

TEACHING in a **First Nations School**



**AN INFORMATION HANDBOOK
for Teachers New to First Nations Schools**

prepared by Barbara Kavanagh
for the First Nations Schools Association

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**Teaching in a First Nations School:
An Information Handbook for Teachers New to First Nations Schools**

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Introduction

This Handbook was created by the First Nations Schools Association (FNSA) to assist teachers who are considering or preparing to work in a First Nations school for the first time. It describes the many benefits as well as the unique challenges that teachers may experience while working in a First Nations school. In addition, the handbook highlights tips that have helped other teachers make a successful transition into a First Nations school setting.

This handbook also provides information to help teachers become familiar with issues related to First Nations education and First Nations schools specifically. The FNSA believes that teachers who choose to work in a First Nations school will benefit from understanding the history of the schools, the reasons why they were created, and their special circumstances. Ideally, that information will help teachers make an easier transition into the new teaching environment, and will also help them to better relate to students and parents.

It is important to note that this Handbook includes information related to First Nations schools throughout the province. Including general information is possible because First Nations in BC share a number of important similarities. It is critical to remember, however, that the communities and schools also vary tremendously. Teachers are therefore encouraged to investigate how the issues outlined in this Handbook relate to the specific place in which they will be working and, perhaps, living.



Facts & Resources

Other relevant sources of information are highlighted throughout this Handbook and in an “additional resources” section at the end. Any FNSA publications can be accessed by contacting the FNSA office at (604) 925 – 6087 or by visiting www.fnesc.ca.



The First Nations Schools Association

The FNSA was created nine years ago in response to requests from First Nations schools in British Columbia. Those schools had indicated the need for a service organization dedicated to supporting their efforts to provide quality educational services for First Nations students. The FNSA was established with a mandate to undertake relevant research, share information, facilitate communications and networking, and raise awareness about the needs and successes of First Nations schools. The FNSA became a non-profit society and registered charity in 1996.

The FNSA membership consists of First Nations schools in BC. Those schools direct the work of the organization through consultations at its Annual General Meetings. The ongoing work of the FNSA is overseen by a regionally representative Board of Directors.

Most people who work in First Nations schools quickly become familiar with the FNSA and its programs. For more information about the services that are available, visit www.fnsa.ca or call toll-free: 1-877-422-3672.



Teaching in a First Nations School

The FNSA created this Handbook as a resource for teachers who are considering or preparing to work in a First Nations school for the first time. It is intended to help those teachers become familiar with the unique context of First Nations schools and the communities in which they operate.

It is important that prospective teachers be realistic about their suitability for work in a First Nation school in order to ensure that the experience is positive for everyone involved. As described in this Handbook, First Nations schools offer a number of benefits for teachers who enjoy a high level of flexibility, close working relationships, and especially meaningful work. However, First Nations schools also present some unique challenges, and new teachers should be aware of those issues if they are to enjoy their new position and appropriately assist their students.



The Rewards

First Nations schools offer very special educational and work environments, which is reflected in some very important benefits for the people who work in those settings.

In 1999/2000, the FNSA conducted a survey of teachers in First Nations schools to explore their experiences and suggestions for success. The survey respondents highlighted numerous reasons why many teachers are attracted to and satisfied working in First Nations schools, including the following.

"First Nations schools are able to demonstrate honesty and courage to forge ahead and provide a type of service the teacher adapts as needed ... [They] are able to be on the leading edge in education. It is stimulating ... and has made me more professional."

Teacher cited in *First Nations Schools: Challenging and Rewarding Places to Work* (Kavanagh, 2000, FNSA publication).

- Many teachers are excited about the chance to learn about and experience a new place and a new culture. First Nations communities generally welcome teacher participation in cultural celebrations, as doing so helps teachers relate to their students and become closer to parents and other community members. These unique opportunities represent a significant benefit to people who are interested in developing an understanding of different cultures and perspectives.
- There are significant advantages to working in a small school, including low student/teacher ratios, close relationships with students and colleagues, comfortable environments, and more intimate interactions with parents and families. Many people find such a work environment very enjoyable.
- While some people may perceive living in an isolated place as a challenge, others believe that living in a small, rural community is a benefit. The peaceful settings, beautiful physical environments, and range of recreational opportunities are among the many reasons why some teachers have remained working in First Nations schools for extended periods of time.
- As First Nations schools are generally not constrained by collective employment agreements and they enjoy relative autonomy, they present very flexible work environments.¹

¹ In a few cases, First Nations have entered into agreements that involve school district staff working in the First Nations school. In those rare cases, the staff may be effected by collective agreements.



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“First Nations schools foster environments in which teachers work effectively with parents as partners in their children’s education.”

Teacher cited in *First Nations Schools: Challenging and Rewarding Places to Work* (Kavanagh, 2000).

Many teachers have commented positively on their involvement in school decision making, their inclusion in choosing and evaluating programs, and their opportunities to creatively integrate cultural learning into their classrooms.

- As a result of complex funding and staffing issues described further in this handbook, First Nations schools deliver a wide variety of curricula and sometimes require teachers to make significant programming decisions. Whereas incoming teachers may be mandated to teach a specific program, there are also opportunities for them to have input into the types of programs and materials implemented. This provides teachers with the exciting challenge of drawing upon their education and skills to choose programs appropriate for their students. It also gives teachers responsibility for ensuring that the programs achieve their intended results, which can be an exciting opportunity for teachers to exercise their professional judgement.
- While encouraging community and family involvement can be challenging (an issue explored in more detail later in this handbook), First Nations schools offer special possibilities for establishing positive relationships with colleagues, parents, and students. The school environments have been said to be team-based, collegial, and energetic. Many people also enjoy living and working in a place that has a strong sense of community, and interacting closely with parents and Elders can be very fulfilling.
- In addition, First Nations schools offer teachers an opportunity to make a positive contribution to First Nations education and to learning environments that were created to be especially supportive of First Nations learners. Teachers who are attracted to a challenging work environment may feel particularly motivated and excited about working in a First Nations school, where the work environments can be both professionally and personally rewarding for people who want to make an important difference.



The Challenges

In addition to those numerous benefits, however, the special histories and current realities of First Nations schools also means that – like any work environment – the schools present some unique challenges. Teachers who are considering or just beginning work in a First Nations school should be aware of those issues if they are to be realistic about the choice they are making.

A number of the challenges that exist relate directly to funding issues, as historically First Nations schools have been critically underfunded. Research undertaken in BC in 2002 and 2003 demonstrated that First Nations schools were receiving significantly less funding than that provided to public schools. It is only in the 2005/2006 school year that the federal government began providing comparable core funding to First Nations schools.

In addition, until very recently First Nations schools did not receive funding to provide services for students with special needs – even for those students who had diagnosed needs that fit within the BC Ministry of Education's special education funding guidelines. Even now, the federal government provides a block of funding for special education in First Nations schools in BC. That funding is distributed to First Nations through grants that are calculated through a set formula. Very limited additional funding is available, regardless of how many students with special needs are enrolled in the school and regardless of the severity of their needs.

Although First Nations schools have seen a significant increase in their funding in the past few years – including the much needed although limited special education funding – many of the schools are still striving to overcome a resource deficit caused by years of underfunding. That situation may be reflected in fewer learning resources in the schools, some outdated equipment, as well as teacher salaries and benefits that are not yet comparable to those paid in local school districts. While it is expected that the recent funding increases will result in improvements in all of those areas, it may take some time for all schools to build their resource capacity.



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As well, for a number of reasons – including the critical funding issues described above – past teacher turnover rates have been quite high in some First Nations schools, which has caused disruptions for the schools, students, and parents. As a result, it may take some time and effort for new teachers to be fully welcomed into a community, as parents and community members may not be certain about the teachers' long-term commitment to the schools.

Past teachers turnover rates also mean that many schools employ a relatively high proportion of administrators and teachers who are either new to their positions or to the schools. Some new teachers may perceive the limited number of staff people with significant experience as a challenge. On the other hand, this situation can be perceived as an exciting opportunity to grow together with a team.

Many First Nations schools are also relatively isolated, in terms of being unconnected to a school district structure and possibly geographically, too. As a result, some staff in First Nations schools work without access to nearby collegial networks – although other schools have had success in building relationships with nearby First Nations or public schools.

