



# 2<sup>nd</sup> Conference on First Nations Parental and Community Involvement

## **I'M INVOLVED!** **“Building Relationships”**

November 16 and 17, 2017  
Manoir Saint-Sauveur

FINAL REPORT





## 1. Introduction

More than 90 participants attended the second edition of the Conference on First Nations Parental and Community Involvement, held in Saint-Sauveur on November 16 and 17, 2017. This represents a 33% increase over attendance in 2016, when there were 60 participants.

The goal of this year's conference was to raise awareness about how important it is for parents, schools and communities to forge strong relationships with each other so that they can better support success at school for First Nations children.

This year, one of the new approaches involved also inviting community school principals, in the hopes of creating an inclusive dynamic for all the participants. While some workshops and presentations were designed specifically for the parents or for the school principals, most were intended for everyone, thereby giving parents and principals the opportunity to get to know each other and discuss issues. In this way, the "Building Relationships" theme of the "I'm involved" awareness campaign became a reality through the high number of parents and school principals who accepted the invitation.

The event's programming was rich and varied, touching on subjects such as parenting skills, school-family-community relations, parent committees and policy development, success and persistence in school, parental participation in the IEP process, technology at school and bullying.

The FNEC is very proud to report that, based on the enthusiastic participant comments gathered after this year's conference, satisfaction levels were high. So high, in fact, that we're considering making this a yearly event... Stay tuned!

## 2. Conference goals

As part of the First Nations Education Governance Project, five themes were chosen for the parental and community involvement component:

- the need to create a structure, based on a parental and community involvement policy and the appropriate procedures;
- awareness raising, by establishing structures for parental participation;
- the need for better communication;
- recruiting; and
- building parental and community capacity.

The FNEC team made sure that each theme was addressed to meet the conference goals:

- Present parents with an outline of the FNEC's offer to support parental and community involvement groups and policy development.
- Emphasize the importance of creating, maintaining and strengthening solid and positive collaborative relationships among communities and the families in those communities.
- Invite principals to open schools to the parents and make them feel welcome.
- Encourage and promote parental and community involvement in school.

- Give school principals a tool designed by the FNEC to help them get to know the community's parents and students better.
- Ask parents about their issues, challenges and opinions on various subjects to help orient the FNEC's work on parental and community involvement.

### 3. Summaries of Presentations and Workshops

#### **Tools in your Pocket: Child Behaviour and Communication – Building Positive Connections**

This presentation navigated through behaviour issues while bringing life to every child's learning in a positive way, one that impacts their own healthy sense of self and ensures success within the family, school and community.

Here are a few points that were discussed:

How do we communicate to children that they are important and valued members of the family and community?

Discipline: Teaching children through logical consequences and the difference between good and bad decisions.

Transition from school to home: How are we greeting children at the end of the day?

Teaching children to do good in the world simply because good is good to do.

Tips and tools to get your children to talk, to voice their needs, and to share the good and not so good parts of each day



#### **Parental Involvement in the IEP Process – Gino Lesage, FNEC**

The purpose of this presentation was to define and especially demystify the IEP. The rights and responsibilities of parents in the implementation of special education services for their children were identified. The role of those involved with IEPs at the school level in terms of who does what were also clarified. Parents of children with special needs were given ways to support their children's progress and achievement.

Here are some of the highlights of the presentation:

- Parents and the school each have specific and irreplaceable roles in education. When the two meet, coordination is possible.
- IEPs are an opportunity to meet to coordinate the program for students with special needs, with a view to ensuring their success.
- The role of parents is to provide a profile of the child at home, to take part in decisions, to ask questions, to tell the school about the strategies they use, to sign the IEP and to consent to services.
- Parents can prepare for the meeting by bringing information about the child's strengths, challenges, worrying behaviours, and fears about school. They can also tell the child about the procedure, going into detail if the child is taking part in the IEP. They can also talk to the child about his or her strengths.
- Parents have the right to take part in a decision-making process, to ask someone (professional or not) to accompany them, to request follow-up on the child's progress, to express their reservations, to share their point of view or recommendations, to be given access to the student's file and to have a copy of the IEP.
- Children have the right to attend pre-kindergarten at the age of 4, to receive daycare services, to receive accommodations for exams as specified in the IEP and to be given educational services until the age of 21.
- A school has the obligation to warn parents if it calls on a professional to assess the child, but also to communicate information about the IEP. The parents' consent is necessary. This obligation does not include remedial programs, however, or referrals to professionals in emergency or crisis situations.

