



Leading Education's Advocates

Ontario Public School Boards' Association
439 University Avenue, 18th Floor
Toronto, ON M5G 1Y8
Tel: (416) 340-2540
Fax: (416) 340-7571
webmaster@opsba.org
www.opsba.org

Cathy Abraham
President

Stephanie Donaldson
Executive Director

June 9, 2023

To: Renita Deonarain
A/Director, Indigenous Education Office

**Re: OPSBA Indigenous Trustees' Council (ITC) Submission on 2023-2024
Indigenous Education Priorities**

The Ministry of Education (EDU) hosted two virtual consultation sessions with the objective of identifying targeted Indigenous Education Priorities, which will be funded through the Grants for Student Needs (GSN) for the 2023-2024 academic year.

The ITC is appreciative of the invitation to participate in these sessions and acknowledges the recognition of ITC as an important voice and stakeholder in the proceedings. It is important to note, however, that the ITC does not support the use of the term "consultation" regarding these virtual meetings. *Consultation*, from an Indigenous perspective, would ensure there is adequate time and space to appropriately engage with all necessary stakeholders. Proper consultation includes:

- Respect for Indigenous values such as the Seven Grandfather Teachings (Respect, Love, Truth, Bravery, Honesty, Wisdom, and Humility)
- Adequate time for discussion and engagement
- Focused effort to seek locally based feedback, with culturally appropriate approaches
- Meaningful, two-way communication; and
- A process for validating the feedback.

The hastened timing of these virtual sessions did not allow for proper engagement with all of our Trustees, who in turn, did not have adequate time to engage with the communities that each Trustee represents. This puts the ITC in an uncomfortable position when speaking on behalf of the Indigenous Trustees as the Indigenous

population comprises many diverse and distinct Nations which makes a pan-Indigenous approach to consultation, and priority-setting, problematic and concerning.

The ITC recommends that the Ministry of Education engage in more culturally appropriate, locally based consultation practices in future engagements with Indigenous partners. This will ensure each community's unique circumstances are given the focus they deserve.

ITC representatives attended both sessions on May 15 and June 7, 2023. At the June 7 session, it was indicated that feedback could be submitted to the Ministry of Education in follow-up to the consultation sessions until June 9, 2023. This document serves as the written submission of the ITC.

To start, the ITC is supportive of the following priorities that were shared at the virtual sessions:

- Land-Based Learning
 - With resources to support Indigenous spaces in schools, including outdoor spaces for Land-Based Learning.
- Staffing and hiring to support Indigenous students in schools and communities
 - Hiring of Indigenous Graduation Coaches in all school boards, with sustainable funding.
- Initiatives that support the transitions experienced by Indigenous students, including, but not limited to:
 - First Nation school to public school (this can occur at various grades, depending on the grade-levels offered by the school that the student is transitioning from)
 - Grade 8 to High School
 - Students moving from school to school (high transiency)
 - Secondary to Post-Secondary
 - Students in Foster Care
 - Re-engagement for students that have left school
- Indigenous youth entrepreneurship programs
- Curriculum supports and resources; and
- Supports for parent and community engagement.

The ITC offers the following suggestions as additional Indigenous education priorities:

- Funding for language instruction, and the hiring, training and recruitment of language teachers:
 - Support for development of Indigenous Teacher Education Programs in partnership with post-secondary institutions/faculties of education.
- Piloting of Supervised Alternative Learning (SAL) sites in First Nation communities
- Allow for ability to support Indigenous students with costs that inhibit student success such as student fees (registration, lockers, shop/science fees), bus passes, access to internet, etc.

- Summer School Opportunities
- Accessing of trauma-informed approaches and crisis response
- Specialized/Focused Learning Supports, including hiring of staff (special education supports, small group learning, classroom support, equal pay/benefits for EAs, access to “hands-on”/practical courses)
- Indigenization of Curriculum, including the ability to collaborate with other subject-areas of the boards
- Inclusion of Local History and Culture, ideally facilitated through local Elders and Knowledge Keepers, to benefit the learning of all students
- Provision of Cultural Competency Training for Trustees, Educators, Staff, Support Staff, Students, School Leadership, etc.
- Other priorities as put forward and determined by Indigenous Education Councils and local Indigenous education leadership.

In addition to the suggestions above, the ITC offers the following considerations as the Ministry of Education moves forward with its next steps:

- The ITC suggests that the Ministry of Education make reference to the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework and subsequent foundational documents, as well as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action that identify Indigenous education as a key priority. Challenges to meeting Indigenous education priorities should be noted and acknowledged.
- The ITC recommends that the Ministry of Education engage in more culturally appropriate consultation practices in future engagements with Indigenous partners.
- The ITC requests that the ministry provides an explanation regarding how achievement of the Indigenous education priorities will be measured and evaluated.
 - What will happen if boards fail to meet their Indigenous education objectives?
- The ITC suggests that the Ministry of Education should consider extending the one-time mitigation fund. The Ministry of Education has indicated that a one-time mitigation fund will be available to support boards with transitioning to the realignment of Indigenous education funding.
- The ITC recommends that it be clearly communicated in the upcoming memo to school boards that funds are to be spent specifically on Indigenous education priorities. During a meeting between the ITC and the Ministry of Education, it was indicated that the funds being realigned to the Board Action Plan would be required to be spent on Indigenous education priorities only.
- The ITC also notes that:
 - A clear target needs to be established and communicated to school boards regarding closing the gap in graduation rates.
 - There is opportunity to review and refresh Indigenous Graduation Coach programs, especially as the program is implemented in all school boards.
 - The Native Languages curriculum is overdue for review and revision. Prioritizing the updating of the Native Languages curriculum for both

Elementary and Secondary grades, with proper consultation and engagement, is strongly suggested.

The ITC is concerned that school boards will be forced to limit or reduce Indigenous education programming due to the changes in how Indigenous education is funded. Several school boards have already voiced their concerns and have indicated they are being forced into deficit budgets and difficult decision-making when it comes to Indigenous education. The Ministry of Education should closely monitor these concerns and should have plans in place to evaluate the impacts of the realignment of Indigenous education funding over the 2023-2024 academic year.

The ITC thanks the Ministry of Education for its review and consideration of the above document. We are grateful for the positive and productive relationship that exists between the ITC and the Ministry of Education.

I look forward to your response and encourage you and your staff to reach out to OPSBA to schedule a meeting soon. I would be pleased to discuss the issues outlined above in further detail.

Respectfully,



Elaine Johnston,
Chair, Indigenous Trustees' Council

Cc:

Nancy Naylor, Deputy Minister, Education

Dasha Androusenkov, Deputy Director, Stakeholder Relations, Minister's Office

Megan Bonkowski, Team Lead, Education Policy and Programs Unit, Indigenous Education Office

Carolyn Bennett, Manager at Policy and Programs Unit, Indigenous Education Office

Suzanne Gordon, Assistant Deputy Minister (Acting), Indigenous Education and Well-Being Division (Education)