



Open Letter

Recipient : Journalists

Date : September 2, 2026

Object : Open Letter from the First Nations Education Council (FNEC) ahead of the upcoming Provincial Election. The FNEC's 22 member communities are calling directly on political parties and urging them to commit to eliminating systemic barriers.

Does Quebec really want our educational success? The First Nations demand solid commitments.

"Education got us into this mess and education will get us out of it." — The late Senator
Murray Sinclair

Education has long shaped the limits of what First Nations felt they could aspire to, learn and attain. After nine years of political inaction in addressing systemic barriers, the provincial government maintains unfavourable conditions for First Nations: the majority of regulatory or political obstacles that our students are subject to originate from the provincial government, whereas we are almost completely funded by the federal government. Why continue, in 2026, to do everything to prevent us from attaining this key source of empowerment, prosperity and complete participation in the economic future? There are many young people in our communities who want to learn, to work and to invest in our schools, our health and social services, our businesses and our public services.

Quebec must change its way of doing things. The number of graduates from our community secondary schools is constantly growing, but when the time comes to attain postsecondary studies or institutions in the provincial network, they face more obstacles than other students, which compromises their educational success. Too often, psychosocial support, academic support, guidance and specialized services are not adequately adapted to their paths, their culture and their needs.

Quebec brags that it has a public system where everyone is equal. Do not be fooled: it has a special regime for First Nations students. In November 2024, the Auditor General of Québec issued a bleak assessment: almost 20 years after the ministère de l'Éducation acknowledged the achievement gap between Quebec and First Nations students, few coordinated actions have been taken to reduce it. In the cohorts examined, almost 40% of Indigenous students left school in the Quebec provincial system without a degree or moved out of the province. Failing a real willingness

by the government to translate these findings into concrete actions, academic environments remain chronically underfunded – if they are funded at all – to support our students. The Auditor General condemns the fact that, despite the efforts and good faith of school service centres, they still lack the resources they need to offer our young people adapted and culturally secure services that allow them to feel understood, respected and supported in their language, their culture and their identity.

These obstacles persist beyond the end of the secondary level. On a college level, a young First Nations student can access an English institution, but their ability to graduate may be delayed due to French language requirements. Another distinct and equally unacceptable obstacle arises when it comes to attaining certain professions. Indeed, a trained and competent First Nations person may be deprived of the possibility of working in their own community due to French language requirements, even if they primarily offer services in their ancestral language or English. The result is absurd: a qualified person may leave a community that really needs them due to a shortage of professionals. To what benefit? None.

Education allows young people to choose their future, but also to live our languages, our cultures and our knowledge and to build stronger, more independent communities. What parallels can be drawn with what the political class claims that Quebec is currently experiencing!

Solutions exist. They are easy and, in many cases, would not result in any cost for the provincial government. The next government should not have to start from nothing: the avenues for action have long been known. We therefore ask all political parties to commit to putting these actions into practices and making the elimination of obstacles to the educational success of First Nations and Inuit a priority for the next government.

Quebec cannot simultaneously seek qualified workers while maintaining its colonial and assimilation-driven policies. It will need its entire emerging workforce in the years to come.

Education allows each of our learners to decide on their future. We choose to let them do so without abandoning their ancestral language to the benefit of a colonial language that is still imposed on them. Several concrete examples demonstrate that more and more young First Nations people are becoming seasoned leaders. However, we can do even better. Let us stand together, each in our own way!

It is time to pave the way for them.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Denis Gros-Louis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Denis" and last name "Gros-Louis" clearly distinguishable.

Denis Gros-Louis
Director General
First Nations Education Council

Information:

Florence Demers
Communications Advisor
First Nations Education Council
fdemers@cepn-fnec.com