### **Principal's Roundtable – Mira Levasseur-Moreau, Valérie Fortin and Bruno Rock, FNEC**

During this consultative workshop, the FNEC asked school principals or their representatives in member communities to discuss new teacher onboarding and integration and how parents are welcomed into the schools. Participants were split into two groups, depending on their language of choice (French or English).

The issue of new teacher onboarding and integration appeared as an issue at all the schools in our member communities. Although several initiatives to have been taken to help welcome them in, challenges remained from one community to the next, including lack of accommodation (in remote areas), inadequate mentorship, a need for training about First Nations history and realities, a lack of knowledge of community realities and existing protocols, and a significant turnover rate in the teaching staff.

To meet these challenges, participants proposed the following solutions: the creation of a general, structured and recurrent training course (about First Nations) available to all, greater recognition and use of cultural facilitators in schools, reliance on Elders to help integrate new teachers in schools and communities, the organization of activities allowing for discussion among community members in a relaxing atmosphere, and enlisting the communities to help ensure a more structured onboarding of new teachers (in remote areas).

As for welcoming parents to the schools, the participants stated that, however much school principals want to build closer relationships with parents and encourage them to take part in activities on a regular basis, they had to be tenacious and repeatedly invite parents to important meetings, for example to organize activities (e.g., mini pow-wows, makushan (traditional community meals), community gardens). Everyone agreed that efforts were still required from both schools and parents to improve communication and encourage them to get to know each other better.

Discussions during this workshop touched on various needs that must be met in order to improve parental and community involvement. Given the significance and urgency of these needs, all the stakeholders in the education field (school, home, community) must get involved, in particular by continuing to build relationships.



To meet the need for a general, structured and recurrent training course (on First Nations) for all, the FNEC hopes to establish a “First Nations 101” course for the general public. The FNEC will then seek out additional opportunities to offer the training course in schools, depending on the needs expressed.

To help raise the school team’s awareness of the importance of welcoming parents, the FNEC has designed a *Parental and Community Involvement Toolbox for School Principals* in its member communities, which is available through CANO.

The *Toolbox* also gives schools several tips to improve communication between parents and schools. To make it easier to use, the FNEC team provides personalized support that it will continue to offer to school principals in coming years.

In addition to these tools for school principals, the FNEC offers parents training courses designed to meet their needs and sets up developmental and strategic projects to represent them.

### **Parents Committees and Participation Policy Development – Eve Lapointe and Pierre Lainé, FNEC**

This presentation on parents committees comprised two parts. The first concerned the main types of parental and community involvement, and the second discussed the parents committees. The goal of the presentation was to encourage the creation of parents committees and to reiterate the FNEC’s support for any steps taken in the communities.

Policy development was offered as a complement to the parents committee workshop. This second component explained why and how parental and community involvement policies are developed to ensure the sustainability of the efforts that will be needed to build any structure. The presentation emphasized the importance of mobilizing actors from different community sectors to ensure that the committees reflect the process of participatory governance.

### **Working with Twice Exceptional Children – Earlyn Sharpe**

This presentation gave the audience a snapshot of the challenges exceptional children face and the strategies educators have explored and implemented to make “the difference” in teaching and learning.



It was an opportunity for Ms. Sharpe to explain what is meant by the term “exceptional children,” i.e. children whose learning disabilities or other issues are coupled with giftedness, i.e., a “gift” or an exceptional talented. Twice exceptional children are highly intelligent but have a disability or disorder of some kind (learning disability, ADD/ADHD, ASD, CD, etc.). For example, 19% of gifted students also have learning disabilities. Ms. Sharpe described the characteristics of three types of twice exceptional children, along with their strengths and potential challenges, and discussed possible approaches to better intervene with these types of students:

- Initiate consultation about the student’s data collected through observation and assessment.
- Involve gifted, general and special education staff and family in collaborative problem solving efforts.
- Collect additional data and implement IEPs or strength-based programming as needed.
- Initiate eligibility determination processes as appropriate for the individual student according to gifted and special education guidelines and criteria.

### **Workshop: Survey of Parents -- Mira Levasseur-Moreau, Eve Lapointe and Pierre Lainé, FNEC**

The FNEC wanted to learn more about parents’ opinions about how they communicate with the school, how much they know about services offered by the school and the community, and how they perceive their own parenting skills. The FNEC team therefore devised a survey, and the workshop was led by Mr. Lainé, who presented each question in a way that provoked thought and discussion amongst the participants. The many comments from the participants are revealing and instructive. The results of this survey will be made public in February 2018 and will help orient the FNEC’s work to better answer the needs expressed by parents.

