



THE MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING FOR FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION IN ALBERTA NEWSLETTER - Volume 2, October 2011

Introduction

This newsletter is intended to provide an update on progress with the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for First Nations Education in Alberta since the signing in February 2010, and to follow up on issues highlighted in the initial newsletter.

In this newsletter you will find information on the National Panel on First Nation Elementary and Secondary Education, updates from the MOU working groups and from treaty organizations, community information sessions, more question and answers and, as always, contact information and sources for learning more about this important initiative.

Overview

The Assembly of Treaty Chiefs of Alberta (AoTC, Treaty No. 6, No. 7 & No. 8) entered into the MOU with Alberta and Canada because each party recognized the common education issues among First Nations:

1. Low graduation and student achievement rates
2. Funding
3. Accountability
4. Loss of First Nation language and culture

Elected Officials Meeting

Elected officials met for the first time in Edmonton on January 24, 2011 where they approved a comprehensive implementation framework that will guide work under the MOU. The MOU calls for elected officials from the three parties to meet annually to monitor progress of the MOU and give direction to senior officials.

The MOU Implementation Framework also sets out the establishment of sub-tables of experts from all parties to the MOU. Their role is to conduct reviews and analysis and make recommendations to inform the development of a long-term strategic plan for restructuring First Nation education in Alberta. While acknowledging the complexity of the initiative, all of the elected officials expressed their satisfaction with the work achieved to date. Comments from elected officials reflected a renewed commitment to working together to improve the education attainment of First Nation students in Alberta.



Elected officials post-meeting

The Importance of Family, Parents and Community in the Memorandum of Understanding for First Nation Education in Alberta

The vision of the MOU, where *First Nation students are achieving or exceeding the full education outcomes, levels and successes of all other Alberta students*, is shared by First Nation parents who want their children to be successful at school, at home and in all aspects of their lives.

The MOU process seeks to empower and engage First Nation parents and families to find ways of improving educational success for their children. A sub-table working group of the MOU has been formed to address this challenge. Research is needed to identify barriers to parental and community involvement in education and to identify what has been done to address these challenges.

Assembly of Treaty Chiefs Meeting on Education

On March 9, 2011 in Calgary, the AoTC met to discuss a number of outstanding education issues, including the MOU for First Nations Education. Seven presentations were tabled and six resolutions, stemming from the presentations, passed unanimously.

Since the formal signing of the MOU in February 2010, Treaty Organization Education Directors Lillian Gadwa-Crier (Treaty 6), Sheena Jackson (Treaty 7) and Dale Awasis (Treaty 8) jointly reviewed the MOU activities. Following this joint review an individual review was done by Chief Gayle Strikes With A Gun, of the Piikani Nation, who detailed funding concerns around the delivery of the MOU.

After Chief Strikes With A Gun's presentation the following resolution was adopted:

Memorandum of Understanding for First Nations Education in Alberta Sustainable Funding continues to be a challenge and the parties are working together to find ways to address this.

The AoTC will seek new resources that will not impact current funding allocations, and will mandate the directors of education of Treaties 6, 7 & 8 to work in collaboration with Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) Minister John Duncan to develop a strategy and/or proposal on the required funding for the MOU agreement.

Additionally, the Regional Director General of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, Alberta Region will assist in securing the meeting commitment with Minister Duncan in writing. Grand

Chiefs and Portfolio Chiefs on Education will keep the Chiefs of Treaty 6, 7 & 8 informed on the progress in securing sustainable resources for the MOU.

Status Report from the MOU Working Groups

The MOU working group, consisting of representatives from all parties to the MOU, has developed a draft framework as a guide through this first stage of MOU implementation. The framework lays out the need to establish seven sub-tables that will work together with all parties to complete initial research and background work in order to make informed recommendations for review/approval by senior officials. Four of the sub-tables were established in January and began their work in February 2011. The working group continues to meet regularly and work collaboratively to support the work of the MOU including the need to ensure that communities and stakeholders are informed about progress.

Currently they are reviewing work plans developed by the sub-tables and will monitor and work closely with the sub-tables as they finalize their reports early next year. These reports will provide the information necessary for the MOU working group to develop a draft long-term strategic plan for First Nations education in Alberta, to be presented for approval to the Alberta First Nations Education Circle consisting of senior officials from all parties to the MOU.



