



FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS, INUIT (FNMI) STRATEGIC PLAN 2013 - 2014

Presented by:

FIRST NATION MÉTIS INUIT WORKING COMMITTEE

to the

NORTHLAND SCHOOL DIVISION ADVISORY COMMITTEE

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REFERENCED DOCUMENTS

The Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report – November 2010
Minutes from the NSD Advisory Committee Meetings
Proposed Implementation Plan: NSD 2012-2017 - Plan to Develop Aboriginal Language
Procedure 204 – Native Language Programs
Procedure 205 – In-School Cultural Programs
First Nation, Métis, Inuit Programming Audit Questionnaire
First Nation Métis Inuit (FNMI) Working Committee - Terms of Reference
Inspiring Education: A Dialog With Albertans - April 2010
Ministerial Order on Student Learning - Ministerial Order (#001/2013)

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The *Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report*, made 48 recommendations related to improving the operations of Northland School Division (NSD). The report states that “95 per cent of NSD student population are First Nations or Métis” and therefore recommends “...NSD be clearly identified and recognized as a special purpose school authority for Aboriginal education that is focused around capitalizing on its unique opportunity to provide excellence in First Nations and Métis education.” This is a challenging task because NSD serves a geographically scattered, unique and diverse Aboriginal population.

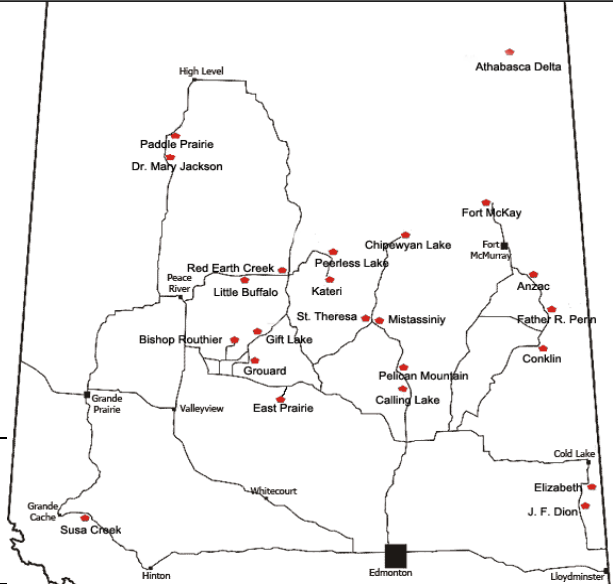
The First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) Working Committee was formed by the NSD Advisory Committee and directed to review the recommendations of *Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report* and propose next steps. The FNMI Working Committee identified Recommendations #8 and

#12 as priorities for providing specialized First Nations and Métis education. To supplement their review the FNMI Working Committee also conducted a school audit which contributed to the development of recommendations, actions and strategies outlined in this report. A brief background, Aboriginal Content Policies, Directions and recommendations for funding improvements were included to provide a framework for three proposed actions. If implemented, the FNMI Working Committee believes these recommendations, actions and subsequent strategies will ensure all students, teachers and communities in NSD are acknowledged, honored and encouraged.

BRIEF BACKGROUND – A PROFILE OF NORTHLAND SCHOOL DIVISION NO. 61

- Anzac Community School
- Athabasca Delta Community School
- Bishop Routhier School
- Bill Woodward School
- Career Pathways School
- Chipewyan Lake School
- Conklin Community School
- Calling Lake School
- Dr. Mary Jackson School
- Elizabeth School
- Father R. Perin School
- Fort McKay School
- Gift Lake School
- Grouard Northland School
- Hillview School
- J.F. Dion School
- Kateri School
- Little Buffalo School
- Mistassiniy School
- Paddle Prairie School
- Peerless Lake School
- Pelican Mountain School
- St. Theresa School
- Susa Creek School

NSD No. 61 is located in the northern half of Alberta and offers educational services to primarily First Nation and Métis students in 24 schools – including Career Pathways Virtual School.



