

## First Nations Education Steering Committee

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### Update on K-12 Education BC Assembly of First Nations Annual General Meeting November 17, 2020

#### AFN CHIEFS COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND NATIONAL INDIAN EDUCATION COMMITTEE UPDATE

Tyrone McNeil, Vice-President of the Stó:lō Tribal Council, is the appointed BC representative on the Chiefs Committee on Education (CCOE) and Deborah Jeffrey, Executive Director of FNESC, is the appointed representative on the National Indian Education Council (NIEC), the technical group that supports the CCOE.

Following AFN Resolution 16/2016, which provides the AFN a mandate to enter into an honourable process to develop recommendations to support First Nations Education Reform, a First Nations–Government of Canada Terms of Reference for Joint Collaboration was created and adopted in November 2016. Since then, both the CCOE and NIEC continue to meet regularly with Minister of Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) and other senior ISC officials to jointly discuss and make recommendations regarding First Nations education. Issues that are now being addressed include the following.

#### Post-Secondary Education (PSE)

In accordance with AFN resolution 29/2018, First Nations PSE Review Report and Recommendations, the CCOE and NIEC were directed to draft a new federal policy for First Nations post-secondary education, with a goal of securing adequate funding and supports for post-secondary students and First Nation Institutions of Higher Learning. In December 2018, the Chiefs-in-Assembly then supported the submission of a *First Nations Post-Secondary Policy Proposal* in an Indigenous Services Memorandum to Cabinet. The draft Policy Proposal outlined specific budget requests to support First Nations in designing and implementing their own Treaty-based, self-government based, or regionally-based models of PSE. All regions are receiving three years of funding to carry out this work. FNESC is engaging with First Nations on the development of a BC Tripartite First Nations PSE model. Discussions are also underway with the NIEC and CCOE to determine the path to negotiation and implementation of these models at the regional level.

The Post-Secondary Partnerships Program (PSPP) supports the delivery of community-based programming through partnerships between public post-secondary institutes and First Nations communities and institutes. FNESC and the Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Society have consistently advocated for the return of this program to a First Nations directed and administered model. This included advocacy through the CCOE, NIEC. This change was achieved for 2020-21 and as a result, BC received \$2.2 million for the program this year. A call for proposals was released by FNESC on October 22, 2020.

#### K-12 Education

Consistent with AFN's First Nation education mandate to regionalize First Nations education programs, the CCOE and NIEC have worked with ISC to regionalize funding for the federal Research and Innovations in Education Programs. The annual allocation for BC is approximately \$130k for research and \$711k for Innovations, which FNESC primarily allocates directly to First Nations and First Nation schools through a call for proposals for innovative projects to improve First Nation student success.

The AFN is also working with ISC on the regionalization of the national Education Partnerships Program (EPP) funding, which is currently administered by ISC headquarters. Some regions have relied on the EPP to address gaps in their core education funding (although those should instead be addressed through sustainable, ongoing funding), and as a result BC does not receive an equitable share of the EPP funding. It is hoped that by next year the funds will be allocated on a more equitable regional basis.

## COVID-RELATED EDUCATION UPDATES

### School Restart: K-12 Public and Non-First Nation Independent Schools

In September, 2020, the majority of public school students returned to full-time in-class learning, with some districts continuing to provide learning opportunities for students not attending in-person. The schools were required to follow Ministry COVID safety guidelines, including grouping students in learning “cohorts” in an attempt to reduce transmission and facilitate contact tracing. FNEsc continues to work closely with the Ministry to address the needs of First Nation students, including joining a number of Ministry restart committees and advocating for necessary accommodations for First Nation students who are not able to attend public schools as a result of their community being partially or fully closed due to the pandemic.

