

Preface:

The National Panel on First Nations Elementary and Secondary was created by the Government of Canada and the Assembly of First Nations to improve the governance framework, improve student outcomes and clarify accountability for First Nation elementary and secondary education.

The National panel was announced by the AFN National Chief and the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development in April 2011. The mandate is to hear from First Nation students, parents, elders, teachers, school administrators, community leaders, and others in each region across the country. This is a very important undertaking to find ways to better support K-12 First Nations students. The National panel is undertaking a response to a series of questions to gauge First Nation responses and to understand issues, aspirations and needs of First Nation educators, community members and to engage Canadians in this process.

At the Ontario Native Education Counselling Association (ONECA) Annual General Meeting in May 2011, the ONECA Board of Directors determined to continue the organizational role to participate in advancing FN education as an aboriginal, treaty and inherent rights, especially protecting First Nation post secondary education. These questions posed by the Panel were previously sent to district representatives for inclusion in an ONECA Report to the Assembly of First Nations.

In Ontario, the Chiefs in Ontario have determined to undertake their own process by providing a parallel report in conjunction to the report being produced by the National Panel.

Introduction:

ONECA represents the administrative service arm of First Nation Education by supporting First Nation education counsellors whose role is to support First Nation students' success and achievement through academic preparedness and personal motivation (self-esteem) and to advocate for student services through a culturally supportive school environment. ONECA believes that the present system requires immediate across-the-board transformation to address the growing educational gap affecting First Nations.

ONECA advocates that foundational changes are required to address the deficiencies of First Nation education and to ensure the changes respond to the diversity of our people and to build unity in a common purpose to advance the rights of our peoples.

It is our belief that:

- First Nation students have a right to a quality and comparable standard of education as offered in Canada's provincial schools systems and First Nation Educational authorities will have the right to establish their own educational systems and institutions;

- A First Nation education system envisioned by all First Nation communities represents and serves the people as a means to achieving self-determination grounded in First Nation indigenous learning styles, supported by First Nation cultures, language, collective land ownership, grounded in traditional teachings and supported through parental involvement ;
- Engage the expertise of ONECA to participate in partnerships with First Nation and provincial government to engage in professional and accountable institutions that supports the delivery of secondary and third level supports including curriculum changes and the need for professional development, diverse courses, in-service opportunities and other educational initiatives that facilitate Aboriginal Student Success (retention, transition, graduation) engaging in federal and provincial partnerships directed at these goals.

First Nations and their families want an educational system that will help their children learn and achieve success so they can compete in the workforce and contribute to the economic opportunities within their communities and within the Canadian economy. They want schools that will help children develop a positive self identity as Aboriginal Nations ground in traditional knowledge and FN language s necessary for cultural continuity.

What is the key message you want the Panel to hear?

- ONECA recommends a statutory funding arrangements for First Nation education be developed in collaboration with First Nation based on real costs, indexed current costs drivers;
- ONECA supports the implementation of mechanisms which will implement First Nations jurisdiction to govern education systems, establish standards which ensure high quality culturally and linguistically relevant education, and which affirm predictable and necessary funding to enable the operation of First Nation Education systems

What would make the most significant difference in the educational success of FN's children?

- Funding which enables First Nation schools to implement comparable programs and services to those in provincially funded schools, and enable responsiveness to the language, culture and social needs of First Nations students;
- Academic preparedness for student transitioning from First Nation daycare centres, elementary schools and high school; recognizing education as life-long learning;
- Continuous evaluation, monitoring of First Nation schools and Boards of Education who are involved in First Nation tuition agreements;
- To cause intervention and the implementation of changes to ensure First Nation students receive culturally appropriate curriculum and programming;
- To implement policies and procedures to ensure First Nation students, First Nation educators and parents participate fully in an accessible, regionally, relevant education system and to put the necessary immediate supports to those schools who are failing and falling behind provincial standards;
- Create a Ontario First Nation Education Act with the mandate to collaborate with First Nation schools and provincial school boards to create nurturing environments that develops learners

pride and competence in First Nation language and heritage and equip them to realize their fullest potential to create culture of learning by administering First Nation parents club, new paths for education, youth programs, First Nation school net and Friends for Life(partnerships with but not limited to Ministry of Health , Youth and Children's Services, Mental Health Services;

What are the unique needs of First Nations students, and how do we respond to them?

