

# **Native Education Policy Review**

**As Approved by:**

## **Metis Settlements General Assembly**

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# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction –Native Education Policy</b>		
<b>Background — Metis Settlements</b>		<b>1</b>
<b>Identification of Learning Needs</b>	<b>Computers</b>	<b>2</b>
• <b>Infrastructure</b>	• <b>Access to Learning Resources</b>	
• <b>Student to Teacher Ratios</b>	• <b>Transitions</b>	<b>2-5</b>
• <b>In-School Libraries and</b>	• <b>Perpetual/Lifelong Learning</b>	
	• <b>Curriculum</b>	
	• <b>Accommodation of Individual Learning Styles</b>	
	• <b>Special Needs Assessments</b>	
	• <b>Reading and Writing</b>	
	• <b>Positive Reinforcement</b>	
	• <b>Mentors and Tutors</b>	
<b>Key Barriers to Learning</b>		
<b>Critical Educational Areas</b>		
<b>Achieving Outcomes/Issues and Recommendations</b>		<b>5-6</b>
<b>Issues, Goals and Recommendations</b>		<b>6</b>
<b>Recommendations to Government</b>		<b>6</b>
<b>Implementation of Recommendations</b>		<b>6-</b>
• <b>Process for Monitoring</b>		<b>9</b>
<b>Back Attachment –Metis Settlements Brochure</b>		<b>10</b>

# Native Education Policy Review

## 1.) Introduction *Native Education Policy???*

The majority of respondents who attended our public meetings on this issue expressed ignorance of the existing policy. After informing the various respondents (i.e. Settlement members, politicians, school board officials, teachers, etc.) that this policy had been in existence since 1987, they were outraged that the policy had not been adequately communicated to them nor had it been implemented effectively in our communities.

The purpose of the Native Education Policy Review was to:

- Determine and define the role, responsibilities and jurisdiction of Alberta Learning in the education of First Nations, Metis, Inuit and other Aboriginal learners.
- Establish directions in legislation, policy and regulation in the delivery of programs and services to First Nations, Metis, Inuit and other Aboriginal learners.

Some expected outcomes of the Native Education Policy Review were:

- To improve aboriginal learner success in ECS to grade 12, and post-secondary institutions.
- To recognize and increase parent involvement in the education of all Aboriginal learners.
- To strengthen partnerships and relationships between all Aboriginal groups, school jurisdictions, post-secondary institutions, other key educational stakeholders, apprenticeship providers, vocational schools, industry and government, and
- To foster a greater appreciation and understanding, by all Albertans, of all Aboriginal people.

While most weren't aware of the Native Education Policy, our respondents did have legitimate concerns, which we have documented and synthesized for everyone's perusal. The existing Native Education Policy may have addressed some of these documented concerns had it been effectively communicated and implemented. While this report may not necessarily critique the Native Education Policy, it will state the issues, goals and recommendations all interviewed groups had, in terms of their existing local school systems.

As our leadership has not negotiated the area of education through the Metis Settlements Accord Agreement or subsequent agreements, the province retains the responsibility to provide equitable educational opportunities for Metis Settlement residents.

After reviewing the results of the achievement tests of Alberta's aboriginal people, the Auditor General and the Minister of Learning identified a need to review the existing policy in order to ascertain areas of improvement.

While acknowledging the fiduciary responsibility of Metis Settlements governance, Alberta Learning extended a contract to Metis Settlements General Council (MSGC) to perform the NEP review on Metis Settlement lands. MSGC then delegated the responsibility to Metis Settlements Strategic Training Initiatives Society (MSSTIS), who were pleased to accept. From there, the NEP team was formed.

### **The Native Education Policy Review Team**

**Walter Anderson, Metis Elder** – Past Education Portfolio Holder of the Federation of Metis Settlements, Fishing Lake Metis Settlement, sixteen years political experience, ten years with the Federation of Metis Settlements, one year with MSGC

**Floyd Thompson, MSGC Secretary** – Education Portfolio Holder, Kikino Metis Settlement

**Herb Lehr, MSSTIS Director** – Four years with MSSTIS, Fishing Lake Metis Settlement

**Tom Ghostkeeper, MSSTIS Provincial Initiatives Manager** – Seconded from the Department of International and Intergovernmental Relations, Paddle Prairie Metis Settlement

**Dorothy Anderson, Project Coordinator, Center for Tripartite Negotiations** – Cree Interpreter, Gift Lake Metis Settlement

## 2.) Background - The Metis Settlements

(Please find attached Metis Settlements brochure)

## 3.) Identification of Learning Needs

As presenters, we admit to having our own personal biases, as did the various respondent groups we met with. Numerous people from all groups wanted to identify successes, as well as failures, and as in most surveys, the pendulum swing went from no problems to major concerns. The following paragraphs reflect consensus of our communities after correlating all responses.

