

SUCCESS FOR ALL

November 2014

Volume # 4

First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education

First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples have long understood learning and education as a lifelong striving for balance and wholeness among the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual dimensions, with each community having its own unique goals and vision for the educational success of its children.

As part of Alberta's Commission on Learning, Mackenzie (2009) writes, "... there needs to be a shared commitment and unrelenting effort from all stakeholders to ensure that every child learns and that every child succeeds." All Alberta students, including First Nations, Métis and Inuit, require support and learning opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for full participation in an enriched society and sustainable economy.

Since implementing the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework in 2002, the Government of Alberta has been committed to success for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students by helping to ensure they have every opportunity to succeed. This volume of Success for All, examines current "best practices" and research in support of this commitment.

Moving Forward

Alberta Education has created a new First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) Education Services Division in order to better address the educational success of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students in Alberta. The new division is organized into three branches: FNMI Curriculum and Learning Supports, Collaborative Partnerships and Improvement, and Policy, Research and Coordination.

In alignment with Inspiring Education, the new division will focus on student success by:

- ensuring that all Alberta students learn about the history of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples of Canada including language, culture, treaties and residential schools;
- building collaborative partnerships/plans among schools, jurisdictions, parents and communities to eliminate any achievement gaps between First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students and all other students in Alberta;
- fostering the necessary conditions for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students to achieve the Inspiring Education vision of an engaged thinker and ethical citizen with an entrepreneurial spirit;
- providing a coordinated approach to the development and implementation of specific education policies, programs and initiatives; and
- Advancing the implementation of agreements such as the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for First Nations Education in Alberta and the Métis Settlements Long-Term Funding Arrangements.



Dr. Jane Martin has been appointed as the interim Assistant Deputy Minister for the FNMI Education Services Division.

What Works? Research shows...

Integrating First Nation, Métis and Inuit Content with Instruction

- ✓ Build learning activities around meaningful content that relates to students' experiences and engages them in tasks based on their learning interests.
- ✓ Allow opportunities for visual symbolic thinking and holistic approaches to education.

- ✓ Look for opportunities to make connections among subject areas, for example, social studies, literature and art.
- ✓ Explore the ways in which learning can happen as a result of flexible scheduling. For example, can scheduling changes accommodate opportunities for holistic learning?
- ✓ Recognize and celebrate the seasons and the changes that they bring. Use nature as a classroom.
- ✓ Create opportunities for experiential learning. For example, Blueberries are a traditional Aboriginal food. When teaching students about nutrition, plan the learning activity so that the class can go to the land and actually have the experience of picking blueberries.
- ✓ Build on First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultural heritage and world views.
- ✓ Access mainstream educational curricula, complimented by opportunities to integrate Aboriginal cultures and languages.
- ✓ Use assessment for learning approaches.
- ✓ Differentiate instruction.
- ✓ Understand Aboriginal content, learning processes, and/or teaching methods and incorporate these into the classroom.
- ✓ Provide cross-cultural training for instructional staff, faculty and students.

Building Cultural Competence...

Research Says:

- Becoming more familiar with students' cultural backgrounds will help teachers: understand how cultural differences may affect students' learning; understand students' motivations and values; adapt materials and approaches appropriately; build mutual respect. Use culturally relevant materials whenever possible.
- Consider the following strategies for learning and teaching about Aboriginal cultures: Students may have a wealth of information; approach them discreetly, as many Aboriginal students do not want to be singled out as being different in front of their classmates; ask them what they know about contemporary issues in the Aboriginal community; be willing to invest time; participate in professional development.
- Pay close attention to the learning styles of Aboriginal students and design programs and lessons to capitalize on their strengths, e.g., use more visual and oral learning styles.



→ Read and learn about FNMI culture. Humility, openness and a sense of humour go a long way in developing relationships and create a relaxed classroom environment.

→ Use traditional Aboriginal approaches to learning such as learning through stories and oral storytelling rather than an emphasis on written information. Stories provide a safe context for students to discuss and share their thoughts and ideas.

