

First Nation Schools Association Backgrounder for Joint Gathering, November 16 & 18, 2015

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The long held vision for First Nation Control of First Nations education is given meaning in First Nation schools. In BC, the schools have worked together since 1987 to ensure that principles of local control and parental involvement are reflected in the schools and have striven to achieve the vision of school environments that lead to success for students while assuring the survival of cultural beliefs and knowledge.

The First Nations Schools Association is a registered society with a broad constitutional mandate that includes, in part, the purpose of supporting “the work of the First Nations schools in developing and implementing culturally appropriate, meaningful and quality educational programs”.

Of the 127 on reserve schools in BC, enrolling a total of approximately 5000, over 90% maintain their First Nations Schools Association membership. The association’s membership is comprised of First Nation school Authorized Representatives for each school organized into 8 regions, defined by First Nation affiliation, from which 10 Directors are chosen to serve a 2-year term on the FNSA Board. Authorized Representatives meet annually to discuss significant issues and provide direction for the development of programs and services through resolutions at their Annual General Meeting.

The FNSA Board meets quarterly to receive reports on school programs and services and to provide on-going direction. A four member Executive meets as circumstances require and also meets with the FNESC Executive to work on inter-organizational issues.

The mandate of FNSA aligns directly with the stated purpose of TEFA which is, “to identify the roles, responsibilities and commitments of the Parties relating to the improvement of educational outcomes for students in First Nation schools in British Columbia....” and is linked to the FNSA in the FNESC/FNSA Memorandum of Understanding (see handout) which acknowledges that,

“FNSA will create and implement programs and services for First Nation schools and establish goals and objectives in regard to the determination of appropriate and effective second level services delivered to schools” (Number 3 of MOU);

“FNESC and FNSA will ... jointly approve an annual workplan and budget for programs and services for First Nations schools and will monitor the implementation of the workplan...” (Number 4 of MOU).

“FNSA will support the TEFA implementation, with the understanding that all work that is relevant to First Nations schools will be directed by FNSA” (Clause H of MOU).

Currently, First Nations Schools Association Services for First Nations schools include:

1. Tripartite Education Framework Agreement (TEFA) Funded Services
 - 1.1 Professional Growth Process
 - 1.2 First Nations Schools Assessment and Certification Project
 - 1.3 Capacity Building Coaching
 - 1.4 Literacy Coaching
 - 1.5 Professional Learning Communities
 - 1.6 Curriculum Development Support
 - 1.7 First Nations Languages Coach
 - 1.8 Data Records and User Management System
 - 1.9 Technology and Learning Support
 - 1.10 Connected Classrooms Initiative
 - 1.11 Professional Development Events

1.12 School Bulk Purchasing

2. Special Education Program Funded Services

2.1 Special Education Managers

2.2 Special Education Coaches

2.3 Speech Language Pathology Services

2.4 Education Psychology Services

2.5 Assistive Technology Services

(Many of these services pre-date TEFA)

The reporting requirements for TEFA are all related to the work of First Nations schools and include annual reports to the federal government on:

1. *Percentage of students who meet or exceed standards for reading, writing, and numeracy*
2. *Student attendance*
3. *Teacher / student ratio*
4. *Teacher certification*
5. *Teacher years of experience*
6. *Student / computer ratio*
7. *Level of connectivity*
8. *Administration of standard learning assessments, where applicable*

The TEFA structure has been described in some detail. It's important to note that First Nations TEFA school funding is enrolment based, so reductions/additions in student numbers result in lower or higher funding levels. Shortfalls in funding still exist in the areas of operations and maintenance, technology, economies of scale, language and culture, and capital/infrastructure funding.

On a positive note, First Nations schools have benefited from a relationship with the province, accessing reciprocal tuition through jurisdiction negotiations since September 2009 (worth \$14 million in 2014/15), and as of last year, access to provincial exams for First Nations schools with secondary programs. Work is currently underway to allow First Nations schools to offer the BC Dogwood graduation certificate, prior to the next step that will be a First Nations Graduation Certificate unique to our schools, recognized by provincial educational institutions.

FNSA sponsors research and program reviews to ensure that there is a practical rationale for programs and services supported. Early evidence from data collected indicates that efforts are resulting in modest gains in the area of student achievement and challenges continue in attaining satisfactory levels of student attendance.

A continuing goal, not yet achieved under TEFA, is to ensure that there is sustainable, comprehensive, adequate funding for schools, which allows for the flexibility to deliver culturally relevant programs, and sufficient second level services to extend equitable services to all First Nation schools.

Although not a TEFA program, adequacy of resourcing for students with special needs continues to be an issue.

FNSA continues to take direction from its community-based membership to build ever better schools. The membership passed a resolution at their 2015 AGM to become a signatory to the next TEFA agreement.

Our schools are key to our overall success. The First Nations School Association supports the pivotal role of Band Councils in improving their schools by Band Councils being informed about how their students are doing, seeking excellence in teaching and being advocates for their schools and staff.