

***The Destiny of Education for  
First Nations Children***

***Priority Intervention Areas***

Presented to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development

by

The First Nations Education Council



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Translated version  
(from French to English)

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**Minawatc tca nihe nicike ka mihitisonaniwok; tante ke ki tocikatak kirano tipirawe kitci ki mihitisoikw, kirano kitci ki mitaikw kaskina tan wa irakonamok mia tapickotc weckatc ka ki totakik.**

**Kirano tipirawe kitci ki ocitaikw kitirakonikewino e ici tacikeikw kaie e ici nataweritamok. Patama kiskinohamakewin wewerita kata motetakaniwon kaie ke ki otamirotcik. E ici ni kaie notepariikw nama tipi taciwok ke ici otamirotcik kitci ki mitatcik ka wi mihitisoikw ekota neta patama ke otci matceparik. Ekotca ni e ickwa witaman.**

Kimocomino Nérée Chachai otarimwewin  
Kiskinohamakewinik ki ka otci kackihonano  
Conference on Atikamekw Education, Trois-Rivières, Akokatcic pisimw 1986

**What does autonomy really mean to us? It means making our own decisions, taking our lives into our own hands, just as our ancestors did before us.**

**We need our own guiding principles, ones that are right for our time and place and meet our needs. And the needs are great in education. So many more people are needed to help us continue our work towards taking full responsibility for our education and to help us consolidate the gains we have made so far.**

Our Elder Nérée Chachai  
Conference on Atikamekw Education Trois-Rivières, Akokatcic pisimw 1986

Free translation

## ***Foreword***

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The First Nations Education Council is proposing original and innovative measures to effectively alleviate the current situation that has been created by recurring deficiencies in the education systems and services of the First Nations communities.

This document sets out an action plan for applying concrete solutions to these problems, thereby enhancing current services and making them more effective.

We have identified areas of intervention that require full attention in order to redress the current situation, all in terms of the communities' real needs. The proposals we are making for these priority areas of intervention include innovative programs, programs for young adults, programs to facilitate academic success, and measures for obtaining the necessary human and material resources. We are also proposing administrative procedures that reflect the communities' control of and accountability for their education systems. In this document, we set out the essential measures that must be taken, as dictated by the reality and the hopes of the First Nations communities.

## ***Introduction***

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### **First Nations Education Council**

The First Nations Education Council was founded in 1985. It is a First Nations organization, which was created by First Nations members for the benefit of First Nations members. Its mission is to defend its member communities' interests in order to improve educational services for their students. As a First Nations organization, the FNEC promotes joint action among members, disseminates relevant information to members, helps members manage the educational services under their jurisdiction, and supports members' claims and requests to governments and other bodies.

The FNEC is associated with the Assembly of First Nations of Quebec and Labrador (AFNQL), which is comprised of all the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador Chiefs. The FNEC carries out the mandates it receives from its general assembly, which is made up of one representative per member community. The FNEC is involved in various issues, namely:

- Special education;
- Vocational training;
- Aboriginal languages;
- New technologies in the schools;
- Training;
- Tuition fees;
- Fetal alcohol syndrome;
- Videoconference;
- Etc.

The FNEC administers various programs for its member communities.

The FNEC advocates for its member communities with the various departments and remains attentive at all times to the requests made by its member communities. It promotes joint action and the sharing of best practices among members. It conducts research on specific education-related issues. With its seventeen years' experience, it has a credible base in each member community, in addition to being part of an efficient contact network.

Moreover, the FNEC has clearly proven its capacity to adequately manage extensive projects, such as special education, and a wide range of programs intended for First Nations communities (Gathering Strength, Aboriginal Languages, etc.)

### **FNEC General Assembly Recommendations**

At their most recent general assembly, the FNEC's member communities described their growing concerns about several files. These included the renewal of authorities and the corresponding uncertainty surrounding the renewal of programs (e.g., Gathering Strength, the Youth Program, the Aboriginal languages program); the lack of funding in such areas as computers, professional development and others; special education (which is stagnating at the national level); the sudden creation of a national committee that is not accountable to the First Nations populations, and, above all, the lack of genuine participation by the First Nations and their education organizations in the processes leading to decisions that have important impacts on their communities.

We, therefore, believe it is appropriate to reiterate our concerns by presenting a table with the issues that deserve special attention, in the hope that you will understand the reason behind our action. We firmly believe we are fully able not only to identify needs, but also to take part in the processes leading to decisions that affect our education systems.

Given the urgency of the situation, and since your calendar shows that the recommendations of the national committee (and very likely other parties as well) will come in mid-December, we have prepared this document, which, although it is incomplete, gives a picture of the priority needs and apprehensions of the FNEC's member communities.

We believe that important measures must be taken immediately to avoid a dramatic situation from developing in the all too near future. The First Nations education system cannot be allowed to continue lagging behind non-Aboriginal school systems in any of its activities. The result would be catastrophic for the future of the First Nations.

## **1. Educational Services: Innovative Programs**

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### **1.1 Special Education**

#### **Context**

In 1997, the FNEC and its member communities, aware that their special needs students had been ignored for so long, came up with an original action plan, namely a three-year pilot project in special education. This project was implemented with funding from the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (DIAND). It ended in 2000, and proved to be an unqualified success, as clearly seen in the considerable benefits it brought to the communities. The project also showed the unquestionable need for the federal government to create a national special education policy for all of the First Nations in Canada. Moreover, the Council of Ministers of Education (Canada) in conjunction with UNESCO at the International Education Conference in Geneva, had this to say about the results of the FNEC's pilot project: *"The report that was presented for the project in January 2001 shows that special education services have highly positive benefits for children's education. The First Nations are still hoping that a national policy will be established for the funding of special education services."*

As a follow-up to these positive results, the FNEC and its member communities were allocated operating budgets to deliver special education services in 2000-2001. Unfortunately, the federal government considers these services to be part of a provisional program, not one that will offer essential services on a permanent basis.

Despite certain announcements by the federal government and DIAND, and the nebulous positions they have taken, they did renew the special education operating budget for the FNEC and its member communities for the years 2001-2002 and 2002-2003. However, the level of funding provided does not correspond to actual needs. Also, this budget was allocated only after a considerable delay, which created very critical and difficult situations for the communities in their efforts to hire qualified professionals and ensure the delivery of effective services.

#### **Current Situation**

As indicated by the context described above, the FNEC and its member communities are in a potentially conflicting situation, owing to the actions of the federal government and DIAND. They have had to adapt as best they can to offer special education services to a growing number of students who need such services, all in an atmosphere of uncertainty and worry, caused by the granting of an insufficient budget based on arbitrary decisions.



The budgets were renewed, in fact, at a level that took no account of the real needs of the FNEC's member communities. Yet the FNEC's three-year pilot project and the services delivered in the 22 communities following the project's completion show an annual budget of \$6.5 million is required to meet needs, and can do so only if these are stabilized.

Moreover, the First Nations in Canada are still waiting for the creation of a genuine national policy that will ensure permanent funding for special education. In that regard, the Finance Minister announced in December 2001 that \$60 million, spread out over two years, would be allocated to special education for the First Nations. This funding, however, was to be provided at the expense of the Gathering Strength program, which was to be cut back to the detriment of the communities it serves. Almost a year after the announcement was made, this funding has yet to materialize.

We also have reason to doubt the effectiveness of any work by DIAND to establish a special education policy and program, the terms and conditions of which are unknown and, thus, undefined. The formation of such a policy and program must take full account of the expertise that the First Nations have developed in special education.

## **Priorities**

Obtain recurring funding in special education with an overall budget to provide:

1. Special education services in the member communities of the FNEC according to the needs established by the communities.
2. Research and evaluation services in special education:
  - Comparative research on clientele's needs and profiles.
  - Research on the needs of children and families outside of school hours.
3. Evaluation of results and essential needs, kept in a regularly updated computerized database.
4. Training in special education for members of the First Nations, with a financial assistance program and adequate reimbursement of costs incurred in having to leave the community to study.
5. Database with comprehensive information on special education professionals.
6. Recruitment and placement services with intercultural training for non-Aboriginal professionals.
7. Incentive measures enabling the communities to eliminate their turnover problems in special education.
8. A memorandum of understanding between DIAND and Health Canada so that First Nations schools can have an intervention budget for fetal alcohol syndrome.
9. Definitive creation of a policy and a program for special education, with recurring budgets for all the First Nations.