Finally, as explained below, it is important for new teachers to remember that most First Nations communities are still in a process of healing. In most communities, personal wellness and social dislocation continue to be a concern, which can be manifested in any number of difficulties. First Nations are showing great leadership and commitment in terms of addressing their social issues and building positive futures for their members. However, the problems they face are complex and long-standing, and the issues will accordingly take significant time and effort to resolve. In the meantime, encouraging parental, family, and community involvement is a critical but difficult challenge for many First Nations schools, and in some communities confidence and trust in the education system and in educators themselves is still growing.



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Preparing to Work in a First Nation School

For teachers who choose to take advantage of the unique work environments offered by First Nations schools, the following suggestions may help to make the experience more positive.

- Learn about the history and current reality of First Nations communities and schools. Demonstrating an understanding of First Nations issues will help you relate to your students and their families, and will increase community confidence in new teachers. This handbook provides a brief overview of some key issues, as well as sources of further information. Take the time to read as many relevant materials as possible.
- Gain an understanding of the community's history and culture before you arrive, keeping in mind that each community functions differently and you will therefore need to adapt your perspectives as you get to know the community better.
- Ask for documents or resources that will tell you about the community, such as newsletters, website addresses, information pamphlets, organizational charts, and school and community mission statements. Read the information carefully and ask for clarification if anything is unclear.
- When you join the school, ask to be introduced to the community staff, including the Band receptionist, Band manager, accounting staff, social development, and health staff. Show an interest in the community outside of the school.
- If orientation materials are not immediately offered to you, ask about the school's orientation procedures and take advantage of any resources that are available. Specifically, ask to see the policy and procedures manual and the teacher evaluation policy, if they exist.



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"It is a very unique situation when you come to a First Nations community as a non First Nations person. Yes, it is stressful but it is also very rewarding. It did not happen overnight, but the acceptance is there when the community knows you care, are committed and dedicated, as well as respectful of their culture.

What a great feeling when you drive through the community and people wave at you from their steps and they have a smile on their face or when the children run up to you to say hello. What is especially nice is when you get a warm smile from an Elder. I even get the occasional hug and they laugh at my jokes!!"

A First Nations school representative, 2005

- Always remember that respect is perhaps the most important and consistent value for First Nations schools and communities in BC. Respect can be demonstrated by listening to others, valuing cultural traditions, and seeking direction as to how the culture is to be appropriately implemented in school programming.
- Take advantage of opportunities to participate in community and cultural events. First Nations communities appreciate teachers who show a commitment to understanding the lives of their students, especially their cultures and traditions. Get to know the community you are working with.
- Reach out to parents as much as you can. Ask other school staff for suggestions about how to best communicate, such as phone calls home, informal meals, and/or celebrations. You might also want to make home visits, although new teachers may find parents more receptive to visits if a community member comes along. Work to make parents feel comfortable and confident that you are interested in their input. And be patient ... while building relationships may take time, it will be worthwhile.
- Recognize and be proactive in addressing potential challenges. For example, avoid feeling isolated by contacting staff in nearby First Nations schools and attending FNSA sponsored conferences and workshops to build a network of colleagues. Also, try to build relationships with neighbouring public school staff to share ideas and resources.
- Focus on the importance of professional development opportunities. Most First Nations communities recognize the importance of ongoing training, which is reflected in reasonable professional development policies. Given their potential isolation, it is especially critical that teachers in First Nations schools take advantage of opportunities to access training in order to grow professionally and stay aware of the latest educational trends.

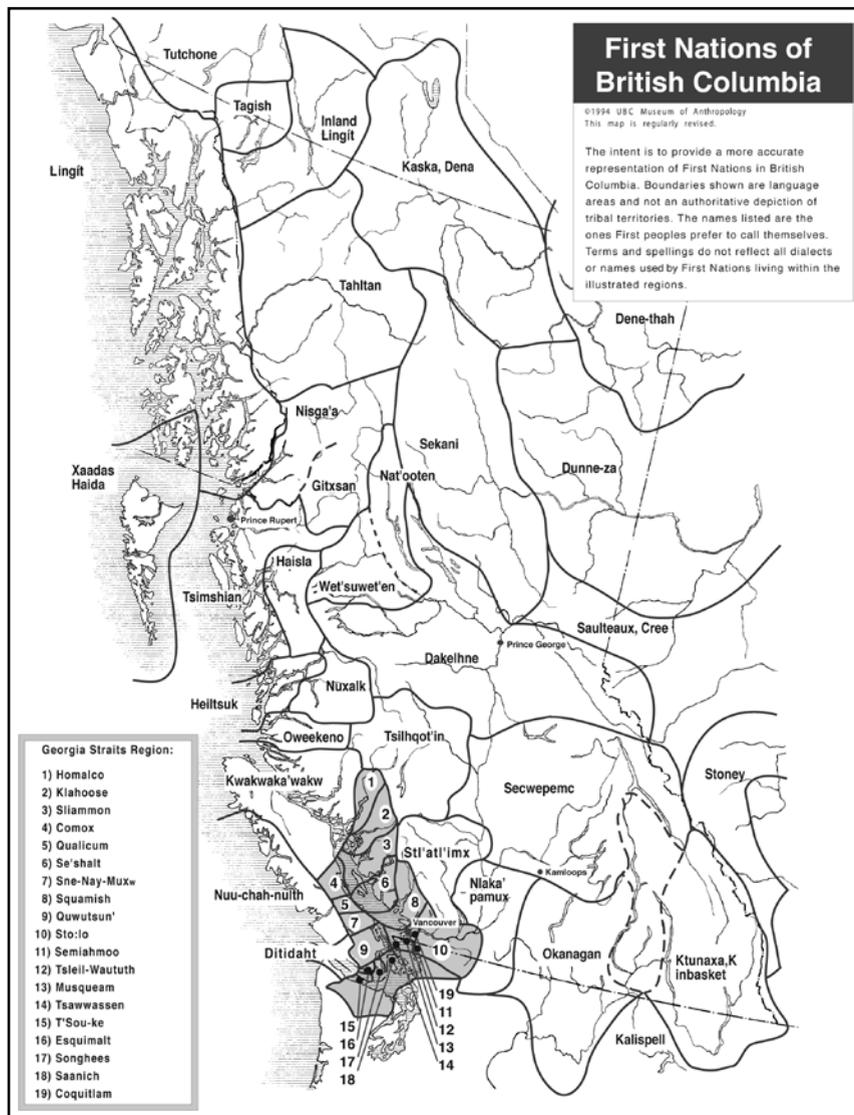


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First Nations of BC

Source: Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia. A more detailed map can be viewed at www.moa.ubc.ca/pdf/First_Nations_map.pdf
Reproduced courtesy of the Museum of Anthropology, University of British Columbia





Historical & Current Context of First Nations Schools in BC

Understanding the historical and current realities of First Nations in BC will help teachers relate to their students and communities. The following information is therefore intended to provide a brief overview of some critical issues related to First Nations education, as well as sources of further information.

First Nations in BC

British Columbia has 196 distinct Bands, which are referred to within this document as First Nations communities (see the note on language use, below). Each of those communities enjoys its own unique culture, language, and values. Each community also has its own strengths, challenges, and priorities. However, while very diverse in terms of their histories and current situations, a deep commitment to building a better future for their children is common to all First Nations in BC.

While tremendously diverse, First Nations in BC – and indeed throughout Canada – also share many common experiences that have shaped their communities in crucial ways. Understanding that history is critical to understanding the current realities of First Nations communities.



Using Appropriate Language

Different terms may be used in referring to First Nations people and communities, which can be confusing. The following definitions are offered as a general guide for appropriate language use. It is important to keep in mind, however, that some First Nations people may refer to themselves differently. For example, while a First Nations person may refer to him or herself as an “Indian,” it is not usually appropriate for a non-First Nations person to use that term. It may be helpful to ask colleagues for advice if you are uncertain about how terms are being used in specific circumstances.

First Nations people: Historically referred to as “Indians” and later as “Native people,” the people who trace their ancestry to the original inhabitants of Canada are now generally referred to as First Nations people. The term Indian is generally used only in an official and legal sense, such as when referring to the Indian Act or to specific federal government policies.

Status and non-status people: First Nations people are officially referred to as “registered Indians” if they are entitled to benefits under the Indian Act. To be eligible to receive such benefits, individuals must be registered in the Indian Register, which is maintained by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) – the federal government department with responsibility for First Nations programming. A more common term for “registered Indian” is “status Indian.” “Non-status people” include members of First Nations who are not entitled to benefits, such as First Nations people who do not live on a reserve. Only students with status are federally funded to attend a First Nations school, but non-status students are still enrolled in many of the schools.

