



## THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING FOR FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION IN ALBERTA NEWSLETTER - Volume 1, January 2011

### Introduction

This newsletter is intended to provide information about the historic Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for First Nations Education in Alberta. It is the first newsletter to be issued about the MOU and others will follow. This edition is intended to introduce readers to the MOU, the partners, and explain what is hoped to be accomplished by the MOU. Future newsletters will help readers understand progress that is being made regarding work of the MOU.

### Overview

On February 24, 2010 at Tsuu T'ina First Nation the Grand Chiefs of Treaty No.6, Treaty No.7 and Treaty No.8 along with the federal Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and the Ministers of Education and Aboriginal Relations from the Province of Alberta signed the Memorandum of Understanding on First Nations education in the province of Alberta. The MOU establishes and strengthens meaningful

### Shared Vision

The MOU states: *"Canada, Alberta and the Assembly of Treaty Chiefs in Alberta hold a common vision for First Nation students where First Nations students are achieving or exceeding the full educational outcomes, levels and successes of all other Alberta students."*

All the parties involved share the same goal – to undertake much needed fundamental change to close the existing gaps in education between First Nation and non-First Nation students. In achieving this goal, First Nations will have an effective role in the design and delivery of education services for their children.

This MOU represents an opportunity for Alberta First Nations to be part of implementing change and addressing outstanding educational issues as equal partners with Canada and the Province of Alberta. The MOU outlines how the partners agree to work together to achieve desired outcomes.

*All parties have a collective stake in improving First Nation student success – no single party acting alone can be expected to have all of the answers. This is what makes a partnership approach important.*

relationships among Canada, the Province of Alberta, and the First Nations of Treaty 6, Treaty 7 and Treaty 8 to collectively address all aspects of the education system in order to achieve better educational outcomes for First Nation children in Alberta.

### Protection of First Nations Rights

The Treaty and Aboriginal Rights of First Nations in Alberta are acknowledged and affirmed. This agreement does not derogate or compromise the Treaty Right to education. The authority and autonomy of individual First Nations are recognized. There is no off-loading of responsibilities between governments. No commitments will be undertaken without the agreement of all three parties.

All of the partners are confident that the MOU will provide the necessary framework to improve outcomes of First Nations students.

### Working Together

The concept of partnership is at the heart of this MOU. All parties have a collective stake in improving First Nation student success – no single party acting alone can be expected to have all of the answers. This is what makes a partnership approach important. This is especially true given the need to ensure seamless transitions for those students who transfer between provincial and First Nation schools.

The parties to this MOU strongly believe that a new approach will benefit all Albertans. They are proud to work together, and believe this MOU will provide a framework for collaboration and support a range of education-related initiatives including: an

Indigenous Knowledge and Wisdom Centre; education improvement and resourcing; accountability and performance management; relationship building; First Nation children in care; special education and school aged children not in school; parental and community involvement; recruitment, retention and professional development of teachers; Treaty and cultural awareness and a holistic approach to education.

## History of the MOU

The MOU is the result of concentrated efforts by all parties, beginning in 2009 with resolutions passed by the Assembly of Treaty Chiefs (AoTC) identifying an Education Working group with representation by the three Treaty organizations. From this starting point, the Government of Alberta and the AoTC delivered a proposal to Indian Affairs and Northern Development Canada Minister Chuck Strahl in June 2009 to develop an MOU. The Minister accepted the proposal and staff from all parties were assigned to begin discussions to develop an MOU. A working group drafted the MOU over a period of six months with direction from their respective senior officials, and then presented the draft to all parties in November 2009. Recommended changes were incorporated and the final draft was approved on January 27, 2010.

Since the signing of the MOU by elected leaders, an all-party MOU working group has developed an implementation framework to assist in fulfilling the commitments of the MOU. Implementation will be an ongoing process that will evolve to meet the changing dynamics of First Nations education in Alberta.

## Statements of elected officials at the signing ceremony

*Former Treaty 6 Grand Chief Eddie Makokis:*

"The signing of this historic document marks the beginning of a new relationship with all partners to

move forward on First Nation Education, including all Treaty 6 First Nation children, youth, parents and elders."

*Treaty 7 Grand Chief Charles Weaselhead:*

"The MOU on First Nation Education marks a new beginning for all First Nation children in the province. One key aspect (of the MOU) is the honouring of our culture and language and maintaining our identity to guide our children to success. We recognize the importance of the partnership between the three governments to improve educational outcomes for the future of First Nations People in Alberta."

*Former Treaty 8 Grand Chief Allan Adam:*

"This (MOU) represents the spirit and intent of the Treaty relationship envisioned when our ancestors signed with the Queen. I hope this marks the beginning of a true Treaty partnership that, among other things, provides us the opportunity to ensure ever increasing knowledge for our children."

*Former Indian Affairs and Northern Development Canada Minister Chuck Strahl:*

"I am deeply encouraged by the announcement made here today. I have great confidence in the positive impact of good schools, committed teachers and the hard work of students themselves. When you add in the active support of parents and communities, you create the conditions for success."

*Alberta Education Minister Dave Hancock:*

"This (MOU) is a significant step in fostering the supports, relationships and resources needed to ensure that every student in this province has the equity of opportunity to succeed."

