in Aboriginal culture and history.) A component of teacher evaluation

could include how well they incorporated aspects of the First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy framework in their instructional practices.

Q4 What strategies should be considered to further encourage students and families to engage in the confidential, voluntary Aboriginal student self-identification initiative?

- The value of Self-identification policies is gaining greater recognition in terms of valuable and appropriate programming decisions.
- Board members are becoming more aware of First Nation, Métis and Inuit education issues and, with the self-identification program showing the presence of First Nation, Métis and Inuit students in schools across the board in every community, every trustee becomes a First Nation trustee, an advocate for First Nation, Métis and Inuit students.
- Clarity is needed around the parameters for Self-Identification, e.g., process for identification for students of the board and for students in the board under tuition agreements. Is it the same and what is the rationale?
- It is suggested that we need to examine the potentially positive relationship between self-identification of staff and self-identification of students. Information from Australia, where there is voluntary self-identification of staff so as to achieve a level of indigenous teachers to support a certain level of indigenous students, indicates that this approach provides both positive role modelling and an incentive for students to self-identify.
- Given that a number of boards have had voluntary self-identification in place for several years, would it be helpful to have a user-friendly pamphlet/video that covers in a concrete way (a) how use of data led to implementation of successful programs and how these programs benefitted First Nation, Métis and Inuit students without drawing attention to individuals, (b) how data was secured and shared so as to protect confidentiality of individual students. There are many useful guides and pamphlets that boards use to encourage self-identification; however they tend to describe what *would happen* rather than the positive things that *have happened* as a result of this initiative. Rainbow DSB offers a strong and positive example of promotion of the voluntary self-identification initiative.

OPSBA's First Nation Trustees' Council appreciates this opportunity to provide input to the next phase of implementation of Ontario's First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework.

***OPSBA First Nation Trustees Council
January 31, 2013***