Through the expertise it has gained in carrying out its mandates and missions, the FNEC could serve as a single window for action on all the above-mentioned priorities on behalf of its involved member communities, from the perspective of reasonableness, savings and efficacy.

## 1.2 Aboriginal Languages

### Context

“The exceptionally close ties linking language, thought and culture explain the priority given by Aboriginal peoples to the teaching of their languages.” (Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Volume 3, Gathering Strength, p. 523)

Linguistic research has shown that, in general, First Nations children are made to stop studying in their Aboriginal language at too early an age and begin studying in French or English. This is done so that they can acquire and apply high levels of skill in their second language. (See linguistic studies, including *Issues in Language and Education for Natives Populations in Quebec*, carried out by Lynn Drapeau for the RCAP in 1995.)

The predominant role that English and French can play in schools has harmed the vitality of Aboriginal languages as the language of communication for First Nations children. Because of this, we note a steady decline in the communities’ use of their first language. It would be idealistic to believe that informal mechanisms alone could halt this decline and preserve the vitality of our Aboriginal languages. A formal mechanism can be provided by the schools, which the First Nations communities are well aware can play an important role in the efforts made to preserve their languages.

### Current Situation

The First Nations communities are studying or working with several models for teaching Aboriginal languages in their schools. The complexity of the situation, however, and the critical lack of resources (i.e., teaching material in Aboriginal languages, teachers, linguists and other specialists) present the danger that projects based on these models could be short-lived.

The First Nations communities and their parents need more options for teaching Aboriginal languages. These options include:

- Use of Aboriginal languages as the main language of instruction for all grades;
- Use of Aboriginal languages as second languages, to ensure oral and written bilingualism;
- Aboriginal language immersion for young children, who go on to study in English and French after they know their own language well enough.

The communities will need concrete support from several key areas of government to preserve and promote their languages.

### Priorities

1. Develop Aboriginal language programs and Aboriginal language teacher training programs.
2. Hire specialists to carry out research on Aboriginal languages.
3. Design and produce learning material in Aboriginal languages.
4. Obtain recognition of elders and other Aboriginal language speakers as teachers of Aboriginal languages.

## 1.3 Multi-Concepts Program

### Context

Over the past few years, the educational systems in Canada have developed new school programs to meet new expectations created by contemporary realities. Students are being offered new academic opportunities through programs such as the following:

- Sport-study programs;
- Art-study programs;
- International studies programs.

Several Quebec schools and colleges are offering their students these newly-designed programs, which allow them to develop specific skills or talents in combination with the development of their intellectual skills. Some students are choosing programs in sports or the arts, while others are opting for international studies programs, through which they can combine their personal and social education with solid intellectual training, to nurture their openness to and exploration of interculturality. New infrastructures have had to be developed and new specialists hired to ensure the effectiveness of all these programs.

When we see the considerable passion and skills that the First Nations youth is demonstrating for its sport or art, such as music and dance, when we see how curious they are to find out more about indigenous peoples elsewhere in the world and about the globalization of Aboriginal issues, we realize more and more the need to offer multi-concept programs in our communities' schools.

### Current Situation

DIAND's current policies contain no provisions or considerations, which would allow the First Nations communities to offer their students the kinds of multi-concept programs described above. Such new forms of academic study, however, in particular the sports-study and arts-study programs, have the advantage of providing our students with new sources of motivation and academic success, and could even bring some of our young dropouts back to the schools.

### Priorities

1. Obtain funding that will allow the First Nations communities to develop multi-concept programs, according to their choice and the needs they have identified.
2. Ensure the systematic inclusion of multi-concept programs in the overall education system of the First Nations.

## 1.4 Program and Curriculum Development

### Context

In 1972, the National Indian Brotherhood published a policy statement entitled "Indian control of Indian Education." Through this document the NIB unequivocally demanded the takeover of the First Nations educational service by the communities and parents. They noted the obvious inability of the federal, provincial, and territorial governments to adopt educational policies based on the First Nations' own objectives.

Thirty years later, we have observed some progress, but it has been made at an extremely slow pace and the First Nations are still far from reaching their objectives. Over this period, First Nations communities, educators and organizations (such as the FNEC) have tried to create innovative educational programs for their populations. Why, then, have all these efforts not led to genuine **Indian control of Indian education**?

One of the main reasons is that First Nations schools have been required, and are still required in 2002, to sign funding agreements stipulating that locally-offered programs must comply with provincial standards.

All the First Nations communities, however, have acquired a great deal of expertise and experience in education. They have been aware, and are even more so today, that the development of innovative programs has nothing to do with the adoption of inferior standards. They want to base their educational programs on their own values.

## **Current Situation**

Today, Aboriginal children are still forced to study in the regular programs established by the dominant society. The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples has this to say about the situation: "The Aboriginal component of programs is usually limited to additional material designed to enrich the normal content of programs. It does not call into question the core hypotheses, values and logic that are being taught". (Volume 3, Gathering Strength, p. 519)

This observation still holds true today. Indeed, even though Aboriginal language and culture courses are given in many community schools, there have been none or very few changes to courses in English, French, the sciences, mathematics, and the social sciences.

Moreover, in their efforts to achieve full self-government, the First Nations have the right to define and apply their own programs and standards for excellence in education. This seems, however, to be unrealistic in the current context. If we take, for example, the payment of tuition fees for students attending the community schools, it appears that these costs cover development in three areas: curricula, Aboriginal language development and preservation and learning material. These three priority areas are all being severely under-funded.

The communities need specific budgets for these priority areas. We need only think, in this respect, of all the educational material that has to be developed to teach and preserve Aboriginal languages.

This situation is forcing Aboriginal communities to prioritize certain aspects of their educational services.

## **Priorities**

The FNEC and its member communities are basing their priorities on their disparate situations and budgets, for implementation at their own rate and according to their own needs:

1. Standards and regulations for educational programs at the pre-school, elementary, and secondary levels.
2. An adequate education system that offers services by means of a pedagogy and programs that preserve and give preponderance to the fundamental values of the First Nations.

3. Strong direction for schools coming under the programs and structures in place in the communities.
4. Creation and acquisition of effective educational material that meets the needs of teachers and students.

## **2. Educational Services: Incentive Programs**

### **2.1 School Dropout Problem**

#### **Context**

The school dropout problem has become a major social phenomenon everywhere in Canada today. Educational systems and services seem unable to stem the tide of dropouts, and families feel there is little they can do in this respect. In response, some governments have created initiatives to help the schools deal with the problem. For example, in each of the past two years the Quebec government provided significant funding, which the school boards and schools used to develop strategies and programs for keeping students in classrooms.

First Nations societies are not spared this problem. Indeed, the dropout rate in their communities has gone beyond all accepted levels to reach alarming and potentially catastrophic proportions. The First Nations have few or no means to combat the problem.

#### **Current Situation**

"Only 22% of young dropouts aged 15 to 24 return to high school, while 11% register in adult education courses to finish their studies. Close to 63% never return to school". (Statistics Canada: Aboriginal Peoples Survey- Special Tabulations, 1994).

Young First Nations members who quit school acquire certain life experiences that set them apart from their peers. When they return to school, they are placed with younger students with fewer life experiences. This setting does not meet their needs. For example, some young women cannot come back to school because they are single mothers and there are no day-care services at the schools. Young men are often working to support their families, and they too cannot come back. This dropout phenomenon is aggravated by two factors. First, there are no programs for detecting possible dropouts and second, our youth are afflicted with many psychosocial problems.

The First Nations communities urgently need adequate resources that will help them take concrete and effective action to combat the dropout situation.

## Priorities

1. Design and implement secondary-school programs to bring dropouts back to the classroom, based on their specific situations, which are different from those of younger students.
2. Design and implement specialized programs, as follows:
  - Relevant, multi-faceted programs that meet the needs and interests of students who have dropped out.
  - Cooperative education program.
3. Set up day-care services in the schools.
4. Develop special counselling and support services.
5. Develop awareness building and extra-curricular activities at the primary and secondary school levels regarding occupational training, sports-study programs, arts-study programs, etc.

## 2.2 Parenting Skills

### Context

Every educational system recognizes the importance of parental involvement in the education of its students. Indeed, parental involvement is as important a factor in the success of the educational system as it is for the success of the children.

The First Nations communities find it difficult, as a rule, to get parents involved in the education of their children. Several factors can be suggested to explain their lack of interest. Parents may not have confidence in the current system and may even be distrustful of what the teachers are doing in the classrooms. Their unwillingness may also stem from the widespread abuse suffered by generations of Aboriginal people who were forced into the residential and mission schools. Their experiences with this former system robbed them of parenting skills and left them incapable of passing on any kind of skills to their children.