### a) **Infrastructure**

The majority of people with whom we spoke felt that having an educational institution in their community was a necessity. Some reasons were: the cultural components; the remoteness of their locations; and exhaustive bussing to and from outside schools. Some communities identified infrastructure requirements – some dependant on the number of people (students, staff and others) in the schools. As the number of students per class steadily grows, more and more upgrading and expansion is becoming necessary in order to adequately accommodate everyone. Different respondents identified specific infrastructure requirements within their communities. Some of those requirements include: daycares; more classrooms; more staff offices; larger gyms; and actual educational institutions

themselves (there are two Metis Settlements, Buffalo Lake and East Prairie, that don't have schools on their lands).

**b) Student - Teacher Ratios**

For optimum learner performance, class sizes with a student-teacher ratio no higher than 17:1 are favorable to most people, particularly to educators. The current situation was, for the most part, supported by the majority of respondents. However, as the ratio increases (evident in the lower grades), they feel there will inevitably be a need for divided classes, more staff, and larger classrooms in the very near future. In this event, the majority wants to see good planning and preparation. For now, upon consulting with parents, teachers and some students, there was a desire and support for the smaller class sizes.

**c) In-School Libraries and Computers**

While there was pride in some existing resources, most respondents felt that much of their material is inadequate or obsolete. At most schools, there were computers available for use by the students, and which were connected to the Internet. However, in order to keep pace with rapidly moving technology, respondents felt that this minimal exposure is insufficient.

**d) Access to Learning Resources**

The majority felt that the necessary reading and viewing material children need is not readily available to them. Although the resources are there, there is not enough time to access them. Consequently, a need for more library/study time was strongly expressed. Realistically, the students do not use their breaks, nor do they come to school early to pick up resources required for projects. As well, if the student is attending another school, he/she cannot stay after school due to bussing schedules.

**e) Transitions**

There is a definite requirement to obtain more resources (both physical and mental) in the area of transitions – from elementary to secondary to high school to post secondary. A tremendous hurdle for our youth is assimilation into schools in non-aboriginal communities - leaving the security of their Settlement where they, as Aboriginals, were the clear majority, to schools in non-aboriginal jurisdictions where they are still subject to racial slanders and societal pressures that are alien to them. Those are great problems, in conjunction with different teaching techniques, extended travel and peer/societal pressure in a different school division. A significant number of respondents, close to half, suggested that having a local high school would eliminate such issues.

Once students have completed their high school endeavors, another complete transformation is required: from Settlement community life to urban life. Students then have to try to assimilate into mainstream society without the support networks they are

accustomed to, or are dependant on (i.e. immediate/extended family, friends, and community members, etc.). Post secondary pursuits normally involve student finance, and/or associated types of funding agencies, which typically provide lump sum financing

for their scholastic endeavors. For students who are just leaving home, who have relied on their parents for all life's responsibilities, the newfound freedom and independence is overwhelming. Having recognized this issue, we now are charged with the responsibility of developing programs and resources to ensure that successful transitions occur.

**f) Perpetual/Lifelong Learning**

Depending on the school division, school hours fluctuate. In most cases, the schools stay open until approximately four pm. In some jurisdictions, there are either classes every second Friday or only a half-day every Friday. The majority of people felt that this decision was not in their children's best interest. Recognizing the results of the achievement tests, the majority felt that the hours of classroom instruction should be extended. The strongest recommendation was to return to regular class hours on Fridays.

**g) Curriculum**

The respondents felt that there was insufficient Metis Settlement philosophy and content in Alberta's curriculum. They felt that equal importance should be placed on Metis content as there is on Catholicism (Catholic religion) and French immersion. They feel that, as a distinct Metis people, their languages and background should be incorporated into the curriculum. Respondents felt that students must be able to relate to what they read, hear and learn in the classroom to be interested and motivated.

**h) Accommodation of Individual Learning Styles**

Under western ideologies, children are generally taught in one manner: reading and writing. The majority of our respondents advocated for an Aboriginal teaching model. In this model, people learn through story-telling and hands-on instruction, as well as from elders and youth. Two specific recommendations to increase academic achievement include: short answer, essay and multiple choice testing, along with oral and hands-on testing; incorporate Metis Settlements scenarios into course material.