THE FNMI WORKING COMMITTEE

PURPOSE

The FNMI Working Committee is recommended by the NSD Advisory Committee to review and revise the Board's mission and mandate to reflect the values and beliefs of the Aboriginal communities they serve. Stemming from that review process, the FNMI Working Committee will recommend policies and direction for strengthening Aboriginal culture and language programming including the expenditure of FNMI funds and resources.

VISION

NSD administrators will act as educational leaders with the vision of achieving the goals of providing flexible, responsible Aboriginal education that includes culture and language instruction. In doing so NSD schools will operate on the principles of equity and inclusivity ensuring students, teachers and community members are treated fairly without prejudice.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE NSD INQUIRY TEAM REPORT

The following recommendations have been identified by the FNMI Working Committee as key to identifying actions and next step strategies. Other related recommendations are referenced further along in this document.

Recommendation #8 - *That NSD place sustained emphasis on strengthening languages (English and Aboriginal) by multiple strategies that are tailored to the contextual needs of each community. In this regard specifically that NSD leadership research a successful approach for the acquisition of Aboriginal languages, English language and numeracy. Further, that NSD leadership establish baseline data on these areas and train all staff in effective teaching of selected programs or approaches. That NSD also maintain longitudinal data to track student progress, adjust strategies as needed and carry out ongoing assessment.*

Recommendation #12 - *That NSD strengthen Aboriginal content within the curriculum, and further that more emphasis, including staff development and support, be placed on Aboriginal content infusion as provided for in the Alberta curriculum.*

RESULTS OF THE FNMI PROGRAMMING AUDIT QUESTIONNAIRE

In the spring of 2013 questionnaires were distributed to all schools in NSD. Six open-ended questions encouraged meaningful replies and allowed for the expression of personal knowledge or feelings on FNMI culture and/or language content in their classroom and school. Woven throughout the twenty responses was a theme that individual schools are looking for division wide direction and support. From an analysis of the research the FNMI Working Committee detected the following:

- Schools and teachers are seeking resources outside of their community, school district and province for literature, consultants and experiential learning.
- School representatives recommended more resources, more time committed to FNMI culture, more opportunities and support to build relationships in the community, more local teachers, more emphasis on language and FNMI literacy, and more professional development.
- When asked about strengthening FNMI programming respondents referred to culture camps, storytelling and natural environment field trips. Many offered ideas such as “make classroom dictionaries” or hold daily “intercom announcements in Cree” or “have a Cree Spelling Bee across the Division.” Other examples included “have non-Cree speakers attend a Cree class,” “train local staff” and “speak Cree in the school as often as possible.”

With the guidance of the *NSD Inquiry Team Report* and the *FNMI Programming Audit Questionnaire*, the FNMI Working Committee examined and thought deeply about the NSD Board’s mandate and mission. The result is the following recommendations for Aboriginal Content Policies and Direction, Critical Success Factors, Recommendations for Different Funding Models and what the committee believes to be three important Actions that if implemented will increase FNMI education successes.

ABORIGINAL CONTENT - POLICIES

In the context of this strategic plan, a policy is a guiding principle that sets the intent of the governing body. From there, direction and procedures or protocols would be developed. These policies are chosen to assist in decision making affecting Aboriginal content in NSD schools.

POLICY 1 RESPECT

Respect for Aboriginal peoples' unique languages, cultures and histories are reflected holistically in Northland School Division curricula.

POLICY 2 COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Northland School Division will provide a range of opportunities to Aboriginal community members for their involvement in the education of their children and the evolution of their schools.

POLICY 3 STAKEHOLDER PARTNERING

Northland School Division will encourage relationship building with Aboriginal communities, stakeholders and partners to work together for quality education and the well-being of all Aboriginal students and their families.

POLICY 4 STUDENT OUTCOMES

Aboriginal content programming will be flexible and include monitoring practices to ensure all students have opportunities to excel and choose from a wide range of possibilities for their futures.