### Current Situation

The Aboriginal communities have tried various means to get parents more involved in their children's education. For example, they have held conferences and general meetings on parental involvement, and have invited parents to attend numerous meetings with teachers and school administrators. All of these initiatives are cause for hope, but bringing genuine parental involvement about still appears a long way from becoming a reality.

The First Nations communities need resources that will allow them to develop original means for getting parents more involved in the learning and other school activities of their children, as part of the overall objective to broaden and enhance parenting skills.

## Priorities

1. Develop a parenting skills program under which the communities can:  
Implement initiatives for promoting parental involvement in the education of their children. Possible initiatives here include:
  - Creating flexible structures to foster parental involvement in various areas of the communities' educational services.
  - Implementing alternate support measures for students, in the form of mentoring and tutoring provided by volunteers in the communities.
  - Creating multi-disciplinary pedagogical measures to teach young students about parenting skills, thereby preparing them to effectively take on parental responsibilities later in life.

## ***3. Educational Services: Human Resources and Equipment***

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### **3.1 Use of Computers and ICTs in the Schools**

#### **Context**

Education today is almost wholly dependent on the use of new teaching methods developed in recent decades. Teaching methods have evolved a great deal, and are now fully based on the use of a range of approaches to reach more students and thus improve their chances of success. The biggest innovation in teaching methods has, without a doubt, been the arrival of technologies that scarcely existed just 15 years ago.

Technology is evolving so rapidly that we are constantly scrambling and learning to try to keep up. The world of communications has been entirely transformed, and so, at the same time, has the world of education, since by definition, education means the communication of knowledge.

Today's students have no choice but to master these new technologies, since the school systems are continuing to base their research, communication and study methods more and more on the use of ICTs. Technology is not just an invaluable learning tool; it has become, for communities that are geographically or culturally isolated, an extraordinary means for communicating with the rest of the world.

Canada's report to the 46<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Education, held in Geneva, on September 5-8, 2001, stated: "All ministers of education have established plans for using information and communication technologies (ICTs) to help students acquire the skills they need to fully participate in an increasingly complex and knowledge-based society."

Canada's report goes on to say: "The results of these studies indicate that the First Nations have urgent needs in the area of ICTs, particularly in terms of equipment, training and cabling/networking infrastructure."

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## Current Situation

Twenty years ago, the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs developed a formula to provide funding for educational services on a per capita basis. The amounts allocated for students are commonly referred to as tuition fees. These fees include services in such areas as curriculum, languages, etc. When the formula was introduced, ICTs were in their infancy, and no one could have predicted the explosive growth they would undergo.

The formula, as it exists today, does not take account of ICTs as learning tools. First Nations schools, therefore, have a huge distance to cover if they are to catch up with other schools in many areas, which incontestably include the use of ICTs. Even though ICTs offer enormous possibilities, they are extremely costly since they require major investments in equipment, training and maintenance.

Gathering Strength is the only program under which we have been able to acquire some ICTs. This program, however, is intended to provide funding to make up for almost all the shortcomings in the First Nations education system. It cannot, by itself, ensure the integration of ICTs into our schools.

First Nations schools are far behind their counterparts in terms of computer equipment and use. The computer/student ratios in provincial schools vary from 1:5 to 1:10, whereas, according to a study carried out in 2002, the ratio among First Nations is three times higher. Also according to this study, the First Nations need more than just computers. They also need software programs, peripheral equipment, and technical support training.

## Priorities

It is now urgent that we consider ways for creating a funding program that will ensure the development of ICTs for use in our schools. The activities targeted by such a program should include: bringing the computer/student ratio down to an acceptable level, training for teachers and users, new software programs, computer labs and equipment, networking for peripherals, and technical support.

We, therefore, recommend establishing an aggressive program to integrate ICTs into First Nations schools over a five-year period, to help them catch up with non-Aboriginal schools. The program, to be managed by the FNEC, would be results-based in its approach. Thus, it is important that we identify needs, in order to establish a program that takes full account of the realities of the communities. To obtain conclusive results, we must be able to offer a program that includes all the elements fundamental to the success of the program.

1. The program would allow for ICTs in the schools and consider the necessary elements for success:
  - 1.1 Purchase of equipment
  - 1.2 Teacher training
  - 1.3 Technical support
  - 1.4 Peripherals
  - 1.5 Equipment



## 3.2 Solutions for Recruiting and Keeping Teachers

### Context

Until the very recent past, First Nations members did not have the opportunity or possibility to receive adequate training allowing them to become, among other things, qualified teachers. Today, there are more Aboriginal teachers in First Nations schools, but there are still not enough. The communities have had to deal with this shortage in the past, and they still have to deal with it. As noted in the paragraph on priorities, the FNEC's member communities intend to take decisive actions to overcome this problem. The communities must also deal with a high turnover rate among non-Aboriginal teachers. Indeed, they have many difficulties recruiting and keeping these teachers.

DIAND has already acknowledged the problem: "Although several factors contribute to recruitment problems, the overall shortage of teachers, which stems in part from the Quebec government's encouragement of early retirements a few years ago, is seen to be an important contributing factor" (Community Development Branch, DIAND, April 10, 2002). Looking at this situation from the perspective of the near future, we see that some First Nations communities may encounter even more difficulties in recruiting and maintaining teachers and educational specialists, while at the same time their student populations continue to increase.

The FNEC and its member communities agree that, given this current inflationary context, they must prioritize certain actions to alleviate the problems they are going through.

### Current Situation

#### 1. RECRUITMENT

Every year, the FNEC's member communities run recruitment campaigns to attract teachers and specialists. These campaigns are very expensive and their results are of limited success if we consider the low retention level of these professionals. Without a centralized recruitment centre, the communities must commit to considerable expenditures to hire personnel. They are also often at the mercy of specialized human resource consultants who do not fully understand the Aboriginal context. They find themselves forced, therefore, to hire teachers who are not fully qualified. Furthermore, at times they hire teachers who come into the community just to complete the basic requirements for their degree. These teachers usually have minimal knowledge of Aboriginal culture and are, therefore, unlikely to stay for a long time.

The federal and provincial authorities require that teachers have a teaching permit from the MEQ, as if that were an absolute guarantee that such teachers are model teachers. This is an absurd policy. For example, a community may want to hire an immigrant with a doctorate in the field of education from a foreign university, but it cannot do so if this person does not have an MEQ permit. This same person, however, can teach in the universities or colleges. What's more, a teacher with certification from Ontario or New Brunswick can teach in an Aboriginal community in Quebec only after receiving certification from the MEQ. This situation is brought about by a compliance policy set up by the MEQ to meet its own requirements to the detriment of the needs of the First Nations communities. Not only do the First Nations communities come up against barriers preventing them from hiring competent teachers, however, they cannot even pay teachers the same salaries they would receive in the Quebec public school system, owing to their limited education budgets.

## 2. MAINTENANCE

The current obstacles preventing the communities from hiring and retaining teachers and specialists have a major negative impact on the situation, which threatens to worsen significantly if important corrective measures are not taken in the immediate future. If we look squarely at the situation, we can observe several concrete problems:

- Under the current system, teachers spend only one probationary year to become certified (four years of university study, compared to three in the past, with the number of probationary years going down from two to one). The facts prove that many teachers who come to spend their probationary year at a First Nations school leave after they have completed that year. It is inconceivable that First Nations schools should serve solely to allow students to complete their probationary periods and obtain their degrees. These teachers then rush to leave the communities once their probationary period is over.
- There is a chronic lack of support for teachers, especially in remote communities, which have the greatest professional development needs but are without the corresponding funding (travel costs, etc.).
- Remoteness and harsh living conditions mean there are fewer urban amenities and a reduced quality of life for non-Aboriginal teachers in some communities.
- The housing shortage, which means that non-Aboriginal teachers and education specialists must often share accommodations, or even live in accommodations bordering on the unsanitary, clearly works against any efforts to retain these persons.
- The over-frequent changes during the school year, due to the resignations of teachers, undermine student motivation and disrupt the learning experience. This phenomenon also considerably increases the recruiting costs of the communities, and leaves them with no option but to hire teachers who are barely qualified.

