



reciprocal tuition handbook

FOR NON-INDEPENDENT FIRST NATION SCHOOLS

2026 EDITION

*prepared by the First Nations Schools Association
& First Nations Education Steering Committee*

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WHAT IS RECIPROCAL TUITION?

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT RECIPROCAL TUITION?

IS MY SCHOOL ELIGIBLE FOR RECIPROCAL TUITION?

HOW CAN MY SCHOOL ACCESS RECIPROCAL TUITION?

WHERE CAN I GET MORE DETAILS?

HOW CAN I GET HELP?

WHAT IS THE 2026/27 TIMELINE?

Reciprocal Tuition Handbook for Non-Independent First Nation Schools

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1. What is Reciprocal Tuition?

In November 2009, the Province of British Columbia (BC) and the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) reached a Reciprocal Tuition Agreement.

Under that Agreement, the BC Ministry of Education provides full per-pupil funding* for students who are:

- attending a First Nation school (including a school operated by a First Nation named in the schedule to the *First Nations Jurisdiction over Education in British Columbia Act* – i.e. a Participating First Nation (PFN) – as of September 29 of the current school year;
- school age as defined by the BC Ministry of Education (at least five years of age by December 31 of the current school year and up to age 19 before July 1 of the current school year); **and**
- living off-reserve and ineligible for federal education funding.

These are students who would be funded by the Province of British Columbia if they attended a public or independent school.

The following students are **not** eligible for Reciprocal Tuition:

- Pre-primary or early childhood education children under five years of age on December 31 of the current school year.
- Students 19 years of age or older before July 1 of the current school year.
- Out-of-province or international students who are not involved in a reciprocal exchange, such as a Rotary Club Exchange Program. These are students who are not ordinarily resident in BC, and their guardians are also not ordinarily resident in the province. (The Ministry does not provide funding for these students).

*** Note:** The reciprocal tuition agreement states that the rates used to pay First Nation schools for reciprocal tuition funding are based on an amount "equal to the per FTE First Nations Student Rate applicable in the public school district in which the school is located." In other words, each reciprocal tuition payment is based on the average per pupil funding for the school district in which the eligible First Nation school resides. This means that reciprocal tuition payments account for all of the items factored into those district averages, including Indigenous education and inclusive education.¹

¹ Information provided by the BC Ministry of Education.

2. What Do I Need to Know About Reciprocal Tuition?

This Handbook has been created to support First Nation schools (including PFN schools) in accessing Reciprocal Tuition.

This resource is for non-Independent First Nations schools only. First Nations schools that are also BC-Certified Independent Schools are exempt from applying for reciprocal tuition, as they are automatically eligible for provincial funding for students who live off-reserve.

This Handbook provides a broad overview of the process for accessing Reciprocal Tuition and a summary of the general requirements for receiving this funding. More details are provided in the full Reciprocal Tuition Agreement. The Handbook explains which schools are eligible for Reciprocal Tuition. It then outlines how interested schools can apply.

We recommend that people who are interested in Reciprocal Tuition read through this short document for an overall understanding of the funding opportunity.

Then, all of the forms and documents referred to in this Handbook can be accessed from the BC Ministry of Education and Child Care web site.

As highlighted further in this Handbook, additional help is available from the BC Ministry of Education and Child Care.

3. Is My School Eligible for Reciprocal Tuition?

*** As noted above, First Nation schools with Independent status are automatically eligible for reciprocal tuition and do not need to make special application to the Ministry.*

In order to be eligible for Reciprocal Tuition, non-Independent First Nation schools (including PFN schools) must meet the conditions set out in the Reciprocal Tuition Agreement, as summarized below.

- ☐ The school has current First Nations Schools Association (FNSA) certification or, in the case of PFN schools, current FNSA or First Nations Education Authority (FNEA) certification, based upon completion of the First Nations Schools Assessment and Certification Process.
- ☐ The school employs only teachers who are certified by the Ministry of Education to teach the British Columbia Curriculum or, in the case of schools operated by a PFN, teachers who hold a First Nations Education Authority (FNEA) teaching certificate, other than teachers who teach First Nations language or culture.
- ☐ The school's staff have undergone a criminal record check² if they:
 - work with children directly; and/or
 - have, or potentially have, unsupervised access to children.
- ☐ Student records are established and maintained for all eligible students.³
- ☐ The school has established an appeals procedure for parents and eligible students.
- ☐ The First Nation school has applied for Personal Education Numbers (PENs) for all eligible students (see below for more information).

² For interested schools, a *Criminal Record Checks and First Nations Schools* pamphlet prepared by FNEA and FNSA (September 2024) is available from www.fnsa.ca.

³ A *Student Record Keeping Handbook For First Nations Schools in BC* prepared by FNEA and FNSA (updated 2024) is also available.

4. How Can My School Access Reciprocal Tuition?

A. If your school is interested in applying for reciprocal tuition for the first time ...

Non-Independent First Nation schools (including PFN schools) that want to access reciprocal tuition must submit a full and complete application to the BC Ministry of Education.

To get started, interested First Nation schools must electronically return Form 1601 to the Ministry of Education. This form is called *First Nations School Data Collection*. It must be submitted to the Ministry by *September 1, 2026*.