*Alberta Aboriginal Relations Minister Len Webber:*

"Education is the foundation upon which the future success of First Nation children, youth and communities is built. This (MOU) will significantly advance our work with First Nations and federal partners on achieving our shared vision for First Nation education in Alberta."



Ministers and Grand Chiefs signing the Memorandum of Understanding at Tsuu T'ina School – February 24, 2010

## Highlights

- The Parties agree to work to continuously improve educational outcomes for First Nation students through the development of a long-term strategic plan for restructuring First Nations education in Alberta in order to meet the stated goals of the MOU.
- The establishment of an Indigenous Knowledge and Wisdom Centre (IKWC) focused on improving the educational outcomes of First Nation students in accordance with all the principles set out in the MOU. First Nations will develop the concept and create a mechanism to preserve all aspects of First Nation teachings that will encourage student success.
- The creation of the Alberta First Nations Education Circle to oversee the implementation of the MOU. Senior officials from all the Parties will provide direction as the MOU develops.
- The Parties will focus on improving the educational outcomes of First Nation children in care, those with special education needs, and those not attending or at risk of not attending school.
- The Parties will work with institutions that contribute to preparing teachers to develop more First Nations teachers and improve recruitment, retention and professional development of teachers in First Nation schools.
- More emphasis is to be placed on teaching all students and teachers First Nations culture, languages, traditions and history.

## Actions/Next steps

On July 27, 2010, the Alberta First Nations Education Circle – senior officials from the three Parties – met to discuss progress and priorities on MOU implementation. All agreed that early efforts would be focused on the following priorities:

- Establishing the Indigenous Knowledge and Wisdom Centre;
- Completion of a comparative funding analysis;
- Continuing to work to address tuition and education service agreement issues; and
- Determining a protocol for the collection and sharing of data across educational systems.

First Nations are drafting a work plan to set out how the Indigenous Knowledge and Wisdom Centre will be developed, using the expertise and knowledge of First Nations elders and First Nation education experts.

Treaty area information sessions about the MOU have been held to raise awareness regarding the purpose of the MOU. On September 23, 2010 Treaty 7 Management Corporation hosted a Community Information Session on the MOU for First Nations Education in Alberta. The session was very well attended with over 100 participants from the Treaty 7 communities and Provincial School Boards. The participants consisted of students, elders, parents, teachers, Education Directors/Superintendents and Board members. Also, Treaty 8 held a community information session on October 29, 2010 hosted by the Athabasca Tribal Council that was well attended, generating much discussion and enthusiasm.

Ongoing communications initiatives by all the Parties are being developed. This newsletter is only one part of a broader information-sharing and communications strategy developed by the Parties.

The MOU Working Group continues to meet regularly as they develop a strategic plan for implementing the commitments in the MOU.

## Questions and Answers

**Q: *What is the purpose of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)?***

**A:** The MOU highlights the commitment of all parties to work together to improve First Nation education outcomes in the province.

**Q: *What will the MOU mean to First Nations education?***

**A:** Implementation of the MOU will result in equal levels of understanding, improved information sharing, additional resources and greater involvement from all parties concerned in improving education for First Nation students.

**Q: *How will the Agreement improve the education of First Nation students?***

**A:** The partners are targeting key areas such as teacher recruitment and retention, parental and community engagement, and treaty and cultural awareness.

**Q: *How do we ensure the MOU is effective?***

**A:** The effectiveness of the MOU is dependent on the collective will of all those involved. The relationships being built, the common vision for ensuring improved educational outcomes for First Nation students, the shared principles and the guidelines for action that are being developed – all are critical to ensure success.

**Q: *Is there any money invested by the Government of Alberta or the Government of Canada in this MOU? Will funding be equitable?***

**A:** All the partners agree this is not just about money. All the parties will work collectively to ensure the effective and efficient use of available resources. Support will be provided to First Nations in Alberta to ensure they are able to implement the MOU.

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Q: *Are there similar arrangements in other places?*

A: There are signed agreements of various types with a number of provinces to improve education outcomes for First Nation students in band- operated schools on reserve and provincial schools off reserve. Other tripartite education partnerships are currently under development across Canada.

Q: *What is the Indigenous Knowledge and Wisdom Centre?*

A: The Centre is an important part of the MOU. The vision of the Indigenous Knowledge and Wisdom Centre is improving the educational outcomes of First Nation students in accordance with all the principles set out in the MOU. First Nations will develop the concept and create a mechanism to preserve all aspects of First Nation teachings that will encourage student success.

## Your Input Is Important

First Nations citizens and organizations are strongly encouraged to provide their input and opinions on the evolving MOU implementation process. Your input is important. If you have suggestions, comments or concerns about this process or about how we can work together to improve educational outcomes for First Nations children, you are encouraged to contact your Chief and Council or representatives from the three Treaty organizations, the Province of Alberta and the Government of Canada, as identified here.

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To view the MOU or learn more, go to:

<http://www.treaty6.ca>  
<http://www.treaty7.org>  
<http://www.treaty8.ca>  
<http://education.alberta.ca>  
<http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca>

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