## Priorities

The First Nations communities need to take comprehensive action, that is both fully reasoned out and reasonable, to overcome the problem of the lack of Aboriginal teachers and education specialists, and to be able to recruit and retain non-Aboriginal staff. Such action must focus on the following priorities, all of which depend on the allocation of a global budget for intervention over the short, medium and long term:

### 1. ABORIGINAL TEACHERS AND SPECIALISTS

- 1.1. Establish a program to promote teaching as a career for Aboriginal students, beginning in grades 7 and 8.
- 1.2. Evaluate systematically current Aboriginal teacher-training programs.
- 1.3. Design and implement an Aboriginal teacher-training program that is based on Aboriginal teaching methods, Aboriginal history, traditions and values, and the teaching of Aboriginal languages.
  - 1.3.1. Within the framework of the creation of an Aboriginal post-secondary institution.
  - 1.3.2. Within the framework of partnerships with existing post-secondary institutions.
- 1.4. Implement financial measures to encourage young Aboriginal people and Aboriginal teachers to embark on teaching careers at the elementary and secondary levels (student bursaries and loans).

- 1.5. Implement financial measures enabling Aboriginal secondary teachers already teaching in the communities to take study sabbaticals, as a means of increasing the number of qualified teachers at that level.

## 2. RECRUITMENT

The FNEC is proposing innovative practices to resolve this problem:

- 2.1. Establish a central data bank of teachers and education specialists according to the profiles determined by the FNEC's member communities.
- 2.2. Create centralized recruitment and placement services to help the FNEC's member communities hire Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers and education specialists.
- 2.3. Create a centralized consulting service for those communities that need to recruit teachers and education specialists among the FNEC's member communities.
- 2.4. Put additional resources into place to ensure appropriate working conditions for teachers and education specialists in the communities.
- 2.5. Explore and design alternative teaching methods, e.g., distance learning, videoconferencing.
- 2.6. Modify the compliance clause imposed by the MEQ on the First Nations communities.

## 3. MAINTENANCE

- 3.1. Provide specific budgets (as part of the overall education budget) for Aboriginal communities to allow for the professional development of teachers and education specialists, regardless of the regional disparity of the communities or the number of students in each community.
- 3.2. Ensure flexible transfer of pension funds and employee benefits for non-Aboriginal teachers working in schools that are funded by DIAND.
- 3.3. Provide tax breaks to teachers and education specialists in remote communities.
- 3.4. Implement effective programs to resolve the housing problems of teachers and education specialists, without cutting into the housing programs that the band councils have in place to meet the needs of their own populations.
- 3.5. Implement a centralized intercultural training centre for non-Aboriginal teachers and specialists working in Aboriginal education or education-related areas.

### 3.3 Libraries

#### Context

All education departments and systems in the country have long known that elementary, secondary and post-secondary institutions must have well-equipped libraries offering a full range of library services. A school library gives students strong pedagogical support and, as such, is an essential part of any school.

The Quebec *ministère de l'Éducation* defines a school library as one which:

- Provides a system of pedagogical services offering learning and related activities (including computer-based activities and activities to increase students' motivation to read), support for student research methods, and support for teacher planning.
- Provides a data system offering an approach for looking up and finding information.
- Has the necessary equipment for offering library services, i.e., a general computerized catalogue, directories, guides, indexes, computer and audio-visual equipment, and CD-ROM data banks.
- Has qualified human resources and adequate financial resources, with specific budgets for equipment, operations and acquisition of new documentation.
- Is physically arranged in a manner conducive to learning.

School libraries in Quebec depend for their funding on the grants that each school board receives from the government. The school boards and the Quebec *ministère de la Culture et des Communications* work jointly to distribute funding among school and municipal libraries.

First Nations schools do not have a specific budget for developing and operating libraries. As a result, their library services fall far short of the services offered in the Quebec provincial school system. Yet the First Nations have the right to offer similar services so that their students can receive an education worthy of the name.

## **Current Situation**

Libraries in First Nations schools are chronically under-funded and under-developed, but they still want to play the role for which they were created, that of being an essential part of the public education system of the First Nations. Given the current situation and available resources, the libraries in First Nations schools cannot carry out their mission to offer learning and learning-related activities, including that of motivating students to read. They need modern library technology to do so. The First Nations communities also want their school libraries to serve all the members of their communities, i.e., offer them access to books and other material for general learning, to books and material dealing specifically with Aboriginal subjects, and to information and communications technologies. Such access would bring with it the additional benefit of fostering greater involvement by the communities' parents in the education of their children.

At present, any work the First Nations may wish to do concerning their school library situation is subject to a specific DIAND policy, which stipulates that resources for libraries are to be included in the budgets for building new schools or adding classrooms to existing schools. This policy sets out the administrative procedures and guidelines for school furnishings and equipment.

Accordingly, First Nations schools are bound by the following funding criteria:

- Funding for the initial purchase of school library furnishings and equipment, at either the elementary level or the secondary level, is calculated on the per capita basis allocated for school construction or expansion. For example, the DIAND guide states that the per capita allocation for building a secondary school is \$927 annually, per student. This sum includes the purchase of library furnishings and equipment. Furthermore, the DIAND guide does not take account of the purchase of books, and totally ignores libraries' needs for modern technology and services. First Nations schools must therefore dip into their construction budget to make sure they have a library!

- Annual funding to replace furnishings and equipment in the libraries of First Nations schools comes to \$60 per student at the high school level and \$42 per student at the elementary level. These standards, as set by DIAND, leave the communities no choice but to use their overall education budgets, which are already inadequate, to reequip and refurbish their libraries.
- DIAND's policy and the standards it entails wholly exclude library funding for pre-school programs.

It is astonishing to note that the First Nations authorities, who are fully competent in educational administration, have never been consulted on the discretionary methods and calculations used for the funding of their school libraries. By including resources for libraries in the communities' overall education budgets, which themselves are already insufficient, DIAND is forcing the First Nations to bear the burden created by a flagrant lack of library services.

The lack of a specific budget for libraries means that First Nations students are not receiving essential basic services to support their learning, and are being severely hampered in their efforts to improve their level of education.

## Priorities

1. Obtain a specific budget for libraries and library services in First Nations schools. Such a budget would provide means for:
  - 1.1. Helping the First Nations school libraries catch up with non-Aboriginal schools, so that they also have up-to-date pedagogical equipment and material.
  - 1.2. Purchasing adequate material for the extended clientele of the First Nations school libraries.
  - 1.3. Implementing and updating all forms of the latest library technology methods in First Nations schools.
  - 1.4. Purchasing high quality information and communications technology equipment for First Nations school libraries.
  - 1.5. Obtaining specific allocations for ongoing professional and technical development of First Nations school librarians.
  - 1.6. Offering library science courses to First Nations students.

## 3.4 Small Schools: Constraints

### Context

First Nations communities are, of course, not all the same size. The ones with smaller populations have extremely limited infrastructures and human resources, making it difficult for them to offer a wide range of services, and to maintain those services at a high level of quality.

Small schools in Aboriginal communities are subject to enormous constraints in the way they operate. They are required to offer the same range of educational services that are offered in most First Nations schools with much bigger student populations, but they must do so for fewer students with fewer resources.

For example, in Quebec, four of the member communities of the FNEC have schools with fewer than 80 students, while another four have schools with fewer than 150 students. These schools must deal with all the above-mentioned difficulties, placing them in a unique context, one that is wholly incomparable to the context that of any other school system. This is because only First Nations schools have to offer such a wide range of services to meet the challenges of their specific characteristics and situations.

## Current Situation

The special education needs of small schools are just as urgent as those of bigger schools, and sometimes even more so because they lack the financial and human resources required to meet those needs. Small schools too need to hire specialists, such as psychologists and orthopedagogists, to provide special education services. Very often, they are able to hire these professionals on a part-time basis only, which causes recruitment difficulties, since specialists are rarely willing to work part-time in remote communities. It is also common to see principals in smaller schools teaching two days a week to make up for the lack of teachers, and many other teachers having to show great versatility by teaching more than one subject. Such are the constraints caused by the ongoing difficulties that First Nations schools experience in order to recruit competent professionals. These are constraints that we can only qualify as risks for students who need strong pedagogical support from competent professionals in an atmosphere conducive to learning.

## Priorities

1. Obtain specific funding to help the small schools in First Nations communities overcome their shortages in human and financial resources.

## 3.5 School Construction and Expansion

### Context

"It is known that the Aboriginal population is increasing more rapidly than the Canadian population overall, especially because of its much higher fertility rate. The Aboriginal infant mortality rate is also higher than in Canada overall, even though it has gone down significantly. These two trends have led to rapid growth of the Aboriginal population." (*Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, Vol. 1— *Looking Forward, Looking Back*, p. 21).

