



Government of Alberta ■

FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS AND INUIT EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP COUNCIL

**Working Group Report on the Year One Action Plan
March 2010 – August 2011**

August 31, 2011

First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) Education Partnership Council Members

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Chief Cameron Alexis, Confederacy of Treaty Six First Nations
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President Randy Hardy, Métis Settlements General Council
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The Changing Context of FNMI Education

It is important to recognize and acknowledge the good news, the increased collaboration, communication and other positive shifts taking place throughout the province in FNMI education.

Since the introduction of Alberta Education's Business Plan Goal 3: Success for FNMI Students, the establishment of the FNMI Education Partnership Council and the signing of the *Memorandum of Understanding for First Nations Education in Alberta*, Working Group members have noted the following positive changes:

- ***First Nations feel welcome at College of Alberta School Superintendent Zone meetings;***
- ***School divisions are inviting First Nations to come and share;***
- ***The United Way visits First Nations and asks for input on its education programs;***
- ***Increased connections between the three Treaty organizations and between the Treaty organizations and the Métis organizations;***
- ***Links are made to other work in education such as the MOU for First Nations Education in Alberta and the review of the Teaching Quality Standard.***
- ***Momentum on work in FNMI education is increasing; and***
- ***Interconnections are building strength and capacity in FNMI education.***

There are still significant gaps and challenges that remain and require urgent action and a continued focus on closing the gap in education achievement for FNMI students.

Partnership Council Background

In October 2009, a 16-member First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) Education Partnership Council was established with the signing of a letter of intent by the elected leaders of First Nations, Métis and the Alberta government, to work in partnership to guide the future direction of FNMI education in Alberta and to close the gap in education achievement and attainment between FNMI and non-FNMI students.

Council membership includes eight partners (Grand Chiefs of Treaties 6, 7 and 8; the Presidents of the Métis Nation of Alberta and the Métis Settlements General Council, the Ministers of Education, Advanced Education and Technology and Aboriginal Relations) and eight First Nation and Métis community representatives with an interest and expertise in education.

Over the first year, the Council identified its priorities, established a Working Group and developed a Year One action plan (Appendix A). The plan includes 11 strategies and 26 actions under the following three priority areas:

Year One Priorities and Strategies:

PARTNERS ENSURE FNMI STUDENTS ARE READY AND ABLE TO LEARN

1. Support and facilitate increased access to early childhood programs.
2. Improve FNMI student attendance.
3. Education system to engage and listen to FNMI students.
4. Increase the education system's awareness and knowledge of learning readiness.

EDUCATION SYSTEM ENGAGES PARENTS AND FAMILIES TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUTH

5. Promote FNMI parent and family engagement in education.
6. Support networking and collaborative learning opportunities for FNMI parents.
7. Promote post-secondary and career awareness for parents and youth.

TEACHER EDUCATION

8. Ensure inclusion of FNMI Knowledge, Skills and Attributes (KSAs) in the Teaching Quality Standard (TQS)
9. Establish a provincial FNMI professional development strategy to build capacity of teachers to support FNMI students and communities.
10. Develop teacher orientation programs.
11. Include Aboriginal Studies 10, 20, 30 accepted as a core credit requirement for high school graduation and for university/college entrance.

Implementation:

In March 2010, a Partnership Council Working Group was identified and tasked with completing and implementing the Council's Year One action plan. Working Group members were nominated by the eight partner organizations on the Council. The Working Group met regularly from March 2010 to August 2011 to complete this work.

Leads were identified for each strategy and the Working Group collaborated on a work plan and began to establish sub-committees, where necessary, to complete the work on each of the 11 strategies. While not identified as lead on a specific strategy, Aboriginal Relations representatives chaired the Working Group meetings and participated on a number of the sub-committees. All Working Group members were invited to participate on the sub-committees.

Much progress was made to implement the Year One action plan; however, the large number of strategies and actions meant that not all of the activities could be fully completed in the time frame of Year One. Some actions were adjusted to accommodate work already underway (Strategies 5 and 6 on parent engagement) and others were achieved in part with plans to continue the work in Year Two (Strategy 3 Speak Out and Strategy 7 Learning Clicks). In some cases, additional human or financial resources may have helped the Working Group to complete further research or to produce and publish resources to support specific strategies.

This report identifies the Year One achievements, challenges and lessons learned. It also makes recommendations for next steps and options for the development of a Year Two action plan for the Partnership Council.

Year One Action Plan Achievements:

- Collaborative working relationships and sharing of information among members of the Working Group at Working Group meetings and on sub-committees.
- Preliminary research and planning was initiated or completed in a number of areas such as early childhood education, student attendance, learning readiness, teacher orientation, professional development, etc.
- Letters sent from the Council co-chairs to all school board chairs and First Nation education authorities to increase awareness of the FNMI Education Partnership Council and its action plan priorities.
- Creative solutions were found to address the lack of human and financial resources provided to support the action plan. By linking to ongoing, related work in FNMI parent engagement or FNMI professional development, for example, the Working Group was able to partner and provide input to these initiatives and make progress on a number of strategies.
- Detailed reports on the activities and progress on each strategy were completed by leads and subcommittee members and are attached in Appendix B.
- Recommendations of new members to fill vacant positions on the Council.