The Ministry has set out a number of expectations for school districts and non-First Nation independent schools, including that they:

- Regularly consult with First Nations to discuss the provision of educational services, with an understanding of the historical impact of pandemics on First Nations communities and related impacts on decisions made by First Nations governments, parents, and students.
- Engage with First Nations to identify the transportation needs of students living on reserve and opting to attend in-person classes, ensuring that there are equitable and safe transportation opportunities available.
- Jointly determine, with First Nations, alternative methods of instructional delivery for students from First Nations that remain closed and will not be sending students back to school at this time.

FNEsc continues to advocate that plans detailing expectations for the delivery of educational services must be jointly signed-off by boards of education and local First Nations, and the First Nations Leadership Council has formally supported that position in a letter sent to the Minister of Education.

### School Restart: K-12 First Nations Schools

FNEsc and the First Nations Schools Association (FNSA) fully respect the authority of individual First Nations to make decisions about school operations in the best interests of their students, schools, and communities, including determining whether their schools will remain fully or partially closed. First Nations are under no obligation to reopen their schools and a wide range of educational delivery methods may be offered this school year, including both remote and in-class learning. FNEsc and FNSA also have developed a number of resources to support First Nation schools and communities, including most recently a [Protocols Document for the Management of Illness and Confirmed COVID-19 Cases in First Nations Schools](#) and a [First Nations Schools Reopening Considerations and Planning Template](#). These resources and other important updates are available at [www.fnsa.ca/covid19](http://www.fnsa.ca/covid19) and [www.fnesc.ca/covid19](http://www.fnesc.ca/covid19).

### Environmental Scans

Throughout the pandemic, FNEsc sent a number of surveys to better understand the experiences and needs of First Nations and First Nations schools, with a wide range of responses. For example:

- Of 96 respondents to a public school-focused survey, close to one third (31%) reported no engagement from their local district during the partial return to classes at the end of last school year.
- In a survey of First Nation schools, it was reported that 8% of schools would remain fully closed with remote learning opportunities only, 19% would be open to staff with in-person classes for some students and remote learning for others, and 39% would return to regular in-person classes for all students.

All responses are being used to inform FNEsc’s advocacy and supports, recognizing that the status of school openings is fluid as communities respond to evolving circumstances.

**COVID Education Funding Summary**

| <b>COVID-19 funding provided to support approximately 5,000 students attending First Nation schools</b>                                   |                |
|---|----------------|
| FNESC/FNSA Summer Learning Grants   | \$2M           |
| FNESC/FNSA School Restart Grants  | \$1.5M         |
| ISC Safe Return to School Funding from ISC – funding amendments now sent  | \$6.7M         |
| ISC Immediate Public Health and Safety Measures Funding (Minor Capital)   | \$1.5M         |
| ISC BCTEA Formula Funding (First Nation school amount based on \$45M provided to provincial schools) – being distributed in November 2020 | \$482K         |
| FNIHB Health and Safety Funding– forthcoming in November 2020   | \$1.5M         |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>\$13.7M</b> |

| <b>COVID-19 Funding identified as available to support the approx. 9,000 First Nation students attending public schools and the 720 First Nation students attending off-reserve independent schools</b> |             |
|---|-------------|
| ISC Safe Return to School Funding – transferred to FNESC, soon to be distributed to First Nations   | \$3M        |
| FNESC/FNSA Safe Return to School Funding (to augment the \$3M from ISC)   | \$2M        |
| <b>Total</b>  | <b>\$5M</b> |

FNESC sent a detailed communique on COVID-19 education funding on October 27, 2020 to all First Nations and First Nation schools and it can also be found on the FNESC website: [www.fnesc.ca/covid19/covid-19-funding-resources-update/](http://www.fnesc.ca/covid19/covid-19-funding-resources-update/).

Consistent with BCTEA, FNESC and the First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) explicitly and consistently recommended to ISC that any COVID-related education funding should be made available to support all First Nations on the nominal roll, regardless of where they attend school. The FNLC sent a letter to the Deputy Minister of ISC in early September outlining that message. The recommendation is particularly important as due to health and safety concerns many First Nations are not sending their students who normally attend provincial schools back to settings outside their communities and are using whatever resources they are able to access to provide programming.