Aboriginal people: The term Aboriginal people officially refers to all First Nations, Inuit, and Metis people. That includes status and non-status First Nations people, and those who live on and off-reserve. The Canadian Constitution includes references to Aboriginal rights, meaning that they apply to First Nation, Inuit, and Metis people. BC Ministry of Education programs also generally refer to “Aboriginal students”, as the provincial government does not separately identify First Nations (status or non-status), Inuit, and Metis students.

First Nation: First Nation is a legally undefined term that came into common usage in the 1970s to replace the term “Indian Band.” Band is an official term that is defined by the Indian Act as “a body of Indians for whose collective use and benefit lands have been set apart ...” Not every First Nation (or “Band”) lives on a single reserve. Also, some First Nations that share a traditional heritage have chosen to work together through collectives, often called Tribal Councils.



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Before the arrival of European people to what later became known as Canada, First Nations across the country governed themselves in self-sustaining, organized ways that reflected their unique cultures, values, and traditions.

With the establishment of European settlements, however, First Nations people became decimated by disease, their traditions were seriously disrupted, and over time their rights and interests were increasingly denied. In fact, the emerging federal and provincial governments created assimilationist policies and practices that banned cultural ceremonies, silenced spiritual leaders, and made traditional ways of life almost impossible.

The creation of reserves is one of the most obvious examples of government efforts to control the lives of First Nations people. The reserve system assigned First Nations people to live in specified areas that the Crown held in trust, and the rights of First Nations people both on and off those reserves were specifically and narrowly defined. Started in 1830, the reserve system was gradually expanded to the entire country, and it still exists today.

In addition, the creation of the Indian Act has had a continued impact on First Nations people. The first Indian Act, which was passed by the federal government in 1876, consolidated the existing federal laws related to First Nations people and their lands. The Indian Act was a comprehensive piece of legislation that regulated virtually every aspect of life. Yet First Nations people had no input into the writing of the Indian Act; they were, in fact, excluded from electing the politicians who legislated the Act, as First Nations people were unable to vote in federal elections until 1960.



Current Context

The history of colonialism, the denial of traditional ways, and the strict control of First Nations peoples' lives has greatly effected the social, emotional, physical, and spiritual well being of First Nations people. The legacy of colonial practices includes higher rates of disease, death, and suicide for First Nations people than for the rest of Canadian society. First Nations communities are also faced with higher levels of unemployment, illiteracy, and poverty.

However, despite their devastating histories and continued challenges, First Nations people have refused to abandon their rights, cultures, and values, and their movements for change have achieved significant progress. First Nations are striving to heal their communities and create positive futures for their children, and their efforts include a considerable focus on improving the educational success of their learners. First Nations are also working to gain control over the programs and services available to their members, with the goal of making them more culturally appropriate and reflective of their needs.

One of the ways in which First Nations are pursuing greater control is through a recognition of their right to self-government. Self-government relates to the capacity of people to manage their lives through political structures that they design for themselves. Self-government generally includes jurisdiction over health, education, social services, child welfare, economic development, and resource management.

In fact, most First Nations are already demonstrating some level of self-government through the development of their own institutions and delivery of a wide range of programs according to their own priorities. In addition, the federal government passed a policy on self-government in 1995, which recognizes that First Nations need to govern themselves in a manner that is responsive to the needs and interests of their people. The right to self-government also has been acknowledged as an existing Aboriginal right under the Canadian Constitution.



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Resources

Significant information regarding the treaty process is available through a number of sources, including the following.

- **Understanding the BC Treaty Process.** A Handbook available through the FNSA office or from the Internet at www.bctf.bc.ca/social/AboriginalEd/TreatyProcess/
- The BC Treaty Commission web site. www.bctreaty.net
- The First Nations Summit web site. www.fns.bc.ca

Some First Nations are also pursuing their rights through the BC Treaty Process. Established in the early 1990s, the treaty process is voluntary, and not all First Nations in the province have chosen to pursue this option. For the majority of BC First Nations that are involved, the treaty process involves complex negotiations regarding education, health, social services, economic development, resource management, and governance.

Section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*
Rights of the Aboriginal Peoples of Canada

35. (1) Recognition of existing aboriginal and treaty rights. The existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal people are hereby recognized and affirmed.

(2) Definition of aboriginal peoples of Canada. In this Act, aboriginal peoples of Canada includes the Indian, Inuit and Metis peoples of Canada.

(3) Land claims agreements. For greater certainty, in subsection (1) treaty rights includes rights that now exist by way of land claims agreements or may be so acquired.

(4) Aboriginal and treaty rights are guaranteed equally to both sexes. Notwithstanding any other provision of this Act, the aboriginal and treaty rights referred to in subsection (1) are guaranteed equally to male and female persons.

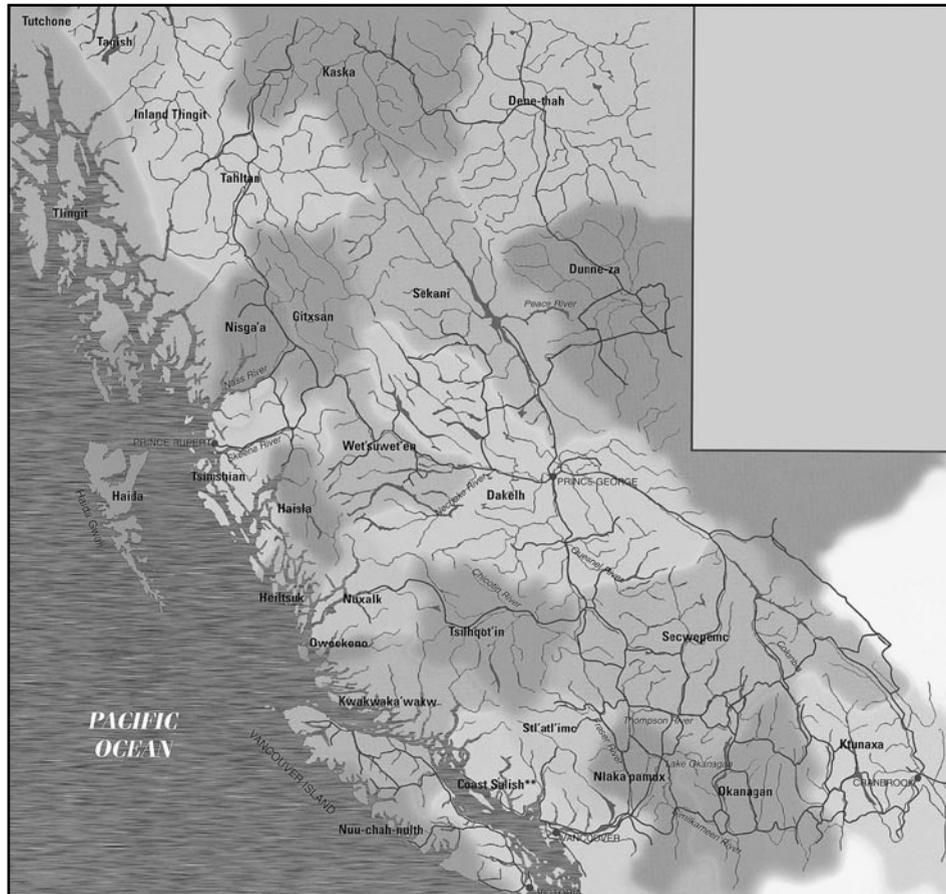


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First Nations language groups in BC

Source: Government of BC. A more detailed map can be viewed at www.bced.gov.bc.ca/abed/map.htm
Reproduced courtesy of the Government of British Columbia.





First Nations Languages

In addition to asserting their rights, First Nations people have been especially consistent in their commitment to revitalizing their languages. For First Nations people, their languages are more than simply a means of communication; they are a central part of their cultures, identities, and ways of understanding and interpreting the world.

British Columbia is particularly rich in its diversity of First Nations languages. There are between 27 and 34 First Nations languages in this province, representing eight distinct language families or isolates (languages that are not known to be related to any other language). The exact number of reported languages varies, because some languages can be listed separately or as a dialect of another language.