MOU Working Group

Education Restructuring Sub-Table: The work of the Education Restructuring Sub-Table is intended to achieve comparable quality and standards between on reserve and provincial education. The work will also help to ensure students have equitable access to quality education and smooth transitions between First Nation and provincial schools. The Sub-Table will complete the following:

- a) Comparative education funding analysis;
- b) Education programs and services analysis;
- c) Review of legislation and policies;
- d) Maximize use of existing programs; and

- e) Analyze accountability/efficiency in First Nation funding

To date funding analysis methodologies have been discussed and survey templates have been assembled to complete a program and services analysis.

Data Sharing Sub-Table: The work of the Data Sharing Sub-Table is intended to empower and engage First Nation elders, students, parents and communities to improve educational outcomes and to enhance governance, policy, program and fiscal accountability to students, communities and funding agencies. The Sub-Table will establish developing a data sharing protocol concerning the collection, protection, ownership, use and disclosure of First Nation student information. This protocol:

- a) Provides capacity to use the information to measure and monitor educational outcomes for First Nation students;
- b) Assists in providing information for program enhancement and development; and
- c) Is consistent with federal and provincial information and privacy legislation including obtaining the necessary parental consents.

To date, discussions have occurred around the following areas: ownership; control; access; protection principles; privacy legislation; First Nations/federal/provincial data systems; data collection and data use. The Data Sharing Sub-Table also conducted a short survey of education stakeholders at the "Strengthening Our Treaties through Education" conference to get preliminary input as to what the scope of the data protocol should be.

Transitions Sub-Table: The work of the Transitions Sub-Table is intended to ensure that First Nation students have equitable access to and smooth transitions between First Nation and provincial schools. The Sub-Table will identify and address ongoing issues related to tuition or educational service agreements including, where appropriate, the implementation of new tuition or education services agreements. The Sub-Table will also develop strategies to enhance collaboration between provincial school authorities and local First Nation communities.

Indigenous Knowledge and Wisdom Centre (IKWC) Sub-Table: Through the IKWC, the AoTC envisions the creation of a culturally appropriate and responsive education environment for First Nation students by developing a multi-year business and implementation plan that will include mandate, governance structure, and scope and operations of the IKWC.

PROFILE – Lillian Gadwa-Crier

Lillian is an advocate for First Nations education. She upholds a strong vision for all Aboriginal students to shine and become the stars our ancestors had set out for us all. It is about achieving and excelling fully in the educational stream much like the grandfathers and grandmothers of hundreds of years past would have wanted. It is about walking the two roads - the traditional road of self-identity and the academic road of developing skills to survive in the present society. As an educator, she has supported and promoted First Nations Education at various levels for the betterment of First Nations students. She believes that parents will always be first and foremost the initial educators of a child, which is why it is very important to actively engage them in their children's education. Then comes the educator – we are responsible to ensure these students receive the best education possible, along with developing their identities – because – remember, they are our future leaders.

Treaty 6 First Nations Update

The education sector for Treaty 6 continues to represent Treaty 6 First Nations on matters of importance, particularly the MOU for First Nations Education. The Confederacy is an advocacy and advisory organization for its Treaty First Nations.

The MOU focuses on the K-12 education system for First Nation students in Alberta. Its mandate is to guarantee that First Nation education achieves its full potential for First Nation students. The Confederacy has been very instrumental in the development of processes along with its partners. The representatives from Treaty 6 at the various sub-tables, designated by the Implementation Framework agreement, are educational experts tasked with best representing their constituents. These members have contributed valuable time and knowledge to furthering the development of the working plans for each sub-table committee. As the work plans progress, the sub-table members will keep Treaty 6 First Nation members up to date on all developments.

The Confederacy hosted an IKWC Elders gathering on May 5-6, 2011. The purpose of this conference was to educate elders and other interested participants and distill much needed wisdom, guidance and validation of IKWC purposes and structure.

The Education Department also brought the First Nation Education Directors together on April 20, 2011. The reason for the meeting was to create an advisory committee to focus on First Nation education matters in general and the MOU specifically.

The need to bring everyone up to date on progress of the MOU and next steps is extremely important in these initial phases. Knowledge, understanding and participation from First Nations leaders and all partners are the key to success.

