



GENERAL MANAGEMENT DEPARTMENT

REGIONAL EDUCATION AGREEMENT

The FNEC is proud to announce that the first phase of the negotiations with Indigenous Services Canada has been completed. We are now in the early stages of establishing an agreement in principle which involves obtaining Canada's financial proposal, and verifying implementation compatibility with the financial arrangements developed by FNEC member communities. Once the FNEC Chiefs Committee and the lead negotiator confirm that Canada's offer meets real needs, each member community will be involved in the ratification stage. This historic agreement not only proposes to redefine the First Nations paradigm of education, but also aims to obtain adequate and equitable funding for learners in our schools for years to come. The new agreement will bring the following advantages and benefits to member communities:

- Over one billion dollars in investment for education.
- Financial security for the next five years.
- The creation of hundreds of new teaching positions and hundreds of other positions in areas directly and indirectly related to education. This considerable financial contribution is a good opportunity for communities to improve their social and economic fabric, and is a significant vector for social stability.
- An unprecedented opportunity for the takeover of education by and for First Nations, targeting complete financial autonomy.
- First-time-ever formal recognition of Indigenous expertise by the Government of Canada for the development, use and application of a new funding formula by and for First Nations.
- Profound change in the relational paradigm between First Nations and the federal government, focussing on recognition and respect for the administrative and political autonomy of First Nations communities.

Next steps

Directors of education in each FNEC member community have received detailed information on the results of FNEC formula calculations, as well as a copy of the manual describing the methodology. We are making the final draft of our technical documents so that everyone can have access to the financial information as soon as the agreement in principle is approved.

Starting this coming May, the FNEC is planning on meeting elected councils along with their senior managers and directors of education on an individual basis to go over the aspects of the regional education agreement affecting them. We will be getting in touch with each member community in the coming weeks to schedule a meeting to discuss preparations and logistics.

We are finally on our way to financial autonomy!

QUEBEC GOVERNMENT'S BILL 96 ON FRENCH LANGUAGE REFORM

The provincial government's bill to strengthen the French language in Quebec threatens the academic success of many Indigenous students who speak their native language and use French or English as a second language. In conjunction with constitutional lawyers and regional commissions and organizations, the FNEC drafted a position paper reflecting the systemic issues the *Charter of the French Language* has on student success.

This position paper was submitted before a parliamentary committee by AFNQL Chief Ghislain Picard, and Chief Responsible for Education John Martin. Since then, the FNEC has met with provincial government representatives, ministry of education officials, and members of the provincial opposition parties. An op-ed piece was also published in the *Montréal Gazette* and posted on the Radio-Canada website in December.

The FNEC is circulating a video campaign on social media to raise awareness of language requirements and the difficulties First Nations learners face.

MNAs are in the process of considering sections of Chapter VIII of the Charter that apply to Cree and Inuit students. We are continuing to pressure the government to apply provisions in this chapter to all First Nations in Quebec.

QUEBEC GOVERNMENT'S BILL 9 TO CREATE A NATIONAL STUDENT OMBUDSMAN

Quebec's minister of education tabled Bill 9, *An Act respecting the National Student Ombudsman*, on November 23 of last year. The bill aims to reform the existing student complaint process in the provincial school system. The FNEC was invited to take part in special hearings before the Committee on Culture and Education.

Even though it looks like the application of the bill would not have a direct impact on FNEC member schools, we thought action should be taken considering the number of First Nations elementary and high school students enrolled in the provincial school system.

To ensure that First Nations students are properly supported and served, the FNEC has proposed the following four recommendations:

- The position of Indigenous student ombudsman should be created with the same duties and responsibilities and required qualifications as regional student ombudsmen to ensure culturally, and linguistically appropriate procedures and mechanisms are in place.
- Student ombudsmen should be responsible for complaint prevention, as well as informing and supporting complainants throughout the complaint process.
- If regional student ombudsmen refuse to examine a complaint, or terminate the examination of a complaint, they must inform the complainant in writing.
- Ensure the duties and responsibilities of student ombudsmen are adapted to the cultural and linguistic needs of First Nations students enrolled in the provincial school system.

The minister of education's report on the special hearings is scheduled for presentation to the National Assembly in the next few days.

For more information, see the FNEC's position paper on Bill 9 (French only):

<https://cepn-fnec.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/memoire-cepn-Projet-de-loi-no9.pdf>

NEGOTIATING NEW POST-SECONDARY FUNDING MODELS

The FNEC has been working with the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and regional members of the National Indian Education Council (NIEC) to develop a policy proposal on new sustainable and equitable funding models based on the real needs of students. Involvement in the post-secondary education funding review was needed because the program will soon be coming to an end.

These efforts resulted in the adoption of a post-secondary education policy proposal at the AFN special chiefs assembly in December 2021 (resolution #23/2021). This proposal should be used as a framework for the ISC's memorandum to Cabinet requesting authorization for First Nations to negotiate and conclude local, regional and/or treaty-based post-secondary education funding models.