In spite of their importance, however, First Nations languages are in crisis. According to a study by the Department of Canadian Heritage, the great majority of languages in BC are declining, endangered, or critical. That situation reflects a number of factors, including Canada's history of colonization and the purposeful destruction of First Nations languages through early government policies. The Residential School system also created a serious disconnect between generations of people (described further below). In recent decades, the overwhelming dominance of the English language has continued the decline in First Nations languages, and as a result most First Nations children and young adults do not fluently understand or speak their language.

Reversing language loss, while a difficult task, remains a priority for First Nations, and as described below this is a critical factor for First Nations schools.



First Nations Education in BC: Historical Background

Traditionally, First Nations children learned through their natural participation in the life of their families and communities. The living environment was the classroom, Elders and families were the teachers, and young people saw their roles modeled by the older generations. Overall, each adult helped to teach children the skills, attitudes, and knowledge they needed to function in everyday life within an appropriate cultural and spiritual context. However, those education practices came under assault with the arrival of European settlers and the increasing imposition of European values and education systems upon First Nations peoples.

The use of education as a means to assimilate First Nations children is perhaps most clearly evidenced through the Residential School system. Introduced at various times throughout the country, Residential Schools were usually established and run by missionaries and they were jointly funded by the Canadian government and churches. In the schools, children were trained in European traditions and were forbidden to speak their own languages or practice their own cultures. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Canadian government passed legislation making attendance at Residential schools mandatory, with fines and jail sentences imposed on parents who did not send their children.

This separation of First Nations children from their families, their Elders, their communities, and their identities was devastating, and efforts are still being made to overcome its effects. In addition, there have been increasing reports of abuse that took place in many of the Residential schools, and individuals and communities are still working to resolve the pain those years of abuse created.

The Residential School era did not end until the late 1960s, when federal government policy started to focus more on integrating First Nations people into Canadian society. At that time, the federal government began creating elementary federal schools on reserves, integrating children into nearby provincial schools, and boarding First Nations children in urban centres in order for them to attend public high schools.

Resources



More information about First Nations education issues is available through a number of sources, including the following.

Our Children - Keepers of the Sacred Knowledge. The Final Report of the Minister's National Working Group on First Nations Education. 2002. Available on the Internet at www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ps/edu/finre/bac_e.html.

Gathering Strength. Volume Three of the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. 1996. Available on the Internet at www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/rpt/gse_e.html.



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Definitions

Band Operated Schools is the official term for federally funded schools that operate under the authority of a First Nation.

First Nations Independent Schools are federally funded schools that are operated by First Nations, and they are also registered with the Independent Schools Branch of the BC Ministry of Education. A number of First Nations have chosen to have their schools registered as Independent, most often for funding or certificate granting purposes.

First Nations Adult Education Centres include federally funded centres that offer courses for adult learners who are working toward a Dogwood diploma.

The FNSA and this Handbook refer to all of the schools described above as First Nations schools.

In 1972, the National Indian Brotherhood – now called the Assembly of First Nations – issued a landmark paper titled *Indian Control of Indian Education*. That paper highlighted the failure of governments to appropriately educate First Nations children and called for local control of education by First Nations communities and parents. Thanks to significant effort by First Nations people, the federal government responded to *Indian Control of Indian Education* by initiating a transfer of education authority to First Nations – a gradual process that is still being realized today.

Since the publication of *Indian Control of Indian Education*, First Nations have continued to assert clear and consistent goals for education. Those goals include First Nations determining how to best meet the needs of their children and prepare them for success within their own communities and within Canadian society generally.

The definition of success is complex and unique to each individual and community, but it almost always involves children being self-confident, understanding their own culture and traditional values, and having a positive self-identity. First Nations also perceive education holistically, including children's intellectual, spiritual, physical, and emotional development.



Fact

Even today, graduation rates for Aboriginal students in the BC public education system are less than 50% -- a significantly lower rate than that of non-First Nations students.

Emergence of First Nations Schools

A central aspect of *Indian Control of Indian Education* involved the creation of First Nations schools, and in the more than three decades since First Nations schools were first introduced an increasing number of communities have created their own learning institutions.

The reasons why so many First Nations have chosen this option are numerous and varied, but all of the schools reflect a goal of increasing the success of First Nations learners. The conventional education system was generally not providing adequate support to First Nations students, resulting in unacceptably low attendance, retention, and graduation rates in provincial education systems. First Nations were confident that their children would benefit from school environments that were both closer to home as well as more nurturing, caring, and reflective of First Nations students' cultures, values, and traditions.

Understanding the reasons for the creation of First Nations schools will help teachers be more successful in reflecting the goals and expectations of each community. New teachers should therefore take the time to speak to colleagues, community leaders, and Elders to learn why their school was created. Teachers should also strive to understand how the community's education values can be incorporated into the classroom and overall school environment.