Aboriginal Content -Direction

- ★ Core curriculum and learning will have a strong focus on Aboriginal content and perspectives, and this will be actualized in the classroom for the benefit of all students.
- ★ Cree language and culture instruction will be tailored to the contextual needs of each community.
- ★ Aboriginal culture and perspectives in curricula will be understood by all teachers and administrators.
- ★ Delivery of Aboriginal culture and language content in NSD will meet high quality standards.
- ★ New ways will be found to make links between Aboriginal content and existing NSD school programs.
- ★ Aboriginal content programming in each school will be regularly monitored and outcomes measured with the intent of identifying best practices for each subject area in each school.
- ★ Unique languages, cultural environments and geographical contexts will be recognized and respected throughout NSD schools.
- ★ All teachers will be supported by effective orientation, in-service programs and quality materials so they can fulfill their responsibilities.

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

- ★ Commitment to the effective implementation of Aboriginal education and ongoing revitalization at all levels of governance and administration is expected.
- ★ There is an urgent need for action at the school level.
- ★ Opportunities to reaffirm their language and cultural identity is essential for learners to achieve success in education
- ★ Innovative programming is required to increase student attendance rates and student retention.
- ★ Specialized support is required to help learners overcome challenges.

CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DIFFERENT FUNDING MODELS

Adequate FNMI funding encourages local people to believe there is strong support for Aboriginal culture and language programming. Complex and overlapping jurisdictional funding processes (federal, provincial/territorial, school boards, and band authorities) hinder NSD's desire to invest in FNMI students' education and future economic successes. Uneven funding systems also adversely affect the integration of FNMI program planning and equitable resource allocation amongst NSD schools. A shortfall in funding is a factor contributing to unsatisfactory educational achievement. With these facts in mind, the FNMI Working Committee recommends NSD advocate the following to improve distribution of funding:

Recommendation 1: NSD needs to actively participate with all stakeholders to determine funding direction, review existing funding models and make recommendations.

Recommendation 2: Procedures and directives need to be developed and communicated to locate and open funding possibilities for FNMI culture and language activities in individual schools.

Recommendation 3: Proposals for additional funding needs to be prepared to support becoming a specialized institution serving a diverse population of mainly Aboriginal students.

Recommendation 4: NSD budget and planning processes need to reflect a vision of FNMI culture and language proficiency through the strong presence of Aboriginal teachers, administrators, and support staff.

Recommendation 5: NSD budget increases are needed to provide for access to additional cultural resources (teaching materials, Elders, community members' involvement and student natural learning environments).

THREE PROPOSED ACTIONS

The following proposed actions and their subsequent strategies are based on the *Northland Inquiry Team Report* recommendations #8 and #12, and from individual school responses to the *First Nation, Métis, Inuit Programming Audit Questionnaire*.

By identifying and promoting what has proven to be effective, NSD can expand upon division strengths where teachers are already integrating cultural content into the curriculum and where language instructors are delivering quality Aboriginal language programs. By making existing programs, innovative approaches, internal resources and experiential learning accessible throughout the region, NSD will truly become a “specialized school authority”.

In NSD, teachers are creating mini immersion programs and hands on learning opportunities so all students are exposed to various Aboriginal perspectives. Teachers from the communities have developed innovative teaching styles that give their students a sense of belonging in any area of study. In the NSD schools, there are talented professionals who integrate their education and experience with the understanding of the importance of personal contact with Elders using the proper protocols.