This population explosion in the First Nations is far from slowing down. Today, 60% of people in Aboriginal communities are 25 or younger. The communities thus face enormous housing problems and their schools are having great difficulty in taking in students, due to a severe lack of space.

At a time when the provinces, Quebec included, are having to close schools because there are not enough students, the First Nations communities are facing an over-population crisis in their schools, which do not have the space to accommodate their students.

### Current Situation

First Nations work in education is, like so many of their other activities, subject to arbitrary policies setting out equally arbitrary standards and rules. As is also the case with so many of their activities, they are wholly excluded from the process undertaken to develop and apply these policies.

To illustrate what we mean here, we need merely cite *Application Guidelines: School Space Accommodation Standards- 2000 Revision* (Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, July 6, 2000):

- Section 6 on page 3 of that document reads as follows: "When a five-year enrolment projection indicates an average of at least 10 full-time students, with no less than 10 in the fifth year, a school including one basic classroom may be established." Yet on the first page of the same document, we read that the "school space accommodation standards take into account the curriculum needs of Indian students and cultural and community needs."

It is unacceptable that DIAND should limit its demographic projections to five-year periods, whereas all demographic projections should be based on a minimum of a ten-year period. Furthermore, demographic data on the Aboriginal peoples are already easily obtainable from Statistics Canada.

In reply to DIAND's assertion that the school space accommodation standards take account of cultural and community needs, we insist that only the communities can know and express what those needs are.

First Nations schools today are facing many challenges, caused in part by what can at the very least be described as under-funding, in their efforts to offer the following services:

- Pre-school and elementary education;
- Secondary education;
- Special education;
- Early childhood services;
- Daycare services;
- Educational and vocational counselling;
- Psychological services;
- Remedial learning services;
- Psychoeducational services;
- Health services;
- Social services;
- Occupational training (one of the goals of First Nations schools);
- Physical education.

An illustration of the enormous difficulties facing the communities is provided by a report that the Atikamekw Council of Wemotaci presented to DIAND in May 2002 regarding its educational planning needs. The report mentioned that the situation in the community's school was forcing the school to use whatever rooms it could find, however inappropriate they might be (for example, the kitchen!), to provide remedial instruction.

Schools in the First Nations communities have to offer a full range of supplementary services above and beyond those offered by conventional schools. This is because of their specific contexts, e.g., isolation, high rate of psychosocial problems affecting young Aboriginal people, etc. The communities, therefore, require enough school space to effectively offer all their services and accommodate their many students, but they cannot do so according to standards that are dictated by DIAND, which do not correspond to their true needs.

## **Priorities**

1. Obtain realistic budgets based on the real needs of the First Nations communities regarding the construction of new schools, the replacement of schools that are no longer functional, and the expansion of existing schools.
2. Obtain realistic budgets, based on the current pedagogical planning needs of the First Nations communities (needs of students at the pre-school, elementary and secondary levels, special education needs at all levels, occupational training, health and social services, and all other kinds of services required in specific rooms at the schools).
3. Abolish DIAND's current standards for school construction and expansion, since these standards do not in any way take account of the pedagogical planning needs of the First Nations communities.

## **4. Educational Services: Programs for Young Adults**

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### **4.1 Vocational Training**

#### **Context**

Educational systems in Canada focus on professional training, which seeks to ensure the highest employability rate and is thus an indispensable part of economic development.

In the current economic context (at both the provincial and national levels), there is a shortage of specialized workers. Indeed, the specialized labour needs of industries and manufacturers are increasing. In particular, these businesses need well-trained workers to help them meet their expansion goals.

In this context, a provincial education system such as Quebec's has strong potential and sufficient financial means to focus more on the promotion of occupational training.

We are forced, however, to note here the total absence of such training in most Aboriginal communities. Paradoxically, the unemployment rate is very high in communities that present numerous opportunities for specialized jobs. These opportunities, in fact, often go to non-Aboriginal people, since First Nations members do not have the necessary qualifications.

#### **Current Situation**

The current policy framework for Aboriginal education entirely excludes occupational training, and no budget is allocated for such training. The federal government's actions appear incoherent, since it will, through DIAND, use this policy framework to examine funding for elementary, secondary and post-secondary studies, but not vocational training.

When we consider how widespread vocational training programs have become in all Canadian provinces over the years, we cannot but conclude that there is an ever-increasing need for such training among First Nations communities, who are engaged in numerous economic development projects. Such training must be given within an autonomous education framework that is adequately funded.

Moreover, such training represents an effective action to combat unemployment and school dropout rates in the communities.

#### **Priorities**

1. Identify and evaluate the occupational training needs of First Nations communities in terms of economic development factors.
2. Allocate a specific budget for developing vocational training programs.
3. Establish a specific budget for occupational training, based on the identification and evaluation of needs.



## 4.2 Post-secondary Education

### Context

No more than 20 years ago, it was unthinkable for Aboriginal people to continue their studies after high school, apart from exceptional cases. The low education level of Aboriginal people, the great distance of the communities from post-secondary institutions and the obligation for students to leave their families were so many factors that were not conducive to post-secondary studies by Aboriginal people.

Nor were Aboriginal people motivated to embark on post-secondary studies, given the ways in which their mind-set and attitudes had been shaped by residential schools (the results of which are well known today) and given the unemployability of Aboriginal people at higher levels in the communities.

The number of Aboriginal students who have completed post-secondary programs may have increased over the past 15 years, but this increase "is seen mainly in non-university programs... Also, even though the real number of Aboriginal students enrolling in university programs has increased, the percentage of Aboriginal people who complete such programs has increased by just 1% in ten years." (Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Volume 3, Gathering Strength, p. 567).

### Current Situation

There are many obstacles today, which still prevent Aboriginal students from starting post-secondary studies. In general, students live in remote communities. Their geographic situation forces them to leave home to continue their studies, and doing so is not always possible when they have family and financial responsibilities. For example, an individual or a family that already has highly restricted financial means would need solid financial assistance to go through such a dramatic life change. Few Aboriginal people in this kind of situation can risk borrowing money to begin post-secondary studies.

Moreover, the Aboriginal communities are bound by the current budget policy (E 12) in this matter. This policy operates with a fixed budget ceiling. Its direct consequences are that some communities cannot send students on to post-secondary studies for lack of a budget. Other consequences are that students are under-funded in terms of allowances for living expenses, housing, school supplies, and day-care services for their children.

It is precisely this budget limit that causes under-funding for current students and prevents other First Nations students from embarking on post-secondary programs. It also ignores the increasing student population.

The FNEC and its member communities are seeking to eliminate these obstacles, so that students who want to continue their studies after high school will have better chances of doing so. In this regard, we have identified a number of priority actions that must be taken as quickly as possible.

## Priorities

1. Revision of the current policy (E 12), to create a new budget envelope, that is, one that does not have a ceiling and provides the following:

Measures for supplementary emergency budget allocations for students currently registered in programs.

Funding for a full range of student services.

Funding that takes account of the forecasted increase in the demand for post-secondary services.

Creation of a specific bursary fund at the national level for First Nations students.

Funding for the implementation of a regional Aboriginal post-secondary institution.

Creation of programs to prepare students for college-level and university-level programs, and to help them gain access to these programs.

## 4.3 Aboriginal Post-secondary Institutions

### Context

For more than 30 years, Aboriginal leaders have continually made recommendations on education to various governments, mainly with regard to the First Nations takeover of their own education systems. Throughout the takeover process, the First Nations have drawn particular attention to the low level of participation of their youth in post-secondary institutions. One of the solutions they developed to resolve this situation has been to create and run Aboriginal post-secondary institutions by themselves, that offer programs that correspond to the values and priorities of Aboriginal communities.

Various initiatives were undertaken (some of which are still in existence) to follow up claims inherent in these efforts. DIAND even provided financial support to First Nations post-secondary institutions that were created through First Nations initiatives. Unfortunately, the situation is the same today with regard to the small proportion (under-representation) of Aboriginal post-secondary students, and the establishment of Aboriginal post-secondary institutions remains largely unachieved.