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First Nations Schools in BC

Source: Government of Canada, Public Works

School	School Name	Band	Band Name
1305	SIXOMIC COMMUNITY BAND SCHOOL	711	ESKITEMO
1306	GITANYOW ELEM SEC BAND SCHOOL	337	GITANYOW -GGG
1307	STEGOULA ELEMENTARY BAND SCHOOL	535	STEGOULA
1308	KISPOO COMMUNITY SCHOOL	333	KISPOO -GGG
1372	LALWHE NEW TRIAL SCHOOL	653	TSARTIP
1374	MAAGTUSIS ELEM SEC SCHOOL	659	AHCHUBAH - NTC
1375	MALFRAY RIVER DAY SCHOOL	546	MALFRAY RIVER
1376	PROPHET RIVER	544	PROPHET RIVER
1377	TSAWATANKU FIRST NATION (KINGSOME)	636	TSAWATANKU
1378	ARTIE DAVE SCHOOL INDEPENDENT BAND	615	KWADACHA
1380	SAKUZ ELEMENTARY (FORMERLY STONEY CREEK DAY BAND SCHOOL)	615	SAKUZ (STONEY CREEK)
1382	JEAN MARIE JOSEPH SCHOOL	728	YERKOOHE
1384	EUGENE JOSEPH ADULT ELEM SEC SCHOOL	619	ULSTER NATION
1386	HARLA COMMUNITY SCHOOL	676	KITAMAMAT -CFNFA
1387	KLAPPAN INDEPENDENT DAY SCHOOL - INDEPENDENT BAND	683	ISKUT - CFNFA
1392	TLETINOX SCHOOL	712	TLETINOX-TIN GOVT
1393	YURESTIN WEGDA (STONE) SCHOOL	717	STONE
1394	GITAMAKY BAND INDEPENDENT SCHOOL	531	GITAMAKY -GGG
1393	MORCETOWN ELEMENTARY BAND SCHOOL	530	MORCETOWN
1396	CHEF AYAM SCHOOL	684	ADAMS LAKE -CFNFA
1397	YAGAN NURI BAND SCHOOL	606	S. KOOCHMAN
1398	SHIHYA ELEMENTARY BAND SCHOOL	600	SPALLANCHHEEN
1392	THYRET PRE SCHOOL	555	THYRET
1394	CHEHALS COMMUNITY SCHOOL	559	CHEHALS
1395	FOUNTAIN BAND PRE SCHOOL	592	FOUNTAIN
1396	CHEWICK TANNING PRE SCHOOL	579	BOVLET
1397	SHLYA AMALATIN	616	ORANGAN
1410	AGRES GEORGE PRE SCHOOL	630	MOWAHAT - NTC
1411	GITWANGAK ELEMENTARY	536	GITWANGAK -GGG
1417	KITASOO COMMUNITY BAND SCHOOL	640	KITASOO
1418	SAKA TI BAND NURSERY INDEPENDENT BAND	538	NUKANE NATION
1419	BELLA BELLA COMMUNITY BAND SCHOOL	538	HEB. TSUK -CFNFA
1421	NOTSOMAT TELUO CHILD CARE CENTRE	641	CHEWICK
1422	QAWYUSIN SMOLEEM ELEMENTARY	642	COWCHAN
1423	QWAM QWUM STALCUT BAND NURSERY	648	SIMNELMUKW -CFNFA
1424	DITDIAHT COMMUNITY SCHOOL (BOOULLA BAND SCHOOL)	662	DITDIAHT - NTC
1425	KUPER ISLAND BAND SCHOOL	650	PENELAKUT
1426	NE NE PAKUX BAND SCHOOL	659	TESSEHAT - NTC
1429	GWA SAKA-NARWAGAWX SCHOOL-INDEPENDENT BAND	724	GWA SAKA-NARWAGAWX
1430	HOOT SI YAK PRE-SCHOOL/KINDERGARTEN (BOUPSTAS BAND NURSERY)	638	KWAKOOT - NTC
1431	WE WAKA DAWBE NURSERY SCHOOL	625	CAPE MUDGE -CFNFA
1432	TUSKALAGAWX BAND SCHOOL	631	NAMUS
1436	NIWALA ELEMSEC BAND SCHOOL	607	OPFER NICOLA
1439	MORRIS WILLIAMS MEM. PRE-SCHOOL	607	LAKE BABINE -CFNFA
1440	TSAY KEN DENE SCHOOL	609	TSAY KEN DENE
1442	GIT DRINKA W/LP KINKOULTH	671	L. GONGKX - NISGAA
1444	CHEF MATTHEWS COMM. BAND SCHOOL	669	OLD MASSETT
1445	OSERBYVILLE NURSERY	678	LAKA ZAP - NISGAA
1446	SKOGGATE BAND NURSERY	670	SKOGGATE -CFNFA
1449	LAX KWALAMAS NURSERY (PORT SIMPSON BAND NURSERY)	674	LAX KWALAMAS -CFNFA
1450	LACH KLAN BAND NURSERY	672	GITKALA KITKALAI
1452	HARTLEY BAY BAND NURSERY	675	HARTLEY BAY -CFNFA
1453	NEW ANYSHAN BAND NURSERY	677	GITKADAMKX - NISGAA
1455	MUSQUEAM CO-OP PRE-SCHOOL	550	MUSQUEAM
1456	YEMELCOSTER NURSERY	558	QUAMISH
1459	XIT'OL'ACW COMMUNITY BAND SCHOOL	557	MOUNT CURRIE
1461	SEABIRD ISLAND COMMUNITY SCHOOL	561	SEABIRD ISLAND
1462	CHEF CHRY BAND PRE SCHOOL	544	SLAMAMON
1465	TSIKWATLAW PRE-SCHOOL	584	TSIKWATLAW
1467	YOFER BAND NURSERY	555	QUAMISH
1473	KLUSKUS SURVIVAL BAND SCHOOL	721	KLUSKUS
1487	ACHSALCIA NUXAL INDEPENDENT BAND	538	NUXALX NATION
4725	NAKALBUN ELEM SCHOOL INDEPENDENT BAND	614	NAKADLI
4748	NISGAA ELEMSEC	679	NISGAA VILLAGE OF GITHWENSHAW
4749	LAKALZAP ELEMENTARY	678	NISGAA VILLAGE OF LAKALZAP
4759	NATHAN BARTON ELEMENTARY	671	NISGAA VILLAGE OF BINGLEY
4760	HARTLEY BAY ELEMUR SEC	675	HARTLEY BAY -CFNFA
4761	LACH KLAN ELEMUR SEC	675	GITKALA KITKALAI
4762	LAX KWALAMAS ACADEMY (LAX KWALAMAS ELEMUR SEC)	674	LAX KWALAMAS -CFNFA
4662	LISA ARCHIE MEMORIAL BAND SCHOOL	713	CANIM LAKE -CFNFA
5708	NAKAZDI NURSERY SCHOOL	614	NAKAZDI -CFNFA
5709	NUR WADENZULI COMMUNITY SCHOOL (FORMERLY TANLA LAKE BAND SCHOOL)	608	TANLA LAKE
5872	HOT SPRINGS COVE BAND SCHOOL	661	TESSEHAT - NTC
5896	TSI DEL DEL ELEM SECONDARY SCHOOL	710	ALEXIS CREEK
6034	KYAH WIGET ADULT LEARNING CENTRE	530	MORCETOWN
6096	AZAMNK NURSERY	602	ST. MARYS
6103	GITWANGAK ADULT SCHOOL	536	GITWANGAK -GGG
6104	YAK TAN NURSERY	602	ST. MARYS
6148	WESTBANK CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTRE	601	WEST BANK
6186	EUGENE JOSEPH ADULT EDUCATION	619	ULSTER NATION
6187	LITTLE FAWN NURSERY	688	KAMLOOPS
6284	OKYMA SOGLUW CULTURAL SCHOOL	697	PENTICTON
6343	GEORGE MANUEL INSTITUTE	690	DEBENWITIN
6348	MURKOTH LEARNING CENTRE	542	SALIS TEAU
6347	TSAWWASSEN FIRST NATION PRE-SCHOOL	371	TSAWWASSEN
6612	B'IERN VALLEY NLAQAPAMUX SCHOOL-INDEPENDENT BAND	705	LYTTON
6613	KWANWATS BAND SCHOOL (FORMERLY OYIMWALAS)	620	CAMPBELL RIVER
6623	SMIL KAMEN INDIAN BAND SCHOOL	568	L. SMILKAMEN
6635	W/LP W/LODOWYHE NISGAA	677	GITKADAMKX - NISGAA
6640	WAGLIS SCHOOL	674	FRANZTUL
6651	JEAN MARIE JOSEPH ADULT SCHOOL	728	YERKOOHE
6652	ITATYDOD LEARNING CENTRE	686	UCLELEET -CFNFA
6688	TACHET I ELEMENTARY SCHOOL	607	LAKE BABINE -CFNFA
6696	FIRST NATIONS HIGH SCHOOL (SHANLTON)	637	ESKITEMO -GGG
6914	CHANDWYSELST SCHOOL (KHOCHWEYELST SCHOOL)	687	SKEETCHESTY -CFNFA
8921	GITHWIKSHAW ELEMENTARY	679	NISGAA VILLAGE OF GITHWIKSHAW
8932	GIF GUDGX W/LP WLODOWY - ADULT	671	GONGKX - NISGAA
7107	SKLEP SCHOOL OF EXCELLENCE	688	KAM COOPS
7114	ROSE BENDON ELEM SCHOOL	725	CANNE CREEK
7117	PENTITON INDIAN BAND ED. CENTRE	697	PENTICTON
7120	SHUTEMAN LEARNING CENTER	684	ADAMS LAKE -CFNFA
7136	TANLA LAKE ADULT EDUCATION	608	TANLA LAKE
7238	THE WILLIAMS MEMORIAL LEARNING CENTER	687	LAKE BABINE -CFNFA
7331	WAGLIS INTEGRATED STUDIES CENTRE	674	FRANZTUL -CFNFA
7600	SECOWPEMAC CULTURAL ED. SOCIETY	691	SIMPW NORTH THOMPSON-CFNFA
7636	LUPALYIE SCHOOL	539	NUXALX NATION
7661	X OX MALHEU	632	KWADACHA
8101	KWADACHA DUNE TWIN CENTRE	630	ST. MARYS
8121	TAGAMINK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL-INDEPENDENT BAND	602	ST. MARYS
8141	K'AY SHAK (WOPSENE SECONDARY)	607	LAKE BABINE -CFNFA
8142	PACHEDYHT PRE-SCHOOL	538	NUXALX NATION
8144	NA AKSA GILA KYER LEARNING CENTRE	681	KITSILKALUM
8146	SUM-SHA-THU-LELLUM	657	TSOUKE



