

Quality Education -- A Right

**First Nations
Education
Steering
Committee
(FNEESC)**

**Annual
Report**

1997 - 1998

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Note from the FNEESC Chair

This past year has been very exciting for the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNEESC). We have seen a strengthening of the Committee, as the participation of people from throughout BC has continued to be tremendous.

As Chair of FNEESC, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the members of the Steering Committee and its Sub-Committees. The commitment shown by those people has been tremendous, and the work which has been accomplished is a reflection of their hard work and determination to improve the quality of education available to First Nations learners. I would also like to thank the members of the Chiefs Action Committee, who have tirelessly worked to promote and support the work of FNEESC.

I hope that we have reflected the direction and input that has been so generously offered through the workshops, regional sessions, and Conferences organized throughout 1997 - 1998. Our initiatives would not be possible without the support, suggestions and encouragement we receive.

Gwen Phillips-Clement, FNEESC Chair

Note from the Executive Director

On behalf of the staff of FNEESC, I would also like to express our appreciation to the FNEESC Chair, Co-Chair, Committee members, and other interested individuals who have so generously offered their time, energy and support throughout the past several years. Working for FNEESC has provided us all with a tremendously exciting opportunity to be a part of some of the positive changes which are taking place.

Watching the growth of the Steering Committee has been a very rewarding experience for me, and I am particularly pleased by the partnerships developed last year with the First Nations Schools Association and the Indian Studies Support Program. I am certain that through cooperative efforts we will all be able to achieve important improvements in the education available to First Nations students. I look forward to 1998 - 1999 with great anticipation of a continued sharing of ideas, resources, and, perhaps most importantly, inspiration.

Christa Williams, FNEESC Executive Director

Introduction

The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) was established in May 1992 at the Provincial First Nations Education Conference held at the Vancouver Friendship Center. The mandate given to the FNESC at that time is:

To facilitate discussion about education matters affecting First Nations in BC by disseminating information and soliciting input from First Nations.

The FNESC has attempted to reflect that mandate throughout the past six years.

The FNESC is made up of 23 First Nations education technicians from around BC who provide direction and technical advice regarding the promotion and implementation of First Nations control of quality education programs and systems. A list of the current members of the First Nations Education Steering Committee members is included in Appendix One.

The FNESC also facilitates decisions about education matters at Chief's Assemblies by reporting through the Chiefs Action Committee (CAC) - a committee appointed by the Chiefs in Assembly at the First Nations Summit.

Rationale for a Provincial Education Body

First Nations educators, leaders and technicians have indicated that there is a need for a provincial education body. Such a body will not speak on behalf of First Nations, nor will it negotiate on behalf of First Nations. Instead it will provide a forum for First Nations to share information, brainstorm, and collectively bring forward concerns. The following activities were put forward by First Nations as relevant and appropriate activities for a provincial body to undertake.

Ongoing Activities

The activities identified for a provincial education organization, and those undertaken by the FNEESC on an ongoing basis, include:

- * Facilitate **communication** (newsletter, policy updates, etc.).
- * Provide **liaison** for First Nations with government and other agencies.
- * Coordinate **information sharing**, to enable First Nations to do more with less money for education, as education demands increase while funding diminishes.
- * Coordinate **Provincial Conferences, Regional Workshops and Information workshops** to increase communication and support amongst First Nations communities.
- * Conduct **research** on broad topics to support First Nations education initiatives (Aboriginal Language programs, legal aspects of control and jurisdiction, Best Practices in First Nations education, gathering data regarding First Nations education for use by First Nations educators). This includes the work of the various subcommittees.
- * Undertake some **policy discussions**, with explicit direction from, consultation and communication with First Nations communities themselves.
- * Provide a forum for a **united First Nations voice**.
- * Serve as a **clearinghouse for information resources and models** for First Nations education activities.
- * Provide **administrative and technical support** to ensure First Nations control and administration of First Nations education programs such as the youth initiatives.
- * Provide **support for First Nations involved in the treaty process**.

Summary of Work -- 1998

The following is a summary of the work undertaken by the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) in 1997 - 1998.

Regional Workshops

In the past four years, the FNESC has facilitated a series of Annual Regional Workshops to consult with First Nations, and to seek direction regarding its activities and where it should continue to focus its energies.