Treaty 7 First Nations Update

An invitation to address the MOU for First Nation Education was extended to the MOU Working Group by the Calgary Chamber of Commerce. The presentation was made on January 26, 2011 in Calgary before an interested and well attended audience.

Working Group members Sheena Jackson, Troy Chalifoux and Lillian Gadwa-Crier were on hand to present an overview of the MOU and what it means to First Nation education in Alberta. The audience consisted of business people and organization representatives interested in First Nation education in Alberta and how this initiative can assist them in the future.



Students learning about the Education Memorandum of Understanding

The well received presentation was recognized as being a comprehensive overview of a process requiring diligent and detailed consideration by the MOU working group. The process recognizes the opportunities the MOU will eventually foster to open doors for First Nation projects within the territories. One initiative of considerable interest to those gathered was the literacy program for First Nation children within Treaty 7, and the considerable benefits from this and other initiatives contained within the MOU.

Treaty 8 First Nations Update

In early February 2011, Dale Awasis was appointed Director of Education for the Treaty 8 First Nations of Alberta. The mandate of the Education Department is to oversee the development of a comprehensive, contemporary and holistic education system for Treaty First Nations. In light of the MOU, the First Nations Metis Inuit Education Partnership Council and other other regional, provincial and national initiatives, the mandate has taken on a new light and an air of excitement is apparent.

As part of the MOU process, each Treaty territory undertakes community engagement through community information sessions. When the opportunity arises, or when a community makes a specific request, a panel consisting of the three signatory parties to the MOU conducts a joint presentation. To date, there have been two such joint presentations (Bigstone Cree Nation and Driftpile First Nation) in the Treaty 8 territory.

Driftpile First Nation held an MOU community information session on March 22, 2011. There was an excellent turnout with participants coming from the community and

surrounding areas. The audience was made up of High Prairie School Division board members, local leadership, senior administrators, school personnel and students.

The evening started with a dinner catered by a local company and welcoming remarks by Caroline Badger, a councillor for the Driftpile First Nation on behalf of Chief Rose Laboucan. The presenters were Dale Awasis, director of education for the Treaty 8 office representing the Treaty 8 First Nations; Troy Chalifoux from AANDC representing the Government of Canada and staff from Alberta Education representing the Government of Alberta.

Presentations were followed by a question-and-answer session. The questions focused on community involvement, especially from the students and teachers, activities of the established sub-tables and the immediate and long-term impact of the MOU in relation to First Nation persons living on and off reserve. The session concluded with the distribution of informational packages on the MOU and gifts for each of the panel presenters.

PROFILE – Dale Awasis

Dale Awasis was born in Thunderchild, Saskatchewan and was educated in Onion Lake. He received his degree from the University of Saskatchewan and began teaching in North Battleford, before moving to British Columbia where he taught in Vancouver and the northern part of the province. At this time he made the decision to abstain from drugs and alcohol and has now been sober for 26 years. For the next five years he taught at Fort McKay First Nation in Alberta, where he was vice-principal in the community school. In 1992 Dale returned to Onion Lake to teach in the community. He was instrumental in establishing the Cree language curriculum and bringing the program to the community level, eventually becoming the director of the program.

During his tenure there Dale was asked to lead the education department for the Mikisew Cree in northern Alberta as their director of education. While in Fort Chipewyan, Dale worked towards the establishment of a fully provincially accredited K-12 private school among other achievements.

He made another career shift in 2005, teaching at the Louis Bull School in Hobbema, Alberta while completing his Masters in Education. When working with his community of Thunderchild First Nation, Dale was elected Chief. In that role he was honoured by the Jesuit Missionaries in Spokane, Washington on May 12, 2007. It was the first time the order had allowed any graduate to dress in traditional graduation attire. Chief Awasis graduated along with 400 others in his traditional First Nation Chief's headdress, and co-presented the student address on behalf of the graduates.

He has assisted with four Sundances - recognized as the highest ceremony in the Cree culture. He also serves the First Nations as a spiritual advisor and healer, utilized and respected in many communities across Canada.

Treaty Education Conferences

Western Canadian First Nations Education Administrators Symposium, March 9-11, Enoch, AB

The Western Canadian First Nations Administrators Education Symposium was hosted by the Enoch Cree Nation on March 9-11, 2011 at the River Cree Resort and Casino – Marriott Hotel. In attendance were approximately 400 representatives from First Nations across Canada.