School	School Name	Band	Band Name
815	XENI GWETIN CHILDREN'S/RESOURCES & DAYCARE	716	XENI GWETIN
8162	TLESOOX ELEMENTARY	718	TOOSEY
8194	SAMANGI ADULT EDUCATION CENTRE	603	TSARTIP
8330	TSEEL-WAUTHTH COMMUNITY CENTRE	549	TSEEL-WAUTHTH
8337	KAKOY LATSET SCHOOL	633	QUATSO
8342	TESOWTSAMKRES ISLAND PRE-SCHOOL	663	TACCOLUATH - NTC
8348	TSIKWATLAW BAND SCHOOL	584	TSIKWATLAW
8388	YOGUA TOLA HEAD START PRESCHOOL	556	NGUATOLA
8457	AHMS-TAH-WO	554	SLAMAMON
8774	NADLER KOH BAND SCHOOL NURSERY	612	NADLER WRITTEN -CFNFA
8778	CHALO SCHOOL	543	FORT NELSON
8801	FORT BABINE BAND SCHOOL	607	LAKE BABINE -CFNFA
8859	LOWER NICOLA BAND HIGH SCHOOL	695	LOWER NICOLA
8860	NIWQWOWELSTEN BAND SCHOOL	681	THOMPSON-CFNFA
8861	NYADZOFER BAKA WAXATYHTER (ZEE TOI)	598	L. SMILKAMEN
8862	GITHWIKSHAW BAND NURSERY	679	GITHWIKSHAW
9045	HEAD OF THE LAKE SCHOOL	662	SKATIN
9067	COLDWATER RESOURCE TECH BAND SCHOOL	693	COLDWATER
9137	COLDWATER ELEMENTARY BAND SCHOOL	693	COLDWATER
9142	SKIN MOUNTAIN COMMUNITY SCHOOL	595	SETON LAKE
9197	SKEETCHESTN PRE-SCHOOL	687	SKEETCHESTN -CFNFA
9240	ITATYDOD PRE-SCHOOL/KINDERGARTEN	698	UCLELEET -CFNFA
9241	BLUESBERRY BAND SCHOOL	664	BLUESBERRY
9280	NAWYINTLOO SCHOOL (UKATKAT BAND SEC)	722	UKATKAT
9284	STVATE ELEM SECONDARY (CHAMANNI NATIVE COLLEGE)	641	CHAMANNI
9302	LOWER NICOLA ELEMENTARY BAND SCHOOL	695	LOWER NICOLA
9338	W/THY THUT SCHOOL	643	COWCHAN
9376	BOUMPARTY SCHOOL	686	BOUMPARTY
9378	SCHWAGER BAND SCHOOL	664	SCHWAGER
9658	BUSY BEAR CLUB BAND PRE-SCHOOL	578	SUMAS
9659	CHANDWYHT PRE-SCHOOL	687	CHANDWYHT
9837	SENSIYUBTER HOUSE OF LEARNING	601	WEST BANK
9914	SEW POK CHN SCHOOL	598	COYDVOO



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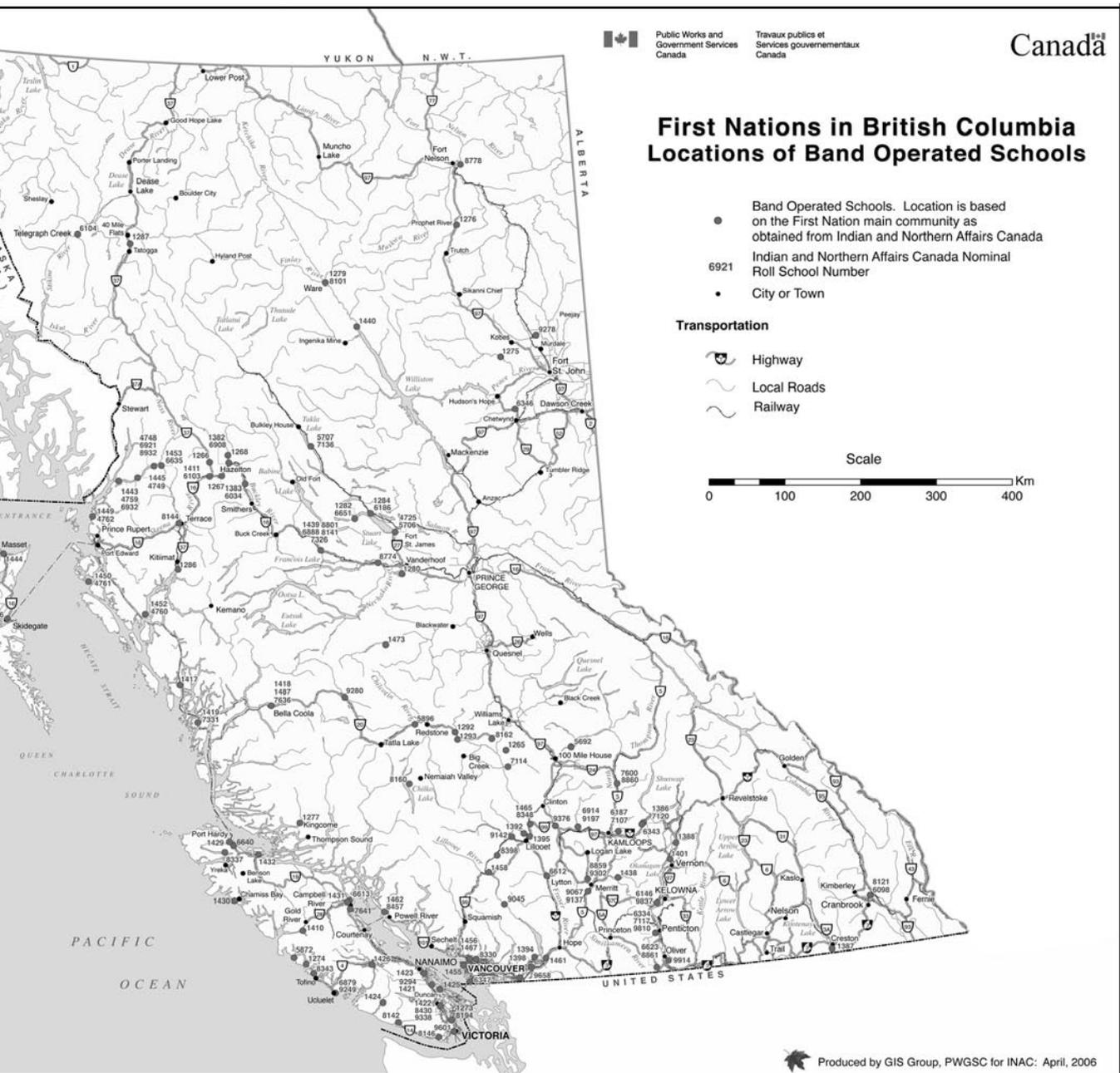
HISTORICAL & CURRENT CONTEXT



Public Works and
Government Services
Canada

Travaux publics et
Services gouvernementaux
Canada

Canada



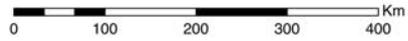
First Nations in British Columbia Locations of Band Operated Schools

- Band Operated Schools. Location is based on the First Nation main community as obtained from Indian and Northern Affairs Canada
- 6921 Indian and Northern Affairs Canada Nominal Roll School Number
- City or Town

Transportation

- Highway
- Local Roads
- Railway

Scale





Resources

The FNSA has considered in detail the issue of expectations for First Nations schools, as highlighted in the publication *Reaching For Success: Considering the Achievements and Effectiveness of First Nations Schools* (Kavanagh, 1998). That paper shares the results of a consultation process that involved First Nations representatives collectively defining standards for First Nations schools in BC. Those standards have subsequently been reaffirmed as the foundation of a school assessment (evaluation) framework and a data collection framework – both of which were designed by the FNSA specifically for use by First Nations schools.

More information about the First Nations Schools Assessment Project and the First Nations Schools Measures Project can be found on the FNSA web site at www.fnsa.ca.

First Nations Schools in BC Today

Today, there are over 100 First Nations controlled schools in BC. Generally, all of those schools are committed to providing quality instruction as well as nurturing, caring environments for children. The schools also have a mandate to emphasize and promote conventional academics as well as First Nations cultures and languages, and they strive to reflect the values and traditions of the communities they serve.

While sharing those foundations, the schools also vary tremendously. Not only are the languages, cultures, values, and perspectives of the school communities different; the schools range in size from less than ten to nearly 300 students, and they have between one and dozens of staff people. The grades offered range from K4 and K5 only to every grade from K4 through to grade 12. Some First Nations schools are located in or near urban centers, while others are extremely remote – sometimes hundreds of kilometers from the nearest center and accessible only by plane or boat. In addition, while some of the schools have been operating for almost three decades, some have been in existence for only a few years.



School Programming

The funding guidelines established by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) require that all First Nations schools meet the provincial learning outcomes established by the BC Ministry of Education. However, most First Nations schools strive not only to meet, but also to significantly enhance that requirement. In addition, First Nations schools incorporate a wide range of curricula to achieve their educational aspirations and do not necessarily implement the texts and programs used in adjacent public schools.

Extensive consultations and ongoing work by the FNSA have demonstrated that First Nations schools are committed to a unique range of expectations, or “standards,” as follows.

- First Nations schools foster a supportive environment in which students have a chance to expand to their full potential, and in which children are secure and happy.
- First Nations schools ensure that children understand and are proud of who they are.
- First Nations schools help children to develop the numeracy, literacy, and other academic skills they need to succeed.
- First Nations schools honour parental and community involvement in education, as First Nations believe that education is the basis of a peaceful community and that Elders, adults and children are not separate.