Regional workshops are held in 10 - 13 communities each year, and an attempt is made to enable different communities to host the workshop each year. In 1997/98, regional sessions were held in Prince George, Terrace, Prince Rupert, Williams Lake, Westbank, Port Hardy, Kamloops, Vancouver, Lytton, Cranbrook and Saanich. A summary of those sessions is available through the FNESC office.

Provincial Conference

Each year, FNESC organizes an Annual provincial First Nations education conference. In 1997/98, that Conference, held in Kamloops, B.C. in April, focused on *Asserting Authority in First Nations Education*. Approximately 300 people attended that two day event.

The conference served many purposes, including providing direction to the FNESC and reviewing past work, as well as providing an opportunity for First Nations educators and technicians to come together to share information and inspiration. It also served to make a very diverse and geographically challenging province feel smaller and better connected.

Subcommittee Activities of Note

The FNEESC activities are undertaken by a number of sub-committees, which are made up of members of the FNEESC as well as other interested individuals who want to assist with the Sub-Committee activities.

Adult Secondary Education

For several years, the adult secondary education committee has been involved with policy discussions with the federal government regarding its adult secondary education funding policy. Throughout 1997/98, the Adult Secondary Education Sub-Committee continued its efforts to work with the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) to design a policy which is appropriate and effective. In addition, it attempted efforts to provide information to First Nations to assist them in developing programs which are both eligible for funding and successful in meeting the needs of students.

In 1997/98, FNEESC and the DIA also agreed to the implementation of a major research project to more thoroughly investigate the need for First Nations adult education programs and possible responses to existing needs.

Aboriginal Languages

The Aboriginal Language Sub-Committee implemented two major projects in 1997/98: the Aboriginal Language Handbook, and the Aboriginal Language Teacher Training Program Project Phase I.

The Aboriginal Language Handbook will outline information and suggestions related to the design and implementation of Aboriginal Language Programs in schools, communities, and homes. The Aboriginal Language Teacher Training Program Project will be an initial investigation into issues associated with the design and implementation of effective training for Aboriginal Language teachers.

The Aboriginal Language subcommittee has also been involved in discussions with the province regarding the approval of language programs, and the Committee was successful in having an alternative process for approval implemented. First Nations can now have their language programs approved by the minister either by following the language template or by working with the school district to design and seek Ministerial approval for an appropriate program.

The Aboriginal Language subcommittee also has a close working relationship with the recently formed national language committee led by Chief Ron Ignace. Within BC, partnerships are being formed with the First Peoples Cultural Foundation, the BC College of Teachers, and universities. The intent is to eliminate competition for limited resources and ensure that the funding available for language instruction and preservation is maximized through collective efforts.

Special Needs Education

This year, the special needs education subcommittee and the FNESC have been working to increase special needs education funding for the BC region. A great deal of effort was put into the development of a proposal, in cooperation with the First Nations Schools Association and the BC Aboriginal Network on Disabilities Society. That proposal was tabled in November, 1997 with DIA, and subsequent discussions have been actively pursued. Early responses to the proposal indicate that some support may be forthcoming from the DIA. This is a matter that will continue to receive considerable attention over the next years, as the need for funding in this area is tremendous, and there are currently almost no resources for relevant programs and services.

FNESC and the Special Needs Education Sub-Committee also assisted the First Nations Schools Association with the development of a Special Needs Education Conference scheduled for April 1998 in Richmond, B.C.

Post Secondary Education

The Post Secondary Education Sub-Committee met several times in 1997 - 1998, and developed a workplan that will address some issues affecting the quality of post secondary education for First Nations students. The National Indian Education Council has proposed a national review of post secondary education that will be directed at the regional level. Discussions relating to the implementation of this review are ongoing, and the post secondary committee will continue to monitor developments in this regard.

Provincial Protocol Working Group

The FNEESC has been working with the provincial Ministry of Education to improve the relationship between the province and First Nations. There has been some progress in these talks, and several areas for collaboration between FNEESC and the Ministry of Education have been identified. These areas include data collection, mechanisms for improving retention and graduation rates, curriculum enhancement, and increasing the accountability of the provincial government to First Nations.

Liaison with Provincial and Federal Governments

The FNEESC has also met on many occasions with the federal and provincial governments regarding many policy issues affecting First Nations education. Summaries of these meetings are made available to First Nations throughout BC. Some of the issues included in meetings held this year include adult secondary education, targeted dollars, special needs education, Aboriginal languages, and post secondary education.

