

April 15, 2020

RE: Engagement with First Nations on Funding and Agreements during the COVID-19 Context

The purpose of this letter is to provide an update on engagement, shared planning and shared decision-making with First Nations and First Nation parents in the current COVID-19 context. This document clarifies actions in four areas related to the education of First Nation students attending public and non-First Nation independent schools:

1. Engagement, Shared Planning and Shared Decision-Making
2. Indigenous Education Targeted Funding
3. Local Education Agreements (LEAs)
4. Joint First Nation Student Transportations Plans (Joint Plans)

Questions and answers related to Targeted Funding, LEAs, and Joint Transportation Plans are attached.

1. Engagement, Shared Planning and Shared Decision-Making

COVID-19 is changing the way that K-12 education is being provided in the BC public and independent school systems. The Ministry of Education, boards of education, independent school authorities, school district staff and others are working hard to provide continuity of learning for students while in-class instruction is suspended. This will include developing remote learning plans and accessing alternative delivery models to provide learning for students and families.

Engagement, shared planning and shared decision-making amongst boards of education, school districts, First Nations and First Nation parents is even more critical during these times to ensure First Nation student needs are being equitably met. The Ministry of Education, First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) and Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) are encouraging this engagement, recognizing that all parties are trying to align their efforts in these challenging circumstances.

Four Guiding Principles created by the Ministry of Education, outlined in the *Integrated Framework for School Districts and Independent School Authorities*, will help focus actions to support the K-12 education COVID-19 response. The third principle is particularly relevant to many First Nation students:

1. Ensure a healthy and safe environment for all students, families and employees.
2. Provide the services needed to support children of our essential workers.
- 3. Support vulnerable students who may need special assistance.**
4. Provide continuity of educational opportunities for all students.

The following sections outline actions related to grants and agreements that support First Nation students:

2. Indigenous Education Targeted Funding Supplement

At this time, there is no change to the expectation that school districts spend the entire 2019/20 Indigenous Education Targeted Funding Supplement, including cumulative underspent amounts from prior years.

Indigenous students served by this funding are expected to continue to receive programs and services over and above the regular continuity of learning that all students will receive.

School districts are advised to engage with local First Nations whom they serve as well as the broader Indigenous community to identify appropriate programs and services to be delivered through targeted funds during the suspension of in-class instruction. School-wide activities that may normally have been carried out using targeted funds will not be taking place, however, there will still be student needs. For example, school districts may find that having Indigenous Support Workers liaise between students/parents and teachers is beneficial to help ensure students receive enhanced services and supports, in addition to the continuity of learning plans, that are appropriate to remote conditions.

School districts should also be planning and sharing decision making with local Indigenous communities on the potential underspend of targeted funds. As in past years, with any underspend of targeted funding, school districts will be required to seek permission from the Ministry of Education, explain why it occurred and have the underspend carried forward and added to the 2020/21 school year supplement.

3. Local Education Agreements (LEAs)

Consistent with the BC Tripartite Education Agreement (BCTEA) it is imperative that boards of education and non-First Nation independent school authorities reach out to engage First Nations and First Nation parents to determine the needs of First Nation students and to come up with plans for meeting those needs. This is particularly necessary where a Local Education Agreement (LEA) is in place, since LEAs set out terms and conditions for the exchange of tuition for education programs and services for First Nation students. Boards of education and independent school authorities should plan and provide for equitable continued learning opportunities in this context, making accommodations to ensure that all students, including First Nation students, are supported.

Please refrain from pressuring First Nations for payment until there is engagement on, or clarity about, what the continued learning plans will be to support First Nation students. Until there is clarity, First Nations may not be able to determine if they need to implement education supports themselves while the pandemic endures.

4. Joint First Nation Student Transportation Plans

2019/20 School Year Joint Plans, Funding and Reporting

Funding

In late 2019, school districts that submitted 2019/20 Joint Plans received letters outlining their approved funding for the 2019/20 school year. Transportation services for First Nation students who live on-reserve and attend public schools will have been impacted by the suspension of in-classroom instruction. **School districts should be engaging with local First Nations who they serve to determine if there are flexible and innovative ways to use these funds for transportation services, consistent with the purpose of the funds, and that ensure First Nation students receive continuity of learning. If 2019/20 funds are not fully expended by the end of this school year,**

consistent with other Special Grants, unspent Joint Plan funds should be requested by the school district (by sending an e-mail to SDFR@gov.bc.ca) to be carried over to next school year for use toward the original intended use of the funds.

Reporting

As noted in the Joint Plan approval letters, there are specific reporting requirements for the transportation funding. **The July 10, 2020 timeline for submission of reports, communicated in the approval letter, has been changed to September 30, 2020 to allow school districts and First Nations more time to review spending and produce reports.** This timeline now aligns with most other financial reporting that is due to the Ministry of Education. Please submit completed reports to BCTEA@gov.bc.ca by September 30, 2020.

2020/21 School Year Joint Transportation Plan Submission Date

The 2020/21 Joint Plan Submission date has been changed from May 1, 2020 to the dates outlined below to help alleviate stress and workload on school districts and First Nations who are focusing on other more imminent priorities. School districts and First Nations engaging in shared planning and decision making for these plans is still the recommended approach, however, the COVID-19 context requires flexibility to be introduced.

As communicated in March 2020, First Nations and school districts should choose from the following options for submission of 2020/21 school year Joint Plans. School districts can visit [Ministry of Education School District Reporting Catalogue website](#) and First Nations can visit the [FNESC Website](#) for information and templates related to the 2020/21 Joint Plans.

- **Option 1: Status Quo Plan Roll Over**
2019/20 Joint Plans that are meeting the needs of the First Nation, where no revisions to services and funding is required for 2020/21, can be rolled over to the 2020/21 school year. **Email a letter by October 30, 2020 to BCTEA@gov.bc.ca indicating agreement to roll over the plan.** The email must include signatures of the Chief of the First Nation (or delegate) and Board Chair in addition to operational contacts at both the First Nation and school district.
- **Option 2: Revisions to 2019/20 Joint Plans**
If the 2019/20 Joint Plan **is not** meeting the needs of the First Nation, and revisions to services and funding are required for 2020/21, **resubmit the original plan by October 30, 2020 to BCTEA@gov.bc.ca**, clearly identifying the changes/updates to the original plan. The email must include signatures as outlined in Option 1.
- **Option 3: New Joint Plans**
For school districts / First Nations that did not submit Joint Plans for the 2019/20 school year, please use the appropriate templates at the link referenced above, to prepare 2020/21 submissions. **Submit plans by October 30, 2020 to BCTEA@gov.bc.ca**. The email must include signatures as outlined in Option 1.

School districts should plan to maintain existing service levels and billing arrangements for transportation services that were in place in the 2019/20 school year pending approval of funding in the fall.

Thank you for your hard work and focus on providing continuity of learning for First Nations students during these times. If you have questions related to the above grants and agreements, please contact Denise Evdokimoff at denise.evdokimoff@gov.bc.ca.

Attachment: FAQs about COVID-19 and the BC Tripartite Education Agreement