Generally speaking, the AFN policy proposal demands:

- Additional investment over five years (starting in 2022-2023).
- Funding over five years for technical tables and regional processes.
- Unlock the investment announced in Budget 2021 for adult education.
- Additional investment over five years starting in 2022-2023 for the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP), and the Post-Secondary Partnerships Program (PSPP). This investment must include cost indicators and funding formulas determined by First Nations for their region.
- PSPP funding includes two components: sustainable funding for First Nations post-secondary institutions and community-based programming.

The policy proposal is available at: <https://www.afn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/2.-First-Nations-PSE-Policy-Proposal-EN.pdf>

PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCES \$19.4M TO DECOLONIZE CURRICULUM WITH HELP FROM FIRST NATIONS AND INUIT ORGANIZATIONS

On November 30, 2021, the FNEC joined Minister of Education Jean-François Roberge and Minister Responsible for Indigenous Affairs Ian Lafrenière in formally announcing three new measures supporting Indigenous student success. The goal of these measures is to decolonize provincial curriculum by including an unprejudiced and representative portrait of the history of Quebec's First Nations and Inuit.

These measures are the result of concrete action supported by many First Nations organizations including the FNEC. They have also been recommended in various independent reports and analyses including the Viens Commission (calls for action no. 11, 21 and 22), the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (calls for justice no. 9 and 11), as well as the anti-racism action group (action no. 17).

The three announced measures aim to:

- Increase the number of culturally appropriate student services and create learning environments where Indigenous students and their families are at the forefront.
- Indigenize provincial curriculum through the addition of First Nations-developed material.
- Develop a plan to integrate Indigenous content into provincial education programming with the help of First Nations and Inuit organizations.

The Government of Quebec is committed to working closely with First Nations stakeholders and representatives to ensure these measures are successfully implemented. The parties have agreed that the implementation plan and related funding distribution will be orchestrated by the provincial panel on Indigenous student success, co-chaired by the FNEC's director general.

A special session of the provincial panel on Indigenous student success was held on February 2 to discuss the four major strategic orientations laying the foundation for further action, including the announced measures to decolonize the provincial curriculum. These four strategic orientations are:

- Support Indigenous student success and wellbeing.
- Recognize and value Indigenous knowledge, perspectives, and teaching methods.
- Increase understanding of Indigenous realities and use culturally appropriate approaches.
- Implement and strengthen Indigenous education partnerships.

SCHOOL VENTILATION UPDATE

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, several experts and organizations have taken a serious look at air quality in schools. In concern for the wellbeing of students and staff, the FNEC has undertaken an analysis of ventilation systems in member schools. These inspections have given us the opportunity to meet with many school principals and ventilation system operators across the province. Our analysis has revealed the following:

1. Staff members do not have formal training beyond what they have learned on the job. Several staff members indicated some hesitancy regarding system maintenance considering their lack of training. Some staff even decided to turn off the ventilation system to avoid taking any risks.
2. School principals and system operators indicated that basic training in building mechanical systems is needed for system maintenance and upgrading, community skill development, and the creation of a resource network.
3. Both minor and major deficiencies were detected in ventilation systems, and in some cases the general condition of the building.
4. Air quality samples revealed the need for upgrades in all the schools we inspected.

Following these inspections, Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) issued funding for the 2021-2022 fiscal year for school ventilation upgrades in First Nations communities. The FNEC has been supporting several communities in the call for proposal process to complete the work by March 31. The FNEC has partnered with the Huron-Wendat workforce training and development centre (CDFM) to develop a building operator training program. This on-site training program will be offered to all band and tribal council staff involved in building maintenance.

The lack of school infrastructure funding for First Nations communities and the need for new investment have been acknowledged by the Government of Canada in ISC's Annual Report to Parliament 2021. The FNEC is currently working on developing a comprehensive partnership to address this issue.

CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS TRIBUNAL RULES IN FAVOUR OF THE MASHTEUATSH POLICE FORCE

On January 31, 2022, the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT) rendered its decision on the complaint Chief Gilbert Dominique made on behalf of Pekuakamiulnuatsh First Nation denouncing the underfunding of public safety services in his community. This verdict confirms the decades-long state underfunding of infrastructure and services in First Nations communities is discriminatory.

The FNEC welcomes this CHRT ruling that has bolstered recent efforts to negotiate a regional education agreement with Indigenous Services Canada, including the application of the FNEC's funding formula. One of the most important goals of the regional agreement is to bring an end to chronic underfunding of First Nations education and meet the real and specific needs of our member communities.

The CHRT ruling further underscores the profound change in paradigm affecting the current relationship between First Peoples and the federal government: [... *the affirmation of national standards and recognition of the inherent right to self-government of Indigenous peoples. ... In simple terms, the notion of Indigenous self-government and political autonomy has been percolating for more than 45 years.*] As stated by Chief Gilbert Dominique: [... *This is an important decision for Pekuakamiulnuatsh First Nation and First Nations across the country. The existence of systemic discrimination has been confirmed by the CHRT. ...*]

The FNEC would like to congratulate the community of Mashteuiatsh and Pekuakamiulnuatsh First Nation. We are more determined than ever to continue working toward equality, First Nations self-determination, and legitimate and equitable recognition of First Peoples!

