

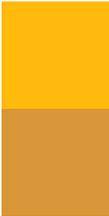


## FIRST NATION, INUIT AND MÉTIS



Canadian Teachers' Federation  
Fédération canadienne des enseignantes et des enseignants

[www.ctf-fce.ca](http://www.ctf-fce.ca)



# FIRST NATION, INUIT AND MÉTIS

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The Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) recognizes the inherent right of Aboriginal peoples to self-government within the country of Canada and the right of the Aboriginal peoples to define the goals of education for their children. (CTF Policy, 1982, 1993, 2008)

Education has long been identified as critical to improving the lives of Aboriginal peoples and addressing long-standing inequities. CTF recognizes the essential need to implement a more inclusive role and successful educational experience for both Aboriginal teachers and students.

Canadian schools, teacher organizations and teacher education programs have much to learn from the professional knowledge of Aboriginal teachers. In 2010, the CTF was engaged in a research study which helped to describe the work of Aboriginal teachers in public schools (off-reserve) by exploring their philosophies of teaching; their knowledge of integrating Aboriginal content and curriculum into instructional learning; their experience of racism in education; and, their experience with non-Aboriginal colleagues who provide support as allies in promoting Aboriginal education.

The Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada website states that "the Government of Canada's overarching goal is to provide First Nation students with quality education that provides them with the opportunity to acquire the skills needed to enter the labour market and be full participants in a strong Canadian economy." The 2013 Alternative Federal Budget released by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives estimates that the First Nations population is growing at twice the rate of the Canadian population, and that by 2020, over half of the First Nations population will be under the age of 25. That means that 600,000 Aboriginal youth will enter the labour market in Canada between 2001 and 2026.

Steps have been taken over the last couple of years for the creation of a First Nations Education Act with a view to implementation by September 2014. While this proposed legislation may address the

systemic underfunding of education services for First Nation youth on reserve, as well as co-accountability processes, it must also address other critical issues which prevent First Nation youth, on and off reserve, from achieving the educational success enjoyed by other children in Canada.

Current research continues to reference differences in educational achievement trends of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth. First Nation, Métis and Inuit students continue to lag behind non-Aboriginal students in literacy rates, high school completion rates and access to and completion of post-secondary education. According to Statistics Canada and other educational research reports, the dropout rate among youth on-reserve, including First Nation and Inuit communities, can be as high as 75%. The dropout rate among youth off-reserve, including First Nation, Métis and Inuit youth, can be as high as 25% compared to non-Aboriginal student dropout rates of 8.5%.

In addition to a funding gap in education, as well as low achievement rates, unemployment for Aboriginal communities is close to 20% more than for other Canadian communities. The wage gap is significant with a difference of over \$10,000 annually between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals. In 2009, the low income cut-off for a family of four was \$34,829 for non-Aboriginal families; it was less than \$24,000 for an Aboriginal family. Furthermore, the increase in poverty among Aboriginal families continues to grow: According to Campaign 2000 "Specific to First Nations Aboriginals, the percentage of those reporting an income of less than \$10,000 per year has increased over the last five years from 11.7% to 16.8%." The research is uncontested regarding the negative impact that poverty has on chances of educational success.

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Successive reports, including the government's December 2012 *Discussion Guide on a First Nation Education Act* have recognized the importance of language and culture as critical components for educational achievement. The February 2012 Report of the National Panel on First Nation Elementary and Secondary Education for Students On-reserve puts forth the following vision:

First Nations lifelong learning is a process of nurturing First Nations learners in linguistically and culturally-appropriate holistic learning environments that meet the individual and collective needs of First Nations and ensures that all First Nations learners have the opportunity to achieve their personal aspirations within comprehensive lifelong learning systems.

*Nurturing the Learning Spirit of First Nations Students*

Furthermore, our Canadian Government endorsed the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* in July 2012, thereby accepting the responsibility of ensuring that Article 14 of that Declaration be supported:

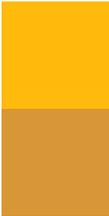
Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning. (Article 14.1)

There's a section in our own *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* that most of us are familiar with: it supports "...the right to distinct educational institutions and such distinct cultural institutions as are necessary for the preservation and promotion of those communities..." These rights are recognized for distinct communities under the banner of our two official languages. As a result of this section in the Charter, there are thriving and healthy Francophone and Anglophone communities in minority settings across this country. This is what Aboriginal communities are seeking: 'thriving and healthy communities'.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The teachers of Canada call on the federal government to:

- Commit to eradicating existing disparities in access to fundamental education, health, and child and family welfare services for Aboriginal families and communities.
- Recognize that culture and language are critical components to the development and implementation of the proposed First Nations Education Act.
- Commit to funding opportunities for early childhood education that is such a critical component to the health and well-being of First Nations, Métis and Inuit children and families.
- Commit to a collaborative process, including funding, for teacher training resources and professional development, for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers. This would include in-depth information about Aboriginal people, history, culture, and spirituality.
- Commit to maintaining and increasing support for collaborative initiatives in education that can act as models of promising practice for communities in Canada.
- Commit to a comprehensive federal poverty reduction strategy for Canada that includes realistic targets and timelines developed in broad consultation with provincial and territorial governments, Aboriginal governments and organizations, non-governmental organizations and people living in poverty.



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Aboriginal communities want access to: economic opportunity; equitable funding for education, including early childhood education, health and other critical child welfare services; community infrastructure that supports safety and security for families and responds to violence, drug abuse, suicide and despair. Case in point: there are numerous sources referring to Statistics Canada research of 2009 showing that there is close to three times more violent victimization of Aboriginal women as compared to non-Aboriginal women in Canada. This victimization can stem from the high levels of poverty, low educational attainment, and high rates of incarceration of Aboriginal men and women, as compared to non-Aboriginals in Canada. The high level of victimization towards Aboriginal women also increases their likelihood of becoming a victim of human trafficking in Canada.

We must recognize the need to support the growth of Aboriginal communities in Canada in a manner that respects the tremendous diversity of their

cultures and languages, while addressing the issues of attaining educational success. We can only do it through mutual respect, validation and collaboration.

The *Idle No More* activist movement has shone a light on these issues with Canadians. Some people would argue that this movement was galvanized by social media. Others would argue that the time has come for Canadians to recognize that our past still haunts us and that many Aboriginal communities are still being referred to as “living in third world conditions” in 2013. Perhaps *Idle No More* is also a reflection of the strength and power of culture and identity and how important these are in terms of societal growth. That’s why CTF continues to work with, and in support of, Aboriginal teachers and Aboriginal communities, establishing partnerships and increasing opportunities for collaboration to better meet the needs of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students and teachers.

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