→ Use a holistic approach to education that addresses students' mental, emotional, physical and spiritual aspects. This will help address various learning styles. Use culturally relevant examples.

→ Familiarize yourself with FNMI legislation (both federal and provincial) and policies and educational programs.

- Create a physical setting in the classroom that supports academic and social goals by communicating respect for diversity, connectedness and community (e.g., indigenous maps, welcome signs in a variety of languages, classroom library with diversity themes).

Connecting with our Community...

Regardless of their own experience with education, FNMI parents want their children to succeed, but they also want a learning environment that is welcoming, safe, caring and has curriculum that includes and supports cultural identity, and where children can learn their cultural heritage.

Understanding who the learner is, where they come from, and their talents and strengths can inform the teachers on how to create an equitable and inclusive learning environment that addresses the needs of all students. Setting high expectations and providing ongoing descriptive feedback and encouragement to the learner demonstrates to them that they are an equal in the learning environment, regardless of their cultural and/or socio-economic background.

Ways in which to connect...

- ✿ When appropriate invite a member of the Aboriginal community to assist in the classroom and to provide the Aboriginal perspective. This will enhance the credibility of the learning activity and build a connection between the school and the community.
- ✿ Communicate regularly with parents and families about their child's success.
- ✿ Encourage and create ways for, parents to be involved in the learning process.
- ✿ Develop strategies with parents, not for parents. Invite parents to actively participate in discussions concerning their child. Do not underestimate parents and families. Set high standards for their involvement. Recognize when differences in world-views and issues such as economic and other stressors create barriers to involvement. Be flexible.

What is a Safe, Caring, Welcoming Environment?

A "safe, caring, welcoming environment" is one in which a student feels safe to learn, to "come as they are", and feel like a valued member of the school and classroom community.

According to Groome and Hamilton (49), "Teachers have found Aboriginal students may be acutely self-conscious and fearful of failure, to a degree which is not found among other students. 'Shame' is a word which these students commonly use to describe situations of embarrassment and failure. These students need high levels of affirmation and many experiences of success to develop the confidence, self-esteem, and self-reliance needed to stay on at school." The legacy of the residential schools has created a deep-seated distrust in the current education system for many aboriginal families. In the research that has been done with Aboriginal students, one of the main recommendations that participants have shared is that they want an educational system "that respects them for who they are, that is relevant to their view of the world, that offers reciprocity in their relationships with others, and that helps them exercise responsibility over their own lives." (Kirness et al. 24)



School climate is extremely significant in the research on safe, caring and welcoming schools. Students want to see themselves reflected culturally in all areas of the school in pictures, books, work displays.

"Let us put our minds together to see what kind of life we can make for our children."

Chief Sitting Bull, Lakota

Highlighting NLSD Schools



Last spring North Star Elementary staff and students participated in an FNMI Cultural Day. The event was organized by Nathan Varughese. It was a fabulous experience for all who were able to attend.

The activities we had were:

- 1) Storytelling and drumming with Kokum Selena
- 2) Presentation on teepees/ cloth baby swing by Tiffany Janvier
- 3) Bussell Art Project with Loretta Mc Feeters
- 4) Round Dancing with Trish Janvier
- 5) Fish Scale art with Adelaine Grandboi
- 6) Traditional Dancing with Clayton Chief
- 7) Moose stew and Bannock lunch
- 8) Artifacts display provided by the Native Friendship Centre

Rhonda Laboucane, Fishing Lake Liaison, caught doing a 25 minute presentation on "Who are The Métis?" at Cold Lake High School. This presentation was open to staff and students. More sessions related to Métis culture will be taking place throughout the year.



A Cold Lake High School student and his cousin welcome Dwayne Peace to their school, November 5th, 2014. Dwayne presented to grade 9 students, the CLHS staff and grade 9 to 12 on the importance of relationships, informed choices, drugs and alcohol, bullying, suicide, and much more.

