

Summary of COVID-19 Funding Resources for Students in First Nations Schools, Public/Independent Schools

October 27, 2020

We hope that everyone is staying safe and keeping well as we move further into the year. In this update, the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNEsc) and First Nations Schools Association (FNSA) are providing a brief summary of COVID-related funding announcements relevant to both BC First Nations schools and First Nations with students in BC public or non-First Nation independent schools, as well as new information about funding we anticipate will be available in the near future.

Funding Previously Distributed to First Nations Schools

Summer Learning Opportunity Grants

In June, 2020, FNEsc/FNSA distributed approximately \$2M in one-time funding to First Nations and First Nations schools to support the offering of summer learning opportunities. This funding was intended to assist First Nations and First Nations schools in addressing the extraordinary challenges arising as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on supporting smooth transitions to school programs provided in the Fall.

School Restart Grants

In August 2020, a total of \$1.5 million was allocated by FNEsc and FNSA as one-time First Nation School Restart Grants based on nominal roll student numbers. Those grants were intended to be used flexibly to pay added costs related to the pandemic, such as technology, learning resources, staffing, and health and safety supplies and materials.

Safe Return to School Funding

On August 26, 2020, Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) announced [\\$112 million for First Nations Canada-wide](#) to support a safe return to on-reserve First Nation schools. In late September, BC First Nation schools received \$6.7M of the available funding as part of their core First Nation school funding, which can be used for a variety of purposes including salaries for teachers, custodians, and bus drivers, access to technology, purchase of e-learning software, and the development of take-home learning materials.

Immediate Public Health and Safety Measures Funding (Minor Capital)

In September ISC also distributed \$1.5M for use toward immediate public health and safety measures, including those related to minor capital investments that support physical distancing and enhanced health and safety practices such as additional hand washing stations, signage to reinforce physical distancing consistent with local public health guidance, plexiglass barriers/partitions for distancing, cleaning supplies and sanitizers, personal protective equipment (PPE) for staff or students, flushing of water lines, and safety checks and updates of existing HVAC systems.

Upcoming Funding for First Nations Schools

Non-OGM BCTEA Formula Funding

On July 29, 2020, the Ministry of Education announced a \$45.6M provincial investment in public and non-First Nation independent schools, which is intended to assist with the implementation of COVID-19 health and safety measures. Consistent with the BC Tripartite Education Agreement (BCTEA), FNEC and FNSA have been working with Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) to ensure that BC First Nation schools receive a proportionate amount of funding from ISC and that it is distributed to First Nations schools as quickly and efficiently as possible. It has now been confirmed that BC First Nations schools will receive a total of approximately \$482,000, to be allocated through FNEC based on student population and distributed as a top-up to the School Restart Grants. Further details will be distributed shortly.

Health and Safety Funding from First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB)

In early September, FNEC was invited to submit a proposal to ISC and the First Nations Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB) for additional public health funding for First Nation schools reopening. FNEC has received approximately \$1.5M from FNIHB and will be distributing these funds to First Nations schools on a per capita basis in combination with the \$482,000 referenced above as a top-up to the initial School Restart Grants distributed in August.

Supporting First Nation Students in Public and non-First Nation Independent Schools

Recognizing the needs of First Nations learners in both the First Nations and BC public education system, a portion of the federal government's Safe Return to School Funding will also be available to support the roughly 9000 First Nation students living on reserve and attending BC public or non-First Nations independent schools. Roughly \$5M will be allocated by FNEC to BC First Nations, including \$3M from the federal government and approximately \$2M in additional funding provided by FNEC, using a base plus per-capita methodology for eligible students on the nominal roll who are registered in schools located off-reserve.

Additionally, to support BC's COVID-19 response to K-12 education, the federal government is providing [\\$242.4M in one-time funding to the BC public and independent schools](#). In response to concerns that First Nation student and community needs will not be prioritized in determining how this additional funding will be utilized, the Ministry of Education, in partnership with FNEC, has included specific reporting requirements for school districts on their use of the funds in supporting Indigenous students and communities.

Further, while the Ministry has set out a number of expectations that apply to public school districts and non-First Nation independent school authorities in their engagement with First Nations during the COVID-19 pandemic, FNEC continues to advocate for the development of restart plans that detail the expectations for the delivery of educational services to First Nations students, to be jointly signed-off by Boards of Education and local First Nations. The First Nations Leadership Council supports this recommendation.

We hope you find this information useful. Please feel free to contact FNEC and FNSA with your questions. Find the latest updates on our COVID-19 information page <http://www.fnesc.ca/covid19/>.