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# BC Aboriginal Education Partners Anti-Racism Initiatives

The lack of success experienced by many First Nations learners in the provincial education system has reached a critical state. The 2000, the graduation rate of 38% for Aboriginal learners versus the provincial average of 78% for all learners is a stark measure of the challenge facing the provincial education system and First Nations communities.

In early 1998 an invitation was extended to all partners in the provincial education system to work together to build solutions and support Aboriginal learners. The following organizations formed the BC Aboriginal Education Partners Committee:

BC Teachers' Federation  
BC School Trustees Association  
BC Principals' and Vice Principals' Association  
BC College of Teachers  
BC School Superintendents Association  
First Nations Schools Association  
First Nations Education Steering Committee  
Department of Indian Affairs and Northern  
Development  
Ministry of Education

The first meetings were challenging as the Education Partners experienced difficulty articulating what tangible, collective and individual, steps could be taken to make meaningful changes to the system.

The first step was clarifying the commitment of the Partners to collaboratively address the challenge in a purposeful way. To publicly demonstrate this commitment, the Education Partners signed the following Memorandum of Understanding on February 2, 1999. The MOU reads as follows:

*We the undersigned, acknowledge that Aboriginal learners are not experiencing school success in British Columbia. We state our intention to work together within the mandates of our respective organizations to improve school success for Aboriginal learners in British Columbia.*

During the past three years the Education Partners have continued to meet quarterly and have drafted an agenda identifying three priority matters to be addressed over the next year. It was a significant challenge to focus solely on three priorities but this was a necessary step to assist the Partners in creating a manageable work plan.

The three priority areas are:

- **Aboriginal Teacher Recruitment;**
- **Employment Equity; and**
- **Racism.**

## Anti-Racism Initiatives

The issue of racism has proven to be a challenging one.

The Education Partners will jointly sat on a panel at the 2000 and 2001 Provincial First Nations Education Conferences in Vancouver, to discuss racism and how their organizations were taking positive action to increase awareness of the issue. The willingness of the Partners to discuss racism and the collective work of the Education Partners was well received.

The Anti-Racism Working Group of the Education Partners meets regularly. It has developed a detailed workplan and are collaborating closely with the Department of Canadian Heritage, Multiculturalism, and the Ministry of Community, Aboriginal and Women's Services, Multiculturalism BC.

## Sample Anti-Racism Workplan Items

Items from the workplan and other current initiatives include:

1. Hiring of an Anti-Racism Officer to facilitate anti-racism and transitions activities for the Education Partners. This individual will undertake projects that will include
  - creating a Transitions/Anti-Racism Toolkit of classroom/school activities
  - building local capacity through regional workshops
  - leading a PowerPoint Presentation Contest for First Nations Studies 12
  - coordinating information sharing about anti-racism and transitions issues
  - moving forward the workplan of the Anti-Racism Working Group
2. Creating a strategy to address the potential implications of the BC referendum on Aboriginal students
  - informing the membership of the Education Partners
  - providing teachers and schools with resources to raise awareness of Aboriginal issues and counter racism
  - providing articles in the First Nations Parents Club Newsletter and other Partners' newsletters
3. Collaborating with the Aboriginal Teacher Education Consortium to encourage and support First Nations students to choose careers in teaching and education administration.
4. Building awareness and resources for First Nations Studies 12, and creating district level support networks to assist those teaching that FNS12 and other First Nations curriculum components
5. Establishing a diploma program/summer institute for teachers in First Nations Studies
6. Involving students in the development and implementation of anti-racism programs
7. Encouraging school districts to develop effective anti-racism policies and goals, and encouraging schools to develop effective antiracism practices
8. Creating a listing of post-secondary courses that provide a background in First Nations studies and making that list available to post-secondary students and to student teachers
9. Encouraging schools to use existing resources (i.e. BCTF Workshops)
10. Exploring partnership opportunities with anti-bullying campaigns

### For more information:

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