### Current Situation

There are now a number of Aboriginal post-secondary institutions in Canada, but their existence is precarious due to the uncertainty of federal/provincial funding. For example, the only financial support that the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College receives comes from DIAND. As has been demonstrated many times, however, the funding received by the SIFC is well below the funding given to comparable publicly funded post-secondary institutions. Other Aboriginal post-secondary colleges and institutions also depend on small short-term grants that are "often limited to just one project and always subject to change" (Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Volume 3, Gathering Strength). First Nations post-secondary institutions are thus permanently on shaky ground, a situation that compromises their operations and prevents them from carrying out long-term planning. It is, thus, indispensable that current and future Aboriginal post-secondary institutions be fully accredited, with the right to stable funding according to their needs. At present, there are no such institutions in Quebec, yet the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador, including the FNEC's member communities, have expressed the desire to see one created and have demonstrated the many needs that such an institution could meet.

## Priorities

Based on the communities' current and future needs, and in keeping with the communities' philosophy of improving their members' access to and completion of post-secondary studies, a post-secondary education budget would make it possible to:

1. Maintain existing Aboriginal post-secondary institutions.
2. Create an Aboriginal post-secondary institution in Quebec, after analyzing the following scenarios:
  - 2.1. College level: Complete general program leading to a DEC (college diploma), according to Aboriginal principles underlying a general education and using both distance learning and traditional classroom learning.
  - 2.2. University level: An Aboriginal studies certificate program for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. This program would be highly original and would include courses in such areas as:
    - Aboriginal culture and history
    - Agreements, treaties and conventions between the First Nations and governments;
    - Self-government theory and practice;
    - Current issues and dynamics in Aboriginal communities elsewhere in the world.

Offering the program to a non-Aboriginal clientele as well would promote regular contact between this clientele and the Aboriginal leadership, thus ensuring stronger intercultural relations between First Nations members and persons from non-Aboriginal culture.

## ***5. Education Systems: Management Procedures***

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### **5.1 Rethinking the Management Philosophy at Indian Affairs: Promoting Participation Instead of Exclusion**

#### **Context**

DIAND says that a partnership with the First Nations is essential, but its current management procedures seem to exclude the First Nations when it comes time to make decisions on files. We need to look more closely at this partnership in order to identify more adequate roles for the First Nations that will allow them to make effective contributions.

Accountability and results-based management have become major concerns for the federal government and DIAND, and the First Nations certainly agree that such practices are necessary. They should, however, be carried out with clear objectives in mind, and it seems that our demonstration of accountability and results is not enough or not what the government wants. When accountability and results have been demonstrated, they should be acted on accordingly. This includes formally recognizing them and using them for specific purposes.

We are convinced that we are the best ambassadors for promoting our schools' results and initiatives. But what do people know about the local projects undertaken through the Gathering Strength program, and what do they know about their results? Very little, it seems. We believe this knowledge gap exists because we are excluded from the crucial step of getting the information out, so that it is acted on properly. Right now, our contribution is limited to writing reports (for which we receive no feedback) and hoping the information we provide will be used adequately to renew or implement programs.

The most recent report of the General Auditor makes reference to the necessity of and use made of the reports and audits. Chapter one “Streaming First Nations Reporting to Federal Organizations” demonstrates the reality that can no longer be ignored. For instance, the reporting requirements regarding the special education issue are rather laborious and mostly useless.

The exclusion of the First Nations from the decision-making process is only widening the gap and confirming a dominant/dominated relationship. We want the government and the Canadian people to know that our many initiatives are working exceptionally well and are having a genuine impact on our youth. If the government fully participates with the First Nations to get the information on our successes out, it will gain the confidence of its own officials who make the decisions concerning the implementation and continuity of programs in education for the First Nations.

To ensure the full participation of the greatest possible number of communities, it is important to consider creating organizations to represent these communities. Such organizations need funding to support second-level services, such as representation of interests, sharing of best practices, program-management methods and evaluation methods. We must move quickly to create structures that will help the schools in areas that the communities have identified as requiring action by means of a regional structure.

The true extent of the federal government's desire to recognize the First Nations' autonomy in education is measured by actions that give them the means to achieve this autonomy. Each community can determine its own capacities and expertise, and can recognize the need for a structure to offer services that it cannot do alone.

## **Management, Evaluation, Accountability and Jurisdiction**

All of these programs are intended for the communities, but some of their aspects make them very difficult to implement. The FNEC's member communities have long known that many aspects regarding the management of evaluation, research, coordination, etc. could be handled better if services were grouped together. Doing so would allow them to combine their abilities, save money and work more effectively. Their desire, 18 years ago, to come together in a formal structure to help the communities in educational issues demonstrates just how important they consider education to be.

For example, the FNEC's management of various programs facilitates the work of the communities and standardizes the gathering and assessment of information by means of a centralized system.

Thus, an organization made up of several communities could provide them with services in such areas as recruitment, program evaluation, coordinator training, research, quality and standards development, pedagogical support, and more. This management approach would offer savings in funding, and at the same time increase quality and performance.

Right now there is no funding policy to support regional structures that could take on a highly determining role for the advancement of education in the First Nations. With regard to jurisdiction, it is clear that the authority for education in the communities must be centralized as a means of saving money and of ensuring effectiveness. We can call these services second-level services, comparable to the services offered by the provincial school boards, but with a different role as defined by the communities making up the organization.

It is also important that funding be obtained to facilitate the grouping together of shared services. An organization created in this way would be able to use this funding, provided on a permanent basis, to concentrate on development rather than on the search for funding.

## Priorities

Establish a financial assistance program, so that the communities can develop structures enabling them to provide second- and third-level services:

- Research;
- Training;
- Management of common programs;
- Combining of educational objectives;
- Support for recruiting teachers;
- Development of common curricula;
- Purchasing;
- Representation;
- Elaboration of new work methods to ensure the participation of the First Nations throughout the development process;
- Development of a communication plan for giving information on the First Nations' work and successes in education;
- Etc.

## 6. *Essential Measures*

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### 6.1 Observations

It has been seen that the First Nations communities are under-funded, and that they are suffering from a flagrant lack of human and material resources in education. This situation is a contributing factor to the ways in which Aboriginal students are being penalized in their studies and being prevented from achieving equality with young non-Aboriginal Canadians.

For more than 20 years, the First Nations, fully supported by numerous federal commissions of inquiry, have known that one of the most important ways of improving their social situation is to have an educational system with services that correspond to their true cultural reality and their true needs. Yet the situation has persisted to this day, to the detriment of Aboriginal youth.

### 6.2 Expectations

Well aware of the deficiencies in education, the FNEC has already told DIAND it is prepared to invest in a true action plan in concert with its member communities and the federal authorities involved. Indeed, the FNEC and its member communities present a strong organizational structure that will allow them to assume their share of the duties, and the accountability that goes with it, in the work to develop and implement the action plan. This means implementing critical evaluation structures to measure the expected outcomes, along with a mechanism for disseminating the results, to ensure that all involved authorities can carry out their own critical assessments of the achievements made under the action plan.

It is, therefore, important that the communities have access to resources in order to determine which local services can best be delivered, for reasons of effectiveness and economy, through a regional structure.

It is also very important to note that the communities want to keep as many services as possible at the local level, owing to their geographical and cultural disparity. Regional or centralized services will be specific and limited in nature, and will be under the authority of the communities. Consequently, the communities must be in charge of all structures created for their educational services.

Lastly, the communities must be part of the decision-making processes, since it is their education system that is at stake. It is only through a genuine desire for full First Nations participation that reasonable and effective policies for the education of our children will be created.

### **6.3 Action Plan**

The action plan must be based squarely on the principle that the Aboriginal communities, as the parties most affected, require access to every possible means for delivering quality education services that meet their needs. It is clear that this approach respects another fundamental principle, namely that only the communities can identify their needs and determine the structures that must be maintained or implemented to prevent the imposition of structures from outside.

Such an action plan, carried out successfully, will help promote social stability in the First Nations communities and encourage young Aboriginal people to continue their studies.

## ***Conclusion***

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The situation we have described here is highly alarming and demands immediate and aggressive action. New programs and procedures must be implemented. Decisions cannot be made without the participation of the communities, which must be included in all decision-making processes affecting the First Nations.

Research in education confirms all the points mentioned in this description of the situation in which the First Nations find themselves today. It is beyond any doubt that these points all have extreme importance for the academic success of our students (see appendix).

The FNEC is very active in special education. Several times, DIAND Minister Robert Nault has asked the FNEC to work closely with his department on special education issues. However, such collaboration has been unidirectional, since the FNEC has had to restrict its involvement to providing data and expressing its views at certain steps in the process. For several months, we have been left out from the making of important decisions. We could have played a much more effective role in the decision-making process if we had been asked to contribute our knowledge and expertise at the crucial stages in the evolution of this file.