Resources

More information about First Nations languages and school programming is available through the FNSC publication: Ignace. 1998. *Handbook for Aboriginal Language Program Planning*. Available on the Internet at www.fnesc.ca/publications/index.php.

First Nations schools strive to create unique environments focused on the following beliefs.

- The teaching of First Nations languages and cultures is a foundation of children’s development.
- First Nations students must be supported in developing a positive notion of who they are as First Nations people.
- Meeting the needs of all children is critical (including children with special needs).



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- First Nations schools must provide nurturing environments for children.
- First Nations schools must teach children the necessary numeracy and literacy skills.
- First Nations schools operate and are governed within a community context.
- Parental and family involvement are critical to school and student success.
- First Nations schools should strive to maintain effective school staffs, which includes providing opportunities for teacher education and training.

The specific ways in which those standards and beliefs are reflected are determined by each school and community. Most schools have created a mission or vision statement that describes the community's aspiration for its learners, although a few schools are still in the process of developing a collective goal statement. New teachers would benefit from reviewing their school's mission statement, if it exists, and asking for clarification if any of the goals are unclear.



First Nations School Mission / Vision Statement Examples

- Our school is to deliver an educational program that meets the needs of individual learners in an inclusive way, [and provides] educational programming that is supportive of our language and traditional knowledge practices.
- We believe that the education of our children must be holistic. We recognize that our children have a unique heritage that must continue to grow and develop into the future and for generations to come. Our children must become life long learners with skills and abilities to compete in today's society.
- At our school, we value a nurturing and respectful environment that promotes cultural awareness, academic achievement, and social responsibility. We encourage a team approach involving students, staff, parents and community to provide opportunities for students to develop into confident citizens capable of making a positive contribution to their community. Our mission is to ensure that our students realize a strong sense of pride and appreciation of their culture, and gain a strong command of their language. It is our hope that the school will help encourage students to be proud of their culture and identity.



The Inclusion of Language and Culture in First Nations Schools

Language and cultural programming is a central component of First Nations schools – an area of learning that is pursued in a number of ways. Most First Nations schools offer some type of distinct language and culture classes, which are usually taught by a teacher who is recognized by the community as being knowledgeable in the language. The majority of schools are also making efforts to integrate language and culture learning throughout the curriculum. However, this is a resource-intensive and time-consuming task, and accordingly the schools are at varying levels in terms of accomplishing full language and culture integration. There is now only one First Nation language immersion school in BC.

It is beneficial for teachers who are new to First Nations schools to demonstrate their commitment to incorporating the language and culture into their classrooms, but it is also very important to pursue this issue sensitively. Each community has its own protocols for appropriately and respectfully using the language and culture, and there are specific rules regarding who can share the community's traditional knowledge. For that reason, teachers should consult with colleagues, the school principal (if there is one), and/or community representatives before using any aspects of the language and culture. Many First Nations also have recognized Language Authorities that have the authority to determine how their languages and cultures are to be used. Where they exist, those Authorities can be of invaluable assistance to school staff.



The Importance of Community Connections

First Nations schools are also intimately related to the communities in which they operate. In fact, this relationship is particularly strong for First Nations schools, as each community made a deliberate decision to establish a school under its own control and then expended great effort and commitment to make that school a reality. Many communities also demonstrate an ongoing commitment to their schools by supplementing the school budget with funding from other program areas or through ongoing fundraising efforts.

The 1999/2000 FNSA survey of teachers specifically highlighted the close relationship between First Nations schools and communities as a critical aspect of their work and one of the major reasons why the teachers initially chose to work in a First Nations school. The opportunity to learn about and experience a different culture was said to be an attractive aspect of working within a First Nations community. Many of the teachers also noted that their positive interactions with the community was a particularly enjoyable aspect of their job. In addition, the teachers emphasized the benefit of community involvement in decisions about school programs.

First Nations schools strive to promote community involvement in many ways, including proactively communicating the school's progress toward its goals, as well as involving Elders and other community representatives in school activities. Many of the schools also serve as a community centre, providing services such as opening the gym or computer lab for community use. It is very important that teachers enjoy opportunities that are available to participate in community and cultural events in order to demonstrate their interest in the First Nation and its students. In fact, it is possible that teachers may be requested to participate in community activities as a part of their job.



Resources

Additional information and suggestions are also included in the FNSA publication. *First Nations Schools: Reflecting Communities Through Governance Structures, Parental Involvement Programs, and School Calendars*. (Kavanagh. 1999)



Parents, Families, and First Nations Schools

More specific than community involvement, their relationship with and accountability to parents and extended families is a particularly critical issue for First Nations schools. A recognition that First Nations parents and families have a fundamental right to a strong and meaningful voice in the learning of their children is at the core of First Nations' perspectives of education.

In addition, in most First Nations communities parents have a choice regarding where their children will attend school, as in many cases a public school is located in close proximity. Parents choose to have their children attend the First Nations school because they believe that their children will be offered more valuable learning opportunities in a school controlled by their own community. That situation makes it critically important that school staff foster commitment and trust with parents.

Extensive research has also highlighted the positive impact of engaging parents and families in all education settings. There is overwhelming evidence that parents can make a critical difference when they are involved in their children's home and school learning. In fact, family support has been shown to be a greater factor in student success than family income or education levels. Parents can greatly enhance a school's efforts by providing meaningful input into school decision-making and by donating significant time and effort to school programs.

Unfortunately, many First Nations parents have not had positive experiences in the education system, and they may therefore be reluctant to be active within the school setting. Also, some parents are not confident that they have the skills and knowledge necessary for involvement in home and school learning, or parents may believe that they should not interfere with teachers' practices.

It is therefore particularly important for teachers in First Nations schools to reach out to parents and to extended family members in sensitive but proactive ways. This may include the use of positive phone calls, as well as friendly notes and newsletters. It is also



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important to offer informal and comfortable opportunities for families to celebrate students and learning, such as assemblies, concerts, and family fun nights.

In addition, a unique and positive aspect of First Nations schools is their commitment to a broad interpretation of extended family involvement if parents themselves find it difficult to support their children's education. Teachers new to a community might seek guidance from those more familiar with the setting about how best to communicate with and engage parents and extended families for the benefit of students.

Additional resources are also available to assist teachers in promoting family involvement in home and school learning. For example, the FNSA sponsors a First Nations Parents Club, which supports First Nations schools and communities in organizing local parent and family groups that reflect the unique needs of each community. The FNSA assists the locally-based parents clubs with a variety of support materials, including newsletters, incentive gifts, a parenting calendar, books for home reading, and other informational materials. If a parent and family group does not already exist in the community, interested teachers can learn more about the Parents Club by calling the FNSA office.



Governance of First Nations Schools

Local Governance

First Nations schools are not directly governed by the BC Ministry of Education, a local School District, or the School Act (unless they have chosen to register as a BC Independent School, in which case they must follow the Independent School Act).² Instead, all First Nations schools are ultimately under the authority of the First Nation they serve, and every First Nation is controlled by a Chief and Council.

Within those overall parameters, the structure and role of the governing authority selected for each school varies amongst First Nations communities in BC. In some cases, First Nations schools are under the direct authority of the Chief and Council, with no School Board or School Committee in existence. In other cases, communities have decided to establish their own School Boards, with Board members elected through a community voting procedure. Other schools are guided by some kind of Education or School Committee, with either elected members or volunteers, and involving only parents or some combination of parents, community members, and Elders.

When they exist, the relationship of the School Board or Committee and the Chief and Council can vary. For example, some Boards operate quite separately, providing regular updates to the Chief and Council but functioning with significant autonomy. Alternatively, the relationship can involve the Board or Committee reporting to and being under the direct control of the Chief and Council.

The decision regarding how to operate the governance authority is entirely dependent upon what works best given the circumstances of each school and community. The structure and membership of a school authority may reflect, among other factors, the political realities of the community, the specific goals and priorities that existed when the school was created, and the number and personalities of people with an interest in education and school



Independent Schools

For more information about the Independent Schools Branch, visit www.bced.gov.bc.ca/independentschools/

² First Nations schools' funding agreements with the federal government also require that they reflect provincial learning outcomes and employ teachers who are certified with the BC College of Teachers.