Form 1601 requests the following information.

- School demographics: name, physical and mailing addresses, telephone and facsimile numbers and email address
- Contact person: the name of the principal or head teacher

Step by step instructions for completing the 1601 Form are available on the Ministry of Education web site.

First-time applicants must also provide a signed and witnessed *Reciprocal Tuition Agreement*, and must mail or courier a direct deposit application. Application forms are available from the Ministry's web site. These documents must be submitted to the Ministry by *September 18, 2026*.

After a complete Form 1601 has been submitted, the Ministry will contact interested schools and provide them with access to the Personal Education Number (PEN) web application.

First Nation schools will then request a PEN for each reciprocal tuition student who has not already been assigned one – *to be completed by September 21, 2026*.

The school must also submit:

1. A spreadsheet showing all students who are eligible for reciprocal tuition – *due by October 9, 2026*.
 - i. The spreadsheet must list all eligible school-aged students who were in attendance as of September 29.
 - ii. For each eligible student, the spreadsheet must include a Personal Education Number (PEN), name, birth date, gender, and grade level.
 - iii. The spreadsheet must indicate the number of courses for all students in secondary grades (grades 8 – 12).
2. A Reciprocal Tuition Checklist – *due by October 9, 2026*.
3. Proof of current FNSA or FNEA school certification – *due by October 9, 2026*. Examples of proof include an official letter from FNSA or FNEA, or a legible photocopy of the certification plaque.

In the week of October 16, 2026, the Ministry will notify applicants of any duplicate enrolments to be resolved between First Nation and public or independent schools.

All duplicate enrolments must be resolved by *October 23, 2026*.

The Province will send successful applicants appropriate payment by January 31, 2027.

B. If your school is interested in continuing to receive reciprocal tuition ...

All First Nation schools interested in continuing to receive reciprocal tuition must submit the following information to the Ministry.

1. An updated 1601 Form – *due no later than September 1, 2026.*
2. A request for PEN numbers for any new students for whom a PEN was not previously assigned – *due by September 21, 2026.*
3. A spreadsheet showing all students who are eligible for reciprocal tuition – *due by October 9, 2026.*
 - i. The spreadsheet must list all eligible school-aged students who were in attendance as of September 29.
 - ii. For each eligible student, the spreadsheet must include a Personal Education Number (PEN), name, birth date, gender, and grade level.
 - iii. The spreadsheet must indicate the number of courses for all students in secondary grades (grades 8 – 12).
4. A Reciprocal Tuition Checklist – *due by October 9, 2026.*
4. Proof of current FNSA or FNEA school certification – *due by October 9, 2026.* Examples of proof include an official letter from FNSA or FNEA, or a legible photocopy of the certification plaque.

In the week of October 16, 2026, the Ministry will notify applicants of any duplicate enrolments to be resolved between First Nation and public or independent schools.

All duplicate enrolments must be resolved by *October 23, 2026.*

The Province will send successful applicants appropriate payment by January 31, 2027.

5. Where Can I Get More Details?

The BC Ministry of Education implements the application process for reciprocal tuition.

All relevant information and forms are available on the Ministry of Education's web site.

Here you will find the 2026/27 Reciprocal Tuition Funding Application Package

1. Cover Letter for the Reciprocal Tuition Funding Application Package 2026/27
2. An overview of the procedures governing the Reciprocal Tuition Data Collection for Non-Independent First Nation Schools
3. Quick reference instructions for completing Form 1601 First Nations School Data Collection
4. Form 1601: First Nations School Data Collection
5. Quick reference instructions for Reciprocal Tuition Student Data Collection
6. Sample student-level spreadsheet
7. Reciprocal Tuition Agreement (for first-time applicants only)
8. A Reciprocal Tuition Checklist
9. Reciprocal Tuition Direct Deposit Application (for first time applicants only, which must be returned by mail or courier)

6. How Can I Get Help?

Interested First Nation schools can call the Ministry of Education's Indigenous education team at any time by:

- Calling the team's main reception line: 250-356-1891
- Calling the Service BC Centre toll free at 1-800-663-7867 and asking to be connected to the team at 250-356-1891
- Emailing Data.Management@gov.bc.ca

7. What Is the 2026/27 Timeline?

Due by Sept. 1, 2026	All interested First Nation schools submit Form 1601 to the Ministry of Education – including new and continuing schools
Due by Sept. 18, 2026	First-time applicants provide a signed and witnessed <i>Reciprocal Tuition Agreement</i> , and mail or courier a direct deposit application
After receipt by the Ministry of a completed form 1601 ...	The Ministry provides first-time applicants with access to the Personal Education Number (PEN) web application
No later than Sept. 21, 2026	First-time applicants request a PEN for each reciprocal tuition student who has not already been assigned one, and continuing schools request a PEN for new students who do not have one
By Oct. 9, 2026	All interested schools submit a student spreadsheet, signed reciprocal tuition checklist, and proof of current FNSA or FNEA school certification
Week of Oct. 16, 2026	The Ministry notifies all applicants of any duplicate enrolments in First Nation schools and public or independent schools that need to be resolved
By Oct. 23, 2026	All duplicate enrolments must be resolved
By Jan. 31, 2027	The Province sends successful applicants appropriate payment