- First Nation students harbor feelings of hopelessness, with unhealthy attitudes of self-worth, feeling de-valued; like losers without anyone to trust. They want to feel wanted and welcomed by the school, not just tolerated;
- First Nation children and youth are not given a direct and meaningful voice resulting in feelings of disempowerment and an inability to affect changes to their lives;
- First Nation students are likely to be poverty stricken as many of their families suffer with unemployment and lack the financial ability to meet the demands of educational s programs and field trips offered by their schools. First Nation families are often severely marginalized, their rights violated, and their needs routinely ignored to a degree not experienced by non-native children and youth . Investment in adult literacy and career skills development are necessary for greater economic self-sufficiency of adult learners;
- First Nation youth more apt to go to jail than to graduate from high school; police more likely to target First Nation youth for simple reasons than for congregating in public places;
- First Nation children and youth are fatalities of stereotypical beliefs that they are lawless and youth are more likely to experience racism;
- Children's early learning experience affect their health, well-being and skills development and lay the foundation for experiencing difficulties with writing, math and science over the long term. Many First Nation children suffer as a result of cyclical stress as result of intergenerational trauma from the impacts of residential school;
- Social and economic barriers prevent families from gaining family security; northern youth transition to urban centers to attend non-native schools without supports and native counselors and social preparedness to make transitions from different phases of lifelong learning;
- First Nations students tend to take longer to complete high school and therefore tend to advance to post secondary at a later age which effect their earning abilities over their lifetime;
- Due to many factors such as , lack of parental engagements, attitudes toward school, teenage pregnancy, higher incidence of critical illness, being boarded out to go to school results in poor attendance and exacerbates the risk of drop out rates;

What is required to make quality education more accessible to First Nation's students and their families?

- First Nation education must have access to equitable resources to provide essential services critical to student success leading toward closing the gaps;

- Second and third level services including curriculum development, securing paraprofessionals, psychologists, developing standards, regulations and policy, teacher certifications supporting systematic and sustained improvement in performance of schools.
- Well maintained, fully equipped schools, with computer technology including high speed internet services;
- Costs related to follow-up provincial reforms which have significant impacts on curriculum, teaching hours and support measures for literacy, numeracy, character education, music, physical education, language fluency and homework assistance;
- Bridge the huge shortfalls in special education funding;
- Hiring of aboriginal counsellors, teachers, principals, psychologists, specialists for a full range of federal support services;
- Immediate lifting of the 2% cap and finance the real cost drivers to ascertain well supported First Nation Schools;
- Data to determine what impacts Bill C-31 and C-3 will have on the education system;
- Fund aboriginal languages in a manner which will encourage their acquisition, fluency and use, similar to French language programs in Ontario;
- Create a holistic approach to educational system reform that respects the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs of FN children and youth and to honor the “spirit” within;

What is required to achieve effective management and delivery of First Nations’ education?

- To mandate the creation of a First Nation Education Act which empowers the development of First Nations education systems, enables the implementation of First Nations Lifelong learning programs and services, and provides the funding necessary to give effect to the Act
- Establishment of a federal/provincial/territorial council of ministries of education with a mandate that could have clear and measurable national goals.
- Develop and establish bona fide Regional Education Authorities that would require the Institutional collaboration and develop relationship with and between First Nations providing sustained and equitable funding for new structures and schools within the catchment areas;
- Creation of permanent independent monitoring body whose responsibility will be to report on learning results to a standing advisory group of educators and civil society whose job will be to consult on the requisite achievement of national objectives and identification of means of reaching goals as a sustained trans-Canadian approach and a national learning framework;
- Creation of a separate organization with clearly defined roles and responsibilities with the proper authorities similar to a tri-partite process with each of the parties equal in the decision making process and would require a clear mandate (an order-in-council) to define commitment, roles and responsibilities of the parties;

What does a First Nation's education system look like to you?

A First Nation Education system:

- Foremost the best interest of students and their families in the forefront of all discussions;
- acknowledge that First Nation students have a right to a life of being well being, emotionally, mentally, spiritually and physically in a culturally respectful learning environment;
- Recognize First Nation jurisdiction over education and that First Nation children have an inherent right to education
- Requires a financing mechanism based on clearly defined principles and processes which are not subject to arbitrary or unilateral decisions;
- Parity costs sufficient for a similar quality of education services including remote and geographic considerations, language and cultural supports the needs of First Nations students and well as 2nd and 3rd level services needed for a quality education system; and qualify the infrastructure costs to properly resource the system for infrastructure and capital costs, curriculum design, teacher qualifications and salary compensation at par with provincial rates, professional development, working with other ministries and federal departments who have a mandate for services for children;
- Required to report progress and to have a minister responsible to deliver such a report to the federal parliament;

What content/recommendations would you like the panel to include in its report?

- The Federal government in consultation with First Nations to take immediate action to create a First Nation Education Act that services all of the First Nation districts that would address the diversity in various regions of Ontario.
- The Federal government to increase funding immediately in all areas of Life Long Learning to ensure a full and continued commitment to support the First Nation Education System to fulfill the mandate and provide the level of services that meet the current and future needs of First Nations in Ontario.

How do we make sure that the Panel's report has an impact and/or generates change?

- In order for the report to have impact and generate change all levels of government, will require political discipline, to find common ground to move these recommendations forward, closing the education gap and providing students with the best quality of education in Canada.
- ONECA supports a First Nations Education Act that will establish standards for equal, quality, culturally and linguistically relevant education, funding to affect a first rate, First Nation Education system. Funding is key to advancing this opportunity and it will be one of the determining factors as to whether or not there will be future success for Indian children.