The symposium showcased the best practices of First Nation Student Success Programs (FNSSP) in First Nations schools across the western provinces. Keynote speakers included Assembly of First Nations (AFN) National Chief Shawn Atleo; Chief Wilton Littlechild, International Chief for Treaty 6 Confederacy; renowned motivational speaker Dr. Martin Brokenleg; a representative from Alberta Education and an Elders Panel convened from western Canada members. Over the course of the conference participants also attended a variety of workshops that addressed FNSSP. Students from Treaties 6, 7, & 8 were presented awards for their competency in literacy, numeracy and retention.

The closing ceremonies included the Passing of the Talking Stick to Manitoba representatives who will host the 8th Annual Symposium, a mini round dance and traditional giveaway.

Strengthening Our Treaties Through Education, March 28-30, 2011, Edmonton, AB

This conference brought together education directors, post-secondary education providers, school administrator, elders and local leaders from all the First Nation communities within Treaty 6, 7 & 8. The main emphasis of the educational forum was to update participants and promote discussion on progress with the MOU and other educational matters affecting First Nation education.

The conference was well attended and very productive. Both of the other signatory parties – the Government of Canada and the Government of Alberta – were well represented. The MOU Working Group, comprised of members from each of the parties, made a joint panel presentation on the MOU and provided general updates on the operational sub-tables and their activities.

PROFILE – Harry Lawrence



Elders bring a wealth of experience and expertise in all aspects of First Nation education and provide guidance to the Circle in work undertaken throughout implementation of the MOU commitments.

Harry Lawrence is the appointed elder for the Memorandum of Understanding for First Nations Education in Alberta Working Group as agreed upon by the Treaty 6, 7 & 8 Grand Chiefs. Harry is from the Duncan's First Nation, Treaty 8 Territory. He believes that the elder's role is to ensure that the diverse identity of the Treaty First Nations history, culture and language is promoted, protected and respected.

This description of an elder's role was adopted by the Treaty 8 Elders Council on July 27-30, 2008. Several guiding principles that demonstrate the traditional teachings in four areas (spiritual, mental, physical and emotional) were discussed and adopted by the Council during that meeting. These have been passed on from generation to generation. Harry bases his role in the MOU process on these traditional teachings.

He further believes that elders have a large role to play when education is talked about. Elder views have to be listened to and elders must stand up for their children. He believes that elders lead by example, working together now to build success for the future.

When Harry was a child, his mother had a vision for his future. She told Harry that if he stayed on the reserve he would just go round and round and never go anywhere. When the opportunity came for Harry to go to Edmonton to live in a group home and continue his education, his mother encouraged him to do it. As a result, Harry finished his GED and worked and travelled in the Northwest Territories during his 32-year career with the territorial government prior to settling back home.

Never limiting yourself is one of his core beliefs. As he puts it, "even when things get hard, keep trying because you never know what capabilities you have until you try." Education is a key interest of his and he believes strongly that elders, parents, and communities working together will ensure a bright future for First Nation people.

National Panel on First Nations Elementary and Secondary Education

Three distinguished educators have been chosen to head a panel looking at First Nations elementary and secondary education through a series of roundtable meetings. Jointly selected by AANDC Minister John Duncan and AFN Chief Shawn Atleo, the panel members are Scott Haldane (chair), Caroline Krause and George Lafond.

Their mandate is to engage key parties in 2011 through a series of roundtables - eight regional and one national - focusing on First Nation students attending school on and off reserve. The goal is to reach agreement on ways

to improve governance frameworks, clarify accountability and improve student outcomes.

The roundtables will invite First Nation leaders, parents, students, elders, teachers and provincial officials to voice their opinions and share thoughts on ways to enhance education for First Nation students. For those unable to attend, there will be a dedicated website where people can submit ideas and papers. The panel will also visit schools and hold less formal meetings to explore other means of engaging First Nation communities.

A progress report will be delivered to the Minister and National Chief midway through the process and a final report with recommendations is expected to be completed in late fall 2011.