The same must be said for the programs that the FNEC manages for its member communities. Even though the reports we send the department contain important information, we are not part of the process for using this information, nor are we kept informed about that process. First Nations accountability is limited to the submission of information, after which they are excluded from the process. Accountability should extend well beyond the fact of simply providing information. The First Nations should be involved in the decision-making for these programs. Such involvement includes making representations to effectively demonstrate how much these programs are needed and how great an impact they are having.

This document illustrates the failures and faults of the current system. The constant lack of funding in the field of education adversely affects the inherent education rights of every single First Nations child.

We trust this document will give food for thought to the persons who make the decisions regarding our education. The future will show just how important it is to have an education system funded by adequate and permanent measures, and guided by a decision-making process that does not exclude the First Nations but instead allows for their genuine participation.

## ***Recommendations***

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### **1. Educational Services: Innovative programs**

#### **Special Education**

Implement an adequate and permanent special education program to provide services to special needs children in the First Nations.

Allow the schools to take part in early childhood development by decompartmentalizing the early childhood programs. This will give the schools access to funding (for programs regarding fetal alcohol syndrome, to give just one example).

#### **Aboriginal Languages**

Develop programs and training for teachers.

Support and foster Aboriginal language research.

Enable the development and production of Aboriginal language teaching material.

Officially recognize the qualifications of the Elders and other native language speakers to teach Aboriginal languages.

#### **Multi-Concepts Program**

Provide funding at the elementary and secondary levels for developing programs and initiatives designed to ensure full child development and better opportunities for the future, e.g., international study programs, sports-study programs, arts and music programs, and others. These programs would work to enhance First Nations students' motivation and attendance, and would offer them opportunities to develop their skills in areas of interest to them.

#### **Program and Curriculum Development**

Revise the current tuition fees to ensure that they cover regular educational components such as counselling, development of pedagogical material, and development of curricula based on First Nations culture and languages.

### **2. Educational Services: Incentive Programs**

#### **2.1 School Dropout Problem**

Develop and implement high school programs to encourage First Nations youth to go back to school.

#### **2.2 Parenting Skills**

Develop a parenting skills program allowing the communities to run initiatives for helping parents get involved in the education of their children, finding new approaches and giving young students skills for parental responsibilities.



### **3. Educational Services: Human Resources and Equipment**

#### **3.1 Use of Computers and ICTs in the Schools**

In collaboration with Industry Canada, develop funding measures in educational technology, to help First Nations schools bridge the considerable gap separating them from non-Aboriginal schools in technology and offer educational programs that will open up the world to their young students.

#### **3.2 Solutions for Recruiting and Keeping Teachers**

Immediately introduce financial measures allowing the communities to carry out work to recruit qualified teachers, with full account taken of the communities' social, economic, cultural and geographical realities.

#### **3.3 Libraries**

Create a budget allowing school libraries to purchase equipment and reading material (including learning material).

#### **3.4 School construction and Expansion, Small schools**

Revise the current school construction standards to ensure that they take full account of the realities of schools in the First Nations communities.

### **4. Educational Services: Programs for Young Adults**

#### **4.1 Vocational Training**

Create a vocational training program for the schools with funding for tuition fees and support allowances, and create a similar program for the communities as a means of providing added value for the secondary-level program or as an independent program.

#### **4.2 Post-Secondary Education**

Increase the post-secondary education funding currently provided, in compliance with the recommendations made by the Assembly of First Nations in 2001.

#### **4.3 Aboriginal Post-secondary Institutions**

Support and bring into realization the creation of an Aboriginal post-secondary institution in Quebec.

## **5. Education Systems: Management Procedures**

- 5.1** Define, in collaboration with the First Nations, a new program-management approach that includes them in the decision-making process, and begin a comprehensive campaign to inform the public about First Nations success stories.
- 5.2** Renew the Gathering Strength program with a budget of \$50 million for the next five years, to overcome some of the weaknesses in First Nations education programs and to bridge the gap between the reality of the First Nations and the reality of non-Aboriginal Canadians.

## **6. Essential Measures**

Develop and implement the proposed action plan.

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*Appendix*

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## **Factors of Academic Success and Achievement**

**FNEC RESEARCH REPORT**

**NOVEMBER 18, 2002**

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### **REFERENCES**

## Section 1. PARENT/FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

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### 1.1 Parent-Child Communications (Homework)

***A Model of Homework's Influence on the Performance Evaluations of Elementary School Students.*** Cooper, Jackson, Nye, Lindsay (2001).

The purpose of this study was to present and test a model of the influence of homework on the classroom performance of elementary school students.

Data was collected on teachers, students and parents/guardians.

#### **Results**

- Positive parent attitudes were directly related to student's attitude toward homework.
- Classroom grades were unrelated to student's attitude toward homework, but were predicted by how much homework the student completed, by student ability, and by parent facilitation.
- Parent facilitation proved to be an important mediator of the relation between student norms, student ability and parent's attitude toward homework and classroom grades.
- Positive parent involvement in homework was the **strongest predictor** of grades. The data revealed the critical role of parents in both the homework process and in the success of elementary school students.
- The study concluded that developing positive attitudes when students are young might help lay the groundwork for later school success.

### 1.2 Parent School Participation

***School Choice, Family Characteristics, and Home-School Relations: Contributors to School Achievement?*** Shumow and Vandell (1996).

Shumow and Vandell (1996) examined:

- 1) the demographic and psychological characteristics of families who use different school arrangements;
- 2) children's academic achievement and attitude to school (student's academic self-confidence, school work habits and conduct graders) between choice and assigned schools and;
- 3) differences in home-school relations between choice and assigned schools.

## Results

- Choice families were lower income more likely African-American living in higher risk environments.
- These parents were reported as spending more time engaged in activities with their children and to be more emotionally supportive of their children.
- Students attending choice schools had higher academic achievements and more positive attitudes to school.
- The strongest positive predictor of achievement and children's attitude to school was parent involvement in schooling such as homework supervision, school visits and communications with teachers.
- The results of this research concluded that policies and programs directed at increasing parent involvement in schooling might be of greater benefit in terms of children's school outcomes than school choice.

### 1.3 Parent Involvement Programs

***Understanding the Impact of Parent School Involvement on Children's Educational Outcomes.*** Zellman, G.L., & Waterman, J.M. (1998).

Zellman and Waterman (1998) examined:

- 1) the relationship among parent involvement measures;
  - 2) demographic and family background characteristics that are associated with parent involvement;
  - 3) the importance of parent involvement in predicting child outcomes.
- Data was collected on 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders and their mothers, principals and teachers of the participating student.

## Results

- When IQ, socio-economic status (SES) and ethnicity were controlled, the research showed that a higher level of reported parent involvement was associated with better test scores in reading and teachers identified fewer learning problems.
- Parenting styles are teachable and changeable.
- How parents interact with their children is more important in predicting child academic outcomes.
- Parent involvement programs that focus more clearly on improved parenting may produce more significant and long-lasting effects on children.

## 1.4 Teacher Training on Parent/Family Involvement

***Challenges to Family Involvement.*** Mick Coleman & Susan Churchill (1997).

Coleman and Churchill (1997) reported that family involvement shows that children learn in two environments that may be distinctively different.

- Teachers with limited training in family relations have only their own family experiences to guide them when developing a family involvement program.
- In-service training is needed so that teachers will understand:
  - The challenges that families from different socio-economic backgrounds confront, and how they influence families' involvement with school or other social institutions.
  - The concerns families from different ethnic, religious, racial and sexual-orientation backgrounds have regarding how their families are depicted in school.
  - The potential stressors associated with divorce, death and remarriage in relation to child-teacher and parent-teacher relations.
  - The strategies that acknowledge the roles of foster parents, grandparents and other extended family guardians.



## Section 2. TECHNOLOGY AND EDUCATION

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### 2.1 Achievement in Major School Subjects

#### Language Arts

Incorporation of word processing into writing instruction can help students produce higher quality writing.

Technology can enhance students' learning language development achievement in reading, writing and spelling.

***Does it Matter What I Write With? Comparing Performance on Paper, Computer and Portable Writing Devices.*** Russel, & Plati (2002).

- The study examined the effects of administering extended composition test items on paper, on computer, or on a portable writing device on grade 4 and grade 8 students.
- Results of this study found that students in grade 4 who wrote their compositions on computer produced longer answers that received higher scores compared to students who wrote compositions on paper.