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operations. The choice of structure may also reflect the desires and interests of school staff and parents, the level and types of resources available to support a School Board, and the stage of development of the school and its governance authority.

What is most important is that teachers understand the governance of the school and respect the established communication structures. If the school employs a principal, administrator, or head teacher, that individual usually works directly with the governing agency and other teachers generally do not communicate directly with the governing agency about school matters.

Of course, in most First Nations communities it is common for school staff to regularly come into contact with people who are involved in school governance, especially if the staff are making an effort to promote parental and community involvement. In those cases, it is important to avoid sensitive school-related topics that are better addressed through formal communication and reporting processes. In addition, in small communities, where parents have multiple roles, new teachers should follow careful protocols when discussing school matters. Engaging in casual conversations and assuming confidences can lead to a range of difficulties.

Second Level Services

While First Nations schools do not operate within a School District system, three provincial-level organizations have been created by First Nations in BC to address First Nations education issues. The first is the FNSEA, described in the introduction of this Handbook. The FNSEA is directed by and supports the work of First Nations schools. In addition, the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) is a non-profit society directed by First Nations communities. FNESC has a mandate to assist First Nations in their efforts to improve the quality of education available to all First Nations students in BC, including students attending both First Nations and public schools. The Indigenous Adult and Higher Learning Association (IAHLA) was created to support First Nations controlled adult education centres and post-secondary institutes in BC.



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It is important to understand that the FNSA, FNEC, and IAHLA do not have authority over First Nations schools and do not govern First Nations in the area of education. The organizations were created to provide services, support, and a united voice for First Nations education issues.

The FNSA, FNEC, and IAHLA work in close cooperation, and teachers in First Nations schools are encouraged to take advantage of the relevant services provided through the associations. Those services include, among others, professional development workshops, conferences, research papers, and direct assistance with technology and special education issues. See www.fnesc.ca or www.fnsa.ca for more information about how to access the available support.



Jurisdiction Agreement

On July 24, 2003, FNEC, the federal, and the provincial government signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Respect to First Nations Authority and Jurisdiction over Education. That MOU includes a detailed framework that First Nations can use to negotiate agreements regarding jurisdiction for education. Taking advantage of the jurisdiction framework will be entirely voluntary, and interested First Nations will be required to formally “opt in” to the process.

The MoU is based upon the creation of two types of Education Authorities. Each participating First Nation will designate a Community Education Authority, which will have law making authority with respect to its membership. Each Community Education Authority can in turn delegate aspects of its jurisdiction and authority to a Central Authority. The specific areas to be delegated and the structure of that Central Authority are now being considered with input from First Nations.

Once finalized and implemented at a local level, jurisdiction agreements will significantly change the control of First Nations schools, but the exact nature of those changes has not yet been determined. In addition, teachers may not be immediately affected by the shift in jurisdiction, as schools are expected to maintain their established programs in the short term and continue their ongoing efforts toward improvement over time.

Up-to-date information about the jurisdiction negotiations is available on the FNEC web site at www.fnesc.ca.



School Administration

First Nations schools also vary significantly in terms of their in-school leadership. For example, because of their different sizes the schools may or may not employ a principal or a head teacher. In addition, the principals and head teachers who are employed in the schools may work full-time on administration and school leadership, or they may work part-time on administration and part-time in the classroom. Some First Nations have also created more complex administrative structures, such as having a community Education Coordinator with responsibility for some school administrative functions, such as personnel, budgets, grant applications, or community liaison. Teachers who begin working in a First Nations school that does not have a principal or administrator are encouraged to contact the FNSEA or neighbouring First Nations schools to develop supportive relationships and become aware of the variety of services and programs that are available.

It is also important to understand that principals/administrators who work in First Nations schools are employed in unique situations. They not only have a wide range of responsibilities and very demanding workloads; the nature of First Nations schools also means that they work in significant isolation without the support of nearby colleagues and supervisors. Many principals and administrators of First Nations schools are also relatively new to their position and/or to First Nations schools, and they may be simultaneously striving to develop their leadership roles within the school and the community. In many First Nations schools, principals are asked to sit on a variety of out-of-school committees, help with programs for youth, and participate in community planning. Understanding that principals of First Nations schools may have different roles, responsibilities, and support structures than administrators in the public education system may help teachers in adapting to the First Nations school environment.



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Concluding Comments

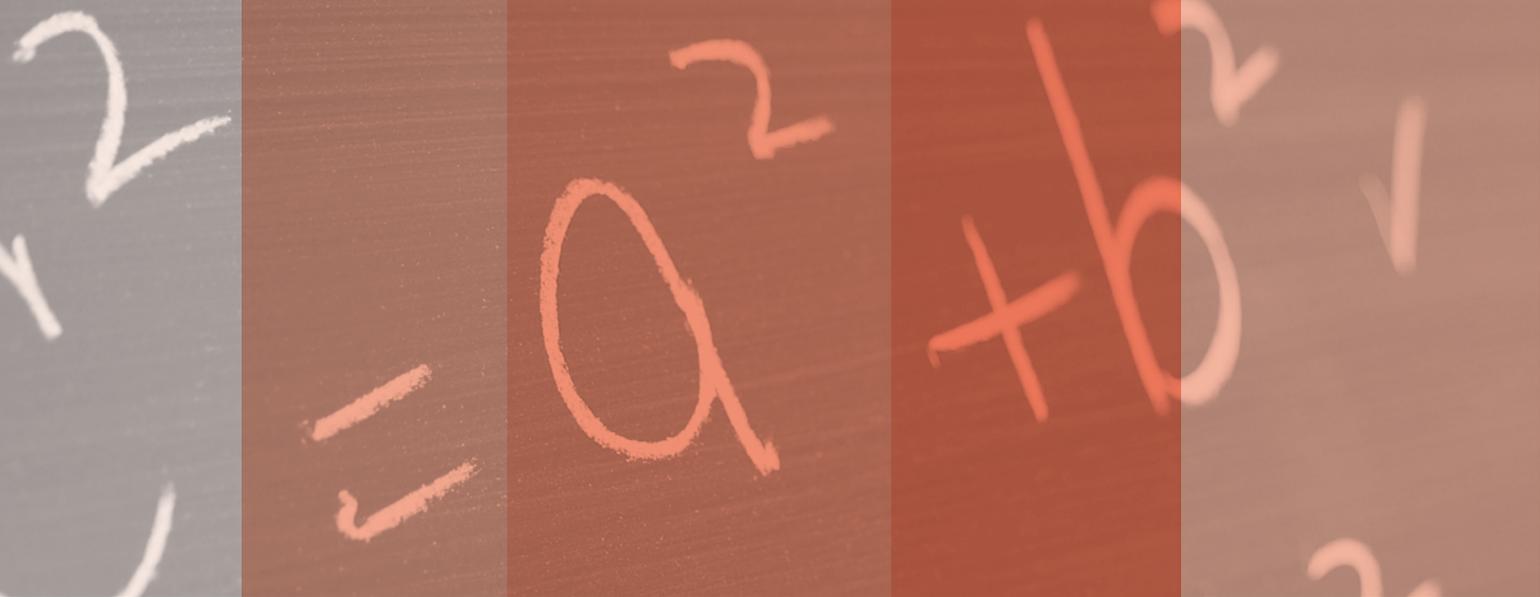
Teachers who are preparing to work in a First Nations school for the first time have a great deal to look forward to. The schools present special teaching opportunities that can be both professionally and personally fulfilling. However, in order to make their experience more successful, new teachers should be fully aware that they are going to be working in very complex settings that include some unique difficulties. Understanding that fact will ideally help new teachers adapt to a First Nations school setting more easily, and result in more positive relationships and benefits for teachers, students, parents, and communities. The FNSA hopes that this handbook helps to make that happen.



Find Out More

The following resources are recommended for people who are interested in more information.

- The web site of the First Nations Schools Association:
www.fnsa.ca
- The web site of the First Nations Education Steering Committee:
www.fnesc.bc.ca
- Kavanagh, B. 2000. *First Nations Schools: Challenging and Rewarding Places to Teach*. A publication of the FNSA.
- Kavanagh, B. 2003. *Providing Educational Leadership: First Nations Schools Administration Handbook*. A publication of the FNSA.
- Kavanagh, B. 1998. *Reaching for Success: Considering the Achievements and Effectiveness in First Nations Schools*. A publication of the FNSA.



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