PROFILE – Sheena Jackson

Oki, I am Sheena Jackson, director of education for the Treaty 7 Management Corporation, from the Piikani Nation where I have resided my entire life. I have two sons, Byron and Lawrence. Byron graduated from the University of Lethbridge with a Bachelor of Science degree in May 2010 and Lawrence completed his RCMP training in Regina, where he received an award for outstanding honours in April 2011.

I am a graduate of the University of Lethbridge where I received a Bachelor of Arts and a Bachelor of Education. Following university I was a Grade 4 and 5 teacher at Napi's Playground Elementary School for five years. I then began teaching Grade 7, various high school subjects and guidance counselling before being promoted to principal at Piikani Nation Secondary School.

Now the Education Director for Treaty 7 Management Corporation, my mandate is to provide advisory services to the Treaty 7 communities regarding education. We strive to build a strong, united front for the children of Treaty 7 so they may receive the best education possible.

I have represented Treaty 7 in the MOU negotiation since the beginning and I am excited to continue working on the implementation of the MOU.

News Coverage

CBC Edmonton focused on the MOU as part of its Learning the Path series. Quoted in the stories were Chief Rose Laboucan of the Driftpile First Nation; Lillian Gadwa-Crier, education director for Treaty 6; Troy Chalifoux, lead negotiator for AANDC, Alberta Region; and Eoin Kenny, spokesperson for Alberta Education.

To read the entire story, visit: <http://www.cbc.ca/edmonton/features/learningthepath/yourself/>

Questions and Answers

Q: What is an MOU?

A: An MOU is a formal, written or non-binding agreement between two or more parties to take a certain action. It defines the roles, responsibilities and expectations of each party and is a plan between the parties for carrying out their separate activities in a co-ordinated and mutually beneficial manner. It is used when there is a need for formal documentation of a relationship but no exchange of funding or resources.

Q: What is a treaty?

A: A treaty is a settlement or agreement arrived at through negotiation. It is an agreement between two or more nations-states over matters that they have agreed upon which gives rise to binding obligations between parties who make them. The treaty is protected and governed by International Law and may outline the rights and responsibilities of the parties as they are agreed upon. A treaty can also be referred to as an agreement or contract and in this sense it can be used to describe agreements made between parties other than nation-states. European nations used treaties to recognize Indigenous peoples' occupancy, ownership and governance of the countries they wanted to colonize.

Q: Does the MOU compromise the treaty right to education?

A: No. The MOU states that "none of the existing treaty or Aboriginal rights, as recognized and affirmed in the Constitution Act, 1982, are derogated or abrogated by this MOU." The MOU was created as a mechanism that lays out the things all parties can work together on to support First Nation education. Alberta's education system has expertise that may be of value and interest to First Nations, for example, in areas of technology and/or curriculum resource design. All parties have committed to supporting the common vision. First Nations, selected by their respective treaty organizations, are fully involved in all levels and stages of the MOU process to ensure all implementation strategies are in the best interests of First Nation learners.

Q: Does the MOU impact First Nations autonomy or First Nations collective vision of "Indian control over Indian education" (1972)?

A: The MOU was developed and designed with full involvement and input by First Nations experts and leaders who realized the need to assure First Nations community members of their ongoing autonomy, and insisted on including the following statement: "This MOU is not intended to define, create, recognize, deny or amend any rights or obligations of individual First Nations in Alberta."

Q: Will the MOU support success for First Nations students attending First Nation band-operated schools and provincial schools?

A: Yes. Many aspects of the MOU were designed with all First Nations students in mind regardless of whether they attend a First Nation band-operated school or a provincial school. Both the MOU and the IKWC, once it is established by Treaties 6, 7 & 8, are intended to benefit all students, in particular First Nations students, regardless of the school they attend.

Q: How are MOU sub-tables reaching out to First Nation communities?

A: The Treaty 6, 7 & 8 education offices have each identified two representatives for each sub-table to serve as education experts from First Nation communities. Some of these sub-tables have also begun developing and circulating survey tools to gather important input from First Nation communities.

Q: How can I get involved?

A: There are many ways to become involved. Each of the Treaty 6, 7 & 8 organizations has established its own processes to ensure its community members are informed about the opportunities for involvement. Interested people should feel free to contact their local education director or coordinator (contact information can be found at the end of this newsletter), to find out more about upcoming events, community information sessions or other opportunities to get involved.

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.aandc-aadnc.gc.ca>



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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