**i) Special Needs Assessments**

Respondents consistently addressed the very important area of special needs. They feel there is a great need for more funding to effectively test and teach special needs learners. Interviewed members were also angered at the absence of effective follow-through. The lack of financial support creates greater difficulties in later years, as these children are passed through the system even if they are not ready to move on, under the current western-scientific knowledge model of management by measurement. One of the end-results is

normally a high dropout rate. Respondents suggested having the criteria for testing changed, as well as the method for accessing more funds. Respondents want to see paraprofessionals testing and teaching special needs learners once they are identified.

**j) Reading and Writing**

Respondents need reassurance that students are up to par in their knowledge of reading and writing before they advance to the next level. Interviewed groups expressed a willingness to increase current standards, even if it means holding a child back for whatever length of time required to reach a satisfactory level. A partial solution offered by respondents is for parents to place a stronger emphasis on reading and writing before children reach pre-school age.

**k) Positive Reinforcement**

The vast majority of respondents said that it's time for negative attitudes and mindsets to change. They want a new way of thinking: instead of "repairing the negative" they want to "improve the positive". Respondents want all stakeholders (i.e. community leadership, membership, students, Alberta Learning, etc.) to use a proactive approach in handling their situations. Tools such as incentive programs, success recognition, confidence building, mentoring and tutoring, social gathering, emphasis of values systems and early intervention should be used in the reinforcement of positive thinking.

**l) Mentoring and Tutoring**

As with any other community or school, there is a need for role models in our schools and communities. Respondents feel that it is crucial for everyone to have an example to follow. The logic was that if a student has not identified their goal, they are essentially working towards nothing and if they're working towards nothing, there is no motivation. Tutors are also an effective tool for building confidence: they provide positive reinforcement for students. Necessary "building blocks of learning" are also developed through tutors.

**4.) Key areas that bar successful learner outcomes:**

- a. Lack of/access to resources
- b. Lack of funds
- c. Lack of parent/guardian involvement
- d. Lack of direction/goal setting
- e. Poor leadership
- f. Poor communications
- g. Ignorance (by non-aboriginals) of our way of life
- h. Family poverty
- i. Lack of role models/mentors
- j. Unaddressed individual learning styles

- k. Poor or undisciplined value systems
- l. Detachment from mainstream society
- m. Need for infrastructure or upgrading of existing facilities
- n. Unidentified special needs students
- o. Daily bussing
- p. Current teaching/testing methods
- q. Mindsets (i.e. negative patterned thinking)
- r. Unaccountability
- s. Off-Settlement schooling (absence of gradual transitions)

5.) Critical educational areas that need to be addressed:

- a. Special needs learners
- b. Availability of/access to resources
- c. Existing curriculums
- d. Success measurement standards (quantitative vs. qualitative)
- e. Effective orientations for new/existing staff
- f. Relationships (boards, families, school staff, communities and leadership)
- g. Teaching methods (technological and traditional)
- h. Need for funds
- i. Native cultural content in curriculums

6.) Achieving Outcomes/Issues and Recommendations

**Outcomes**

- 4.1 To improve First Nations, Metis and Inuit learner success in ECS to Grade 12 and post-secondary institutions
- 4.2 To recognize and increase parent involvement in the education of First Nation, Metis and Inuit learners
- 4.3 To strengthen partnerships and relationships between First Nation, Metis and Inuit people, school jurisdictions, post-secondary institutions, apprenticeship providers, vocational schools, industry and government.
- 4.4 To foster a greater appreciation and understanding by all Albertans of First Nation, Metis and Inuit people.

7.) Issues, Goals and Recommendations

The following states the concerns, goals and recommendations most communities had in terms of local school systems.

ISSUE	GOAL	ACTION
Lack of Parental Involvement	Increase Parental Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Home visits by staff</li> <li>ii. School visits by parents or guardians</li> <li>iii. Sending communications home with children</li> <li>iv. Teaching parents to teach their children</li> </ul>
Lack of Resources Need for new, upgraded resources	<p>To purchase more resources</p> <p>To upgrade or improve existing resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Keep school open for longer hours (e.g. “open school policy”)</li> <li>ii. Access funds to improve existing resources (i.e. add internet, etc.)</li> <li>iii. Access funds to purchase new resources (i.e. updated texts, etc.)</li> <li>iv. Set aside time especially for accessing resources</li> </ul>
Lack of understanding for culture and lifestyles	To raise understanding of culture and to foster appreciation of lifestyles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Cross community training for new and present staff</li> <li>ii. Base applications on genuine interest as well as credentials (ask why they want to teach in the particular community)</li> <li>iii. Promote active involvement in community events, etc</li> <li>iv. Display stability (low turnovers)</li> <li>v. Show commitment</li> </ul>
Lack of Metis cultural content Incomprehensible learning materials	<p>To instill Metis pride and knowledge of our culture</p> <p>To create a better understanding for students</p> <p>To spark interest in the students</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Add more Metis content (logical, considering audience)</li> <li>ii. Replace material that students can’t relate to with material that they can relate to</li> <li>iii. Add activities that enhance social skills (i.e. extra-curricular activities, age mixing – getting higher grades to interact with lower grades, visitors – elders coming into the school to tell stories, out-of-town activities, etc.)</li> </ul>