***Computer-Assisted Reading Intervention in a Secondary School: An Evaluation Study.*** Lynch, Fawcett, Nicolson (2000).

- The researchers examined the efficacy and the cost-effectiveness of RITA, a computer-based literacy support system, in 300 at-risk students.

#### Results

- Students improved significantly in reading standard score and demonstrated that computer-assisted support with continuing follow-up may prove more effective than purely traditional methods.
- Fluency and word attack improvement in the group overall in the rate of reading. Increased their confidence and their word attack skills.
- Group performance in comprehension improved substantially from 7.95 years to 8.55 years for rate from 8.4 years to 8.95 years. These improvements occurred over a 10-week time frame.
- Students also showed higher levels of enthusiasm and commitment than with the traditional approach.

## **Math**

***The Influence of Problem-solving Software on Student Attitudes about Mathematics.*** Funkhouser, C. & Djang, P. (1993).

Forty high school students' motivation was studied with the use of problem-solving software.

## **Results**

- The research comparing traditional mathematics instruction to computer-assisted instruction showed positive results with the use of technology (problem-solving software).
- Students who received instruction with problem-solving software scored significantly better on test of mathematical problem-solving and academic performance.

## **Science**

- A study on 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders who were engaged in telecommunications-based science activities made significant gains in such skills as the use of graphs for organizing observations, the interpretation of data, and the identification of map locations.

## **2.2 Student Attitudes**

***The Effects of Media on Motivation and Content Recall: Comparison of Computer- and Print-based Instruction.*** Yang (1992).

Technology and computer-based instruction showed that students are more successful in school, motivated to learn, and have increased self-confidence and self-esteem.

## **Results**

Computer-based instruction was superior to paper-based instruction as regards:

- 1) student motivation;
  - 2) continuing motivation;
  - 3) immediate and delayed recall.
- High school mathematics students in a classroom-instruction-plus-CBI group gained significantly more on a measure of self-concept of academic ability than did their peers in a classroom-only-instruction group.

## 2.3 Special Education

***Uses of Computer Technology to Help Students with Special Needs.***  
Hasselbring, & Williams Glazer (2000).

- The article reviews the role that computer technology can play in promoting the education of children with special needs within a regular classroom.

**Students with Mild Learning and Behavioural Disorders.**

### **Word-processing software**

The effectiveness of this as a learning tool for children with special needs includes:

- Aids in revising texts, producing clean and readable texts and produces a sense of authorship, which improves writing skills. This allows for more time to focus on the content of written work.
- Helps those students who struggle with delays in fine motor skills that impair their ability to write legibly.

### **Word-prediction software**

The software reduces the number of keystrokes that are required to type words and provides assistance with spelling for students of various ability levels.

- Allows students to express their words and ideas in a vocabulary that more closely reflects their thinking and so be better able to compete academically in a regular classroom setting.

### **Communication and networking technologies**

- Provides students with special needs with more knowledge construction activities, such as generating new ideas and building on the thought of others as a topic is analyzed, and by actively engaging them in the learning process.
- Multi-media deepen students' conceptual understandings by linking visual imagery and sound effects to information that is difficult to understand when presented in text alone.

## **Barriers of Effective Use of Technology for Students with Disabilities**

### **Inadequate teacher training.**

In 1999 only "20% of the teachers in US schools felt they were very well-prepared to use technology in their teaching".

- Lack of adequate training has a strong effect on students with disabilities because technology is often a critical component in planning and implementing an education program.

### **Cost of Technology.**

- Technology for students with special needs has the potential to 'act as an equalizer by freeing many students from their disability in a way that allows them to achieve their true potential.'

## **2.4 Software**

***Effects of Fantasy Contexts on Children's Learning and Motivation: Making Learning More Fun.*** Parker & Lepper (1992).

- Software, including animation and video, improves learning. A study with poor-reading 2<sup>nd</sup> grade students, who used a program that included animated objects without spoken levels, showed that they recalled significantly more of the objects' names than did similar students who used a version with levels but no animation.

***The Effects of Logo-Based Instruction.*** Yusef, M.M. (1995).

Students who received Logo-based Instruction:

- developed higher-order thinking;
- increased awareness of their thinking process and problem-solving skills.

### **Results**

- 3<sup>rd</sup> grade students who explored geometry concepts in a Logo program performed better when they worked within a story context than without one.

## **2.5 Teacher Training Sessions**

**Summit of Technology and Education Report (2001).**

- Professional development is the key to effective use of technology.
- Investments are needed in teacher development in newer instruction approaches, as well as in the use of technology.
- Information and communication technologies require that teachers master the use of the technologies in their classrooms and address the professional beliefs about teaching and learning and their practices.

***How Exemplary Computer-using Teachers Differ from Other Teachers: Implications for Realizing the Potential of Computer in Schools.*** Becker (1994).

- Becker concluded that computer-using teachers differed in that:
  - 1) They had considerable formal training in using and teaching with computers;
  - 2) They spent many hours at school working on computers for a variety of tasks.

***Decision Making about Computer Acquisition and Use in American Schools.*** Becker, H.J (1993)

- Becker found that successful computer integration in schools included:
  - 1) the existence of a supportive social network of computer-using teachers;
  - 2) organizational support from both school and administrators;
  - 3) adequate resources to fund software acquisition.

## Section 3. LIBRARY MEDIA PROGRAMS

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### 3.1 Library Media Centers

***The Impact of School Library Media Centers on Academic Achievement.***  
Keith Curry Lance (1994)

- The research examined the relationship between library media centers on academic achievement (both for elementary and secondary students).
- The size of the library media program, indicated by the size of its staff and collection, is the best school predictor of academic achievement.

#### **Results**

Is there a relationship between expenditures on library media centers and test performance, particularly when social and economic differences between communities and schools are controlled?

- Students at schools with better funded library media centers tend to achieve higher average reading scores, whether their schools and communities are rich or poor and whether adults in the community are well or poorly educated.

What characteristics of library media programs help to explain the relationship between library media expenditures and test performance?

- The size of the library media centers total staff and size and variety of its collection are important characteristics of library media programs that confirm the correlation between library media center expenditures and test performance.

### 3.2 Library Media Personnel

***Proof of Power: Quality library media programs affect academic achievement.*** Keith Curry Lance (2001)

Examined the evidence from four statewide studies on the impact of school library media programs on academic achievement.

- Identified three important roles for school library media specialists.
  - Learning and teaching role;
  - Providers of information access and delivery;
  - Program administrators.

Students perform better academically where the library media specialist:

- Is part of a planning and teaching team with the classroom;
- Teaches information literacy;
- Provides one-to-one tutoring for students who need it.

## **Results**

- The level of development of the library media program was a predictor of student performance.
- Collection and expenditures were predictive of reading scores.
- Where library media programs were better staffed, better stocked, and better funded, academic achievement tended to be higher.
- Academic achievement levels increased with the availability of networked computers, both in the library media center and elsewhere in the school, that provided access to catalogues, licensed databases, and the Internet.

## **Recommendations**

School library media programs should be funded sufficiently to employ both professional and support staff, and to have both information resources in a variety of formats and the technology necessary to extend the library media program beyond the walls of the library media center.

Technology is an essential part of a successful library media program. Information resources, including licensed databases, should be available throughout the school via networked computers in classrooms, labs and offices.

## **Section 4. CULTURAL IDENTITY PRESERVATION**

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### **4.1 Different Environments**

***Challenges to Family Involvement.*** Mick Coleman & Susan Churchill (1997)

Coleman and Churchill (1997) reported that family involvement shows that children learn in two different environments and that there may be many disparities between the child's home life and education.

- "For example the school's customs, schedule, spaces, resources, expectations, experiences, languages and values may not be reflected in the same way, or to the same degree, at home. This may be especially true for children from racial and cultural minority families, as well as those from lower socio-economic families."
- School environments may fit better with the family environments of children from middle-class families, because public schools are typically staffed by middle-class teachers and administrators.
- Parents of lower socio-economic status may have a difficulty or hesitancy when directly interacting with school. This may be due to conflicting work and family schedules or their own negative school experiences and feelings of academic inadequacy.

### **4.2 Language**

***Vanishing People, Canada & the World Groundbreaker*** (2002)

- 10,000 languages spoken at the beginning of human existence.
- 6,000 are still spoken today – but 90% are in danger of disappearing.
- Only half