Support to the First Nations Schools Association

The First Nations Schools Association (FNSA) is a non-partisan organization committed to promoting First Nations control of education, and to improving and supporting the development of quality and culturally appropriate education for First Nations students. The Association has been in existence since November, 1996, and is incorporated as a non-profit society. The FNEESC has provided ongoing support to the FNSA since its establishment, and throughout 1998 FNEESC assisted with the implementation of activities and projects to ensure that a strong foundation for the Association has been established. A 1997/98 FNSA Annual Report is available.

Support to the Indian Studies Support Program

1997/98 represented the first year that the FNEESC and the Indian Studies Support Program (ISSP) Committee formally agreed to work together. The ISSP Committee makes recommendations regarding the distribution of DIA funding for post-secondary programs for First Nations learners. FNEESC and the ISSP Committee are committed to working together to avoid a duplication of efforts and support the development of quality educational opportunity for First Nations students at a post-secondary level.

Administration of the Youth Initiatives

The FNEESC, in cooperation with the FNSA, agreed to take responsibility for the administration of four youth initiatives funded by the DIA. Those programs include the Summer Science and Technology Camp Initiative, the Summer Student Career Placement Program, the Cooperative Education Program, and the Youth Work Experience Program. The administration of those programs was extremely challenging, but every effort was made to ensure that there was an equitable distribution of dollars throughout BC and that quality projects were supported. Interim and final reports reflecting the implementation of those programs are available.

1997 - 1998 Research Projects

In the Success of the Child Comes the Success of the Community. Education Agreements Best Practices Handbook. Kavanagh, 1997.

This project involved the preparation of a handbook to provide information and suggestions for First Nations and School District representatives involved in negotiating Local Education Agreements.

Adult Education Handbook. Greenwood, 1997.

This handbook provides information related to the design and implementation of adult secondary education programs that are relevant and appropriate for First Nations learners, and consistent with DIA funding guidelines.

Building Strong Communities Through Education and Treaties. Williams, 1997.

This paper is intended to provide support for First Nations Treaty negotiation teams, including background information related to First Nations education, jurisdiction and funding, as well as various scenarios for the implementation of quality education programs for First Nations learners.

Standards in First Nations Schools, Jack, 1997.

This discussion paper introduces concepts related to the development of education standards that are appropriate and meaningful for First Nations education. A second phase of this research will be implemented in 1998/99, which will outline a more detailed framework for consideration by First Nations people.

Understanding the B.C. Treaty Process: An Opportunity for Dialogue. Kavanagh, 1997.

In collaboration with the B.C. Teacher's Federation and the Tripartite Public Education Committee, FNESC prepared this document to provide information regarding the B.C. Treaty Process and the context for negotiations. The document was sent to all teachers in B.C. in an effort to increase understanding of this important issue.

Aboriginal Language Program Handbook. Ignace, 1998.

This document outlines detailed information related to the establishment of language programs, including suggestions for achieving community support, for program and curriculum design, and for ensuring that programs are accredited and funded.

FNESC Members

Chair

Gwen Phillips-Clement Ktunaxa Nation

Vice Chair

Sandra Martin Wet'suwet'en Nation

Members

Jim Angus	Kispiox Nation
Barbara Barltrop	Nanoose First Nation
Theresa Dennis	Okanagan Nation
Jacqui Dennis	Association of Aboriginal Post-Secondary Institutes
Marlene Erickson	Carrier Sekani Tribal Council
Marge Fraser	Cooks Ferry
Cecilia Harris	Penelakut Indian Band
Marion Hunt	Kwakwiltl District Council
Deborah Jacobs	Squamish Nation
Brenda Leighton	Metlakatla Band
Jacob McKay	Nisga'a Nation
Nancy Nyce	Haisla Nation
Monty Palmantier	Lake Babine Nation
David Rattray	Tahltan Nation
Wilma Robinson	Nuxalk Nation
Gail Russ	Skidegate First Nation
Charlene Alfred	Namgis First Nation
Lana Wright	Soda Creek First Nation
Conrad Vandercamp	Saanich Indian School Board
Sandra Victor	Cheam Indian Band
Barbara White	Nanaimo First Nations

Chiefs Action Committee

Chief Nathan Matthew
Chief Ron Ignace
Margery McRae