<p>Lack of testing Unreasonable criteria for testing Lack of effective follow-through</p>	<p>To recognize all special-needs learners To effectively teach special needs learners To perform additional research on learning handicaps</p>	<p>i. Access more funding for special needs children ii. Remove criteria that a child must have a behavior disorder in order to get tested iii. Implement a more in-depth and professional mechanism for following up</p>
<p>Lack of communication Lack of understanding Need for clearly defined roles and responsibilities</p>	<p>To improve communications To increase understanding To clearly define roles and responsibilities</p>	<p>i. More meetings amongst stakeholders (parents, leadership, school staff, school boards/committees, children, etc.) ii. Cross-community training for staff iii. Orientations to define roles and responsibilities by all stakeholders iv. Enforcing accountability by all stakeholders (Alberta Learning, local school, boards, parents, etc.) v. Increased cooperation and collaboration</p>
<p>Lack of focused goal-setting</p>	<p>To achieve clearly defined goals To find common objective between all stakeholders</p>	<p>i. Meeting of stakeholders ii. Understanding of common interests and desires iii. Finding ways of achieving those common interests and desires iv. Rewarding achievements v. Recognizing efforts</p>
<p>Ineffective and old-fashioned Ineffective teaching/testing methods</p>	<p>To deliver material in a more effective manner (i.e. comprehensible, interesting, up-to-date and up-to-standard)</p>	<p>i. Conduct some courses in seminar fashion (to build learning/college skills) ii. Utilise more hands-on and visual techniques iii. Add more distance learning (i.e. teleconferencing) to curriculum iv. Explicitly to our culture, implement story-telling as a teaching technique v. Establish new testing methods (i.e. visual and hands on, etc.) vi. Change wording in material in a way that relates to the Metis reader</p>
<p>Lack of liaison workers and counsellors Lack of mentors/tutors</p>	<p>To have full-time, on-site counsellors and liaison workers at the schools (especially high school)</p>	<p>i. Access funding to train/hire full time support workers ii. Set aside funds to pay for tutors/tutor programs iii. Implement motivational seminars and workshops</p>

<p>Lack of accountability Unreasonable model for measuring success Weak relationship with stakeholders</p>	<p>Increase accountability Define roles and responsibilities</p>	<p>i. More meetings with other stakeholders (share plans &amp; ideas) ii. Provide solid support to school divisions that work with native students iii. Follow through needed in terms of the statements made or are being made iv. Display good, strong commitment to divisions and the students v. Host workshops and make presentations to aboriginal people to sell support to them (currently, the lack of follow through reinforces apathy felt by native people that, as a minority group, their needs are not a priority)</p>
<p>Need for new facilities or upgrade of existing facilities</p>	<p>To have all necessary facilities available</p>	<p>i. Access necessary funds for infrastructure</p>

## 8.) Recommendations To Government

At the Metis Settlements General Council Assembly, recommendations were made to government complimenting recommendations made by respondents. The following outlines those recommendations in detail.

- a) Ensure the implementation of the Native Education Policy by supporting the creation and maintenance of a Ministers Aboriginal Advisory Committee on Education, whose responsibilities would be to:
  - communicate the policy
  - implement the policy
  - develop new policies
  - advocate for Aboriginal educational concerns
  
- b) Provide adequate resources to continue to research and communicate to Metis Settlement residents on educational issues. Examples:
  - self-governance of educational institutions
  - new teaching/testing methods
  - research and documentation of infrastructure requirements
  - design of quantitative and qualitative measurement tool
  
- c) Develop new distributing model for special-needs funds that are available in our province, to be based on:
  - socio-demographic information
  - per capita
  - recognizing the increasing demand in Aboriginal communities

- d) Impose year round learning that would provide access to learning resources such as libraries, computers labs and physical education facilities. Not limiting access to youth, but to include entire community.

## 9.) Implementation of Recommendations and Process for Monitoring Progress

With the incorporation of a Ministers Advisory Committee, we foresee the said committee as being the agency responsible for monitoring progress, as well as reporting back to all affected Aboriginal groups.