Action Plan Highlights:

Partners Ensure FNMI Students are Ready and Able to Learn

- Completed an e-scan to identify gaps in early childhood, literacy and parent support programs for FNMI communities. A significant finding is that only three of 48 First Nations in Alberta have on-reserve access to library services.
- Developed a survey on attendance policies, strategies and incentives for use with First Nation education authorities and provincial school authorities.
- Held three Speak Out forums with FNMI youth; planning is underway to schedule additional forums to hear from FNMI youth in the fall of 2011.
- Identified factors that impact learning readiness and completed a scan of programs and resources available for FNMI parents and families.

Education System Engages Parents and Families to Support Children and Youth

- Linkages were made to collaborate on the work of the FNMI Families, Parents and Communities Engagement project as members of the FNMI External Advisory Committee.
- Supported 28 additional First Nation and Métis parents from Treaties 6, 7 and 8, the Métis Nation regions and the Métis Settlements General Council to register and participate in the March 2011 Learning Together For Success Conference that focused on FNMI Parent and community engagement.
- Increased awareness of provincial initiatives in FNMI education among First Nation and Métis parents and communities.
- Learned that FNMI communities are interested in and are accessing Learning Clicks presentations to promote post-secondary awareness for both parents and youth.

Teacher Education

- A FNMI focus group recommended adding FNMI foundational knowledge as a requirement for all teachers in the draft TQS/Professional Practice Competencies for Teachers. Once approved, this addition will impact how faculties of education prepare teachers to teach FNMI content in the curriculum and to support FNMI student success.
- Working Group members are contributing to draft a work plan for two consultants hired to develop a FNMI Professional Development Strategy for the province.
- Developed a needs assessment survey on teacher orientation and professional development for First Nation administrators and superintendents.
- Prepared a draft poster to promote the benefits of taking Aboriginal Studies as a course in high school.

Challenges:

- The large number of strategies and actions in the Year One action plan resulted in a small Working Group trying to accomplish too many tasks at one time. Working Group members were asked to sit on a number of sub-committees while also being involved in education initiatives outside of the Partnership Council action plan.
- More communication was needed to promote awareness of the work of the Partnership Council among FNMI community members and First Nation education directors. To address some confusion between the work of the Partnership Council and the work under the MOU for First Nations Education in Alberta, pocket cards were developed and distributed.
- No additional human or financial resources were identified to support the work on the Year One action plan which, to a degree, limited its full implementation.
- Ensuring that all partners have a role in hosting Working Group and/or Council meetings.
- Scheduling Council meetings and Working Group meetings to accommodate all members.
- Changes in leadership result in changes to the Council membership or Working Group membership impact ongoing work.

Year One Lessons Learned:

The action plan may have been too ambitious with too many strategies and actions to be accomplished in the same time period, by a small Working Group with no additional funding or human resources provided. Work on the strategies could have been addressed in phases, to avoid the conflicting demands for Working Group members to attend sub-committee meetings and work. Alternatively, an action plan with fewer strategies would have allowed all Working Group members to work together on a fewer number of strategies.

Speak Out forums and Learning Clicks presentations would have worked better if Year One had been used to promote/inform the Council and community members with plans to hold the sessions in Year Two. In some cases – such as Learning Clicks – the presentations had already taken place so there was no need for presentations until the following year.

One of the strengths and benefits of completing the action plan research and e-scans was the valuable sharing of information that took place throughout the process; in particular, Working Group members increased their own awareness of programs, services and supports available to FNMI learners, parents, educators and communities. There is a lot of good work going on in FNMI education in provincial and First Nation

school authorities that would be valuable to share publicly beyond the Council or Working Group tables.

A communications plan for the Partnership Council work is needed to ensure FNMI communities and provincial and First Nation school authorities are informed of what's happening in FNMI education in Alberta and the work of the Partnership Council.

First Nations and remote communities often do not have access to a lot of the services available in most provincial school communities. While some of these gaps may be addressed by the work under the MOU, there is an opportunity for the Partnership Council to raise awareness of these gaps and to identify services that are available in neighboring communities and school authorities for First Nations to access through partnerships with service providers.

Recommendations:

Action Plan

1. Discuss options to ensure the Year Two action plan is manageable for the Working Group members to support and implement. Recommend the Year Two action plan continues the work from Year One with the addition of a communications plan.
2. Develop a Communications Plan for the Partnership Council work.
3. Working Group to explore funding options and develop a proposal to address resource and capacity issues for Year Two action plan.

Considerations for Process

4. Consider scheduling one or two full-day Partnership Council meetings, rather than the two three-hour meetings each year.
5. Consider a rotating chair and host for Partnership Council and Working Group meetings to reflect the spirit of partnership.
6. Working Group to schedule monthly meetings for the year (e.g. third Wednesday of every month).
7. Identify an Inuit representative for the Council (perhaps from the Edmonton Public School's parent committee or the Inuit Cultural Society).