Strategy: NSD assigns specific people whose mandate is to identify, document and distribute information regarding existing FNMI teaching processes, community protocols, budget planning guidelines and classroom materials specifically for FNMI language and culture and infusion of FNMI language and culture. The following activities are recommended:

- Develop approval criteria for NSD FNMI teaching processes (i.e. storytelling in the natural environment), NSD FNMI teaching materials (i.e. films, digital resources, artifacts, books, and classroom materials), NSD FNMI cultural camp content and NSD FNMI consultants.
- Identify viable ways to share existing resources and program models between schools.
- Maintain and provide teachers with an updated inventory of materials and resources that will aid their incorporation of Aboriginal content into the specific content areas.
- Research existing programs that provide Aboriginal language instructors with the training and tools to deliver quality programs. From that research design, a rotational process where advanced language instructors can share with other instructors in other schools.
- Set up a NSD specific website to support FNMI teachers. Provide information about cultural camps, cultural content in the classroom, school wide cultural programs, teachers’ favorite FNMI classroom materials and where to access professional training in FNMI content.
- Provide a planning guide for individual schools outlining how to spend funds allocated for FNMI culture and language content.
- FNMI cultures are constantly evolving therefore annually audit NSD schools to monitor outcomes, identify gaps and recognize innovation that offers promising collaboration opportunities or learning outcomes.
- Implement school programs that celebrate student, teacher and staff accomplishments. Incorporate recognition of the role of parents, family members and community contributions to student success. This can be achieved in the classroom, in monthly school recognition activities

and by holding an annual dinner attended by the students' parents, teachers and principals as well as Board trustees and administration.

ACTION 2 IMPLEMENT A NEW NSD COMMUNITY RELATIONS APPROACH

Individual schools and teachers in NSD continue to build and reinforce good relations with FNMI student, families and community to promote a healthy relationship with the natural environment, but the residual effects from the legacy of residential schools challenge their efforts. Conflicting opinions exist in many FNMI communities where some community members support language and cultural content and others resist. The Northland Inquiry Team Report Recommendation #14 also recognized "the reality that not all parents support Aboriginal language and cultural instruction within the school environment" so the Inquiry Team recommended "opt-out arrangements" for individual students "similar to the manner in which public schools generally deal with religious instruction".

To replace the subtle, yet pervasive, perception that schools in NSD are outdated institutions a **new community relations approach** is necessary to encourage student and parental faith in the quality of instruction and to communicate broadly that FNMI language and culture content in NSD schools:

1. Honors and compliments the future aspirations of its students,
2. Respects past experiences and cultural-based knowledge,
3. Ensures the school is an integral, responsive part of each community, and
4. Promotes open relationships based on mutual respect.

It should be noted that when it comes to school 'image management' the school Principal's leadership and engagement is essential. The following strategies for community relations are recommended:

Strategy: NSD works with school Principals to develop a multimedia "relationship building" campaign to promote the advantages that FNMI language and cultural learning hold for students' future aspirations. This will require short term and long term planning that starts locally and gradually works outward towards creating a global image of success. Activities may begin with NSD school newsletters (i.e. distributed to homes) and NSD sponsored community gatherings to an advanced multimedia advertising campaign that reaches throughout Alberta (i.e. in provincial Aboriginal newspapers, texting, Twitter and Facebook).

ACTION 3 CONTINUE IMPLEMENTING THE INQUIRY TEAM'S RECOMMENDATION FOR LIBRARY ENHANCEMENT

Recommendation #9 is connected to Recommendation #12 and states “that library enhancement for the purpose of supporting reading be an integral part of the effort to strengthen languages”. As a result, a library audit has occurred at each school, materials have been inventoried and appropriate materials are being acquired to encourage and support reading goals. This is an ongoing activity already being implemented in many schools.

Strategy: NSD will review existing audits and set out guidelines for FNMI, English and Numeracy teaching materials, digital resources, artifacts to be acquired so content and accessibility reflects NSD short term and long term goals, teacher and students’ needs, and the communities they serve in a balanced manner.

CONCLUSION

The FNMI Working Committee believes NSD students will benefit from affirming their culture, language, history and community values. Today, NSD has the opportunity to turn around the mistakes and oversights of the past by taking the position of promoting cultural identity and instilling pride among in its students so they can succeed beyond expectations. It is therefore recommended that the FNMI Strategic Plan be reviewed quarterly and updated annually.