### **Bullying: Impact and Intervention – Institut Pacifique**

The goal of this workshop for school principals was to familiarize participants with the concepts around bullying so that they can recognize the individuals involved, understand the repercussions of bullying and identify different strategies the school might put in place. Among other things, the workshop explained the differences between bullying prevention, codes of conduct and intervention protocol. However indivisible these strategies may be, the implementation in schools of any one of them contributes to the potential success of the anti-bullying action.

### **Testimonial -- Charlotte Gauthier and her parents**

Charlotte Gauthier is a 16-year-old member of the Abenaki nation of Odanak. She appeared with her parents to talk about her experience as a student, drawing on her experience in school, her daily reality and the challenges faced by her family. Each family member spoke, sharing a number of inspiring messages of hope and perseverance.

*We would like to say a special thank you to Charlotte and her family.*



### **SMART Quiz – Martin Bertrand and Pierre Lainé, FNEC**

This presentation described the possible uses and advantages of interactive whiteboards. Parents and school principals took part in an interactive quiz, which gave them the opportunity to talk about topics raised in the newsletters about parental and community involvement.

### **CANO: The Parents Page – Dorothée Picard, FNEC**

The purpose of this presentation was to introduce participants to the various components of the CANO Parents Page: report cards, attendance lists, homework, behaviour incidents, bulletins, messaging, etc.

The contribution of technology in the school-home relationship, the importance of this relationship and the means at our disposal to encourage the best communication possible were also addressed.



**Presentation of the *Toolbox* – Mira Levasseur-Moreau, Pierre Lainé, Eve Lapointe and Valérie Fortin, FNEC**

As part of its I'M INVOLVED! awareness campaign, the FNEC has developed the *Toolbox* for the school principals of its member communities to promote parental and community involvement in schools.

The main objective of the campaign is to make parental and community involvement a priority in communities by placing value on children, the role of parents, volunteering, school and the people who work there, as well as the different ways children learn. The *Toolbox* has been created to help fulfill this objective.

To encourage parents and community members to get involved, schools must show them that their participation is welcome and very important. To provide different doing this, the *Toolbox* offers many tips, ideas, and approaches schools can use to encourage parental and community involvement in a variety of ways.

Here are some comments from participants:

- *Principals appreciate having this tool available and say that once they are back at their offices they will take the time to go through the Toolbox and learn how to work with it.*
- *Some aspects of the Toolbox are useful to introduce community schools to non-Aboriginals (teachers, administrative staff, parents).*
- *Communication between schools and parents will improve with a better knowledge of the community. First and foremost, work must be done to improve cultural competency.*

- *Because resources in FNEC schools are often non-Aboriginal, the approach proposed by the toolbox is very interesting.*
- *The Toolbox is a very useful instrument for a school team.*
- *The tool is flexible: it can be used at several levels and in many situations. It can be made culturally appropriate, depending on the realities, challenges and needs of the schools.*

### **The Importance of Literacy – Collège Frontière**

This interactive workshop addressed the role of literacy and numeracy in the home. Through games and role-playing, participants saw how important it is to include reading and writing in their child's everyday life. In addition, tips and tricks were shared on:

- choosing the right reading material for children;
- reading aloud and how to do shared and guided reading with children;
- improving comprehension when reading;
- incorporating numeracy, vocabulary and learning in everyday tasks.

Parents took away a series of simple interactive activities to test out at home to make reading, writing and counting a central part of family fun.

### **Why Do My Children Try My Patience? – Marie-Hélène Chalifour**

Why are there days when I can react calmly and in an appropriate way to my child's behaviour, and other days I feel completely overwhelmed and incapable? This presentation aimed to help participants find answers to these questions through an empathetic approach, so that they could:

- understand why parents sometimes lose patience with their children;
- understand the effects on the parent-child relationship;
- learn how to stay calm and handle the situation differently.



### **Encouraging Communication between School, Home and Community – Serge Larivée**

There is a wide consensus in scientific literature on the importance of cooperation between the school, home and community and the participation of parents in their child's development and education

Parental involvement and cooperation is complex and multi-faceted and can be expressed in a variety of ways.

Several obstacles can hinder the establishment of harmonious relationships between the various stakeholders concerned or limit the extent of parental involvement.

A reference framework and a planning guide based on research on effective or promising school-home-community collaborative practices was presented to participants.

A brainstorming session on how to encourage discussion and cooperation between school, home and the community was also held.

### **Testimonial – Terry Randy Awashish**

Terry Randy's testimonial highlighted his determination to persist despite the obstacles in his path. The loss of a loved one, trouble at school, a lack of financial resources or the loss of property – any one of those events might have caused him to give up.

He has nevertheless persevered, and along the way met people who have reached out a hand to help, each in their own way. As a result, he still believes in his dreams today, one of which is to graduate from university.

*A special thank you to you, Terry.*



**Talking Circle – Pierre Lainé, Eve Lapointe and Mira Levasseur-Moreau, FNEC**

During the first conference in November 2016, participants expressed a desire to have time to talk amongst themselves. The FNEC therefore organized a discussion workshop around the following themes: “What intention am I leaving with?” and “Is my view of parental involvement different today?”



The workshop leader set out the basic concepts, explaining the goal of the circle and how to proceed. The participants spoke eloquently, with many stating a desire to build more solid relationships with the school to better encourage children in the community to do well. Many people joined the talking circle, which wrapped up the two-day conference. Here are a few thoughts that were expressed:

- *It's important to take the time to stop when you're a parent. The conference was an ideal opportunity to take the time to think about our children.*
- *Having a school for the children of the community in the community is valuable.. The important thing, in fact, is to find a way to build a connection between the family, the school and the community. It is important for the institution that receives the children, i.e. the school, to be inviting, so that they feel supported and safe. The child shuttles between the school and the community. Activities should not be limited to meetings where the community is invited to the school, but to occasions where teachers can go out meet the community. In an effort to build a better living environment for children and healthy relationships, we have to be like the beaver who sees his dam destroyed in the morning but rebuilds it at night.*
- *It is also important to teach the children to have pride, something they can carry with them to progress through their schooling.*
- *The opening of Kiuna College was a big step forward for Aboriginal communities. Every community is unique. It is important to find ways to preserve what makes each one special. It falls to the Elders and the communities to ensure that it is sustainable. Unfortunately, languages are being lost in many communities across Canada. One of the most important events we saw organized is one where the Elders of several communities in Quebec were invited and translators for all of the languages also attended, letting everyone express themselves in their own language. It is important to build these relationships between First Nations.*
- *We also must take the time to find how to integrate culture and language in our school curriculum. This is our children's heritage.*
- *The shock of the residential schools is generational in scope. Healing will have to take place over several generations. Parents in communities must demand that the schools and communities reflect Aboriginal culture and provide a healthy living environment for children. As important as it is to respect the system, it is just as important for the system to respect Aboriginal peoples and their culture.*
- *One way to learn the language and culture is to spend time with Elders. So much damage has been caused by schools (residential and others) in the past, including a loss of culture and language. Despite everything, many parents encourage their children to go to school to learn, but the fundamental learning for parents is what can be learned by going to the forest with their families and teaching their culture.*
- *The relationship between children and parents was broken by the residential schools. The environment, the community where children evolve, is holistic. If one part of the community suffers, it has repercussions on all parts. Therefore, the repercussions from the boarding schools are felt throughout the community. If schools are used as a place of healing, based on the relationship with children, they can have positive effects on the community, starting with young people. The key to success is the love we can give them.*

## Next Steps

Based on the results of our evaluation of the event, we can state that the participants were very satisfied with the experience: 100% of respondents said that they would recommend that their colleagues or friends take part in a future conference.

For example, parents very much appreciated the quality of the presentations and the information conveyed. The parents' favourite subjects included "Tools in Your Pocket for Building Positive Connections", "Working with Exceptional Children" and "Why Do My Children Try My Patience?" Many also reacted positively to the presentation of the *Toolbox* for school principals to promote parental and community involvement.

The attendance of parents and school principals at the Conference demonstrated that interest in parental and community involvement is very much alive in the communities, and that the needs in this respect are important issues.

To support parents and communities in their progress, the FNEC plans to organize activities (among other things) to encourage parental and community involvement. It will:

- organize training courses for parents (awareness raising, the structure of parental and community involvement, policy development, etc.);
- establish structures for parental and community participation;
- hold working sessions with principals to present the use the *Toolbox* to promote parental and community involvement and to develop an action plan;
- establish and develop a parents' network;
- elaborate strategies to develop the community's power to take action;
- plan the third Conference on Parental and Community Involvement

The FNEC is proud to be steadily increasing its allies to help implement strategies to promote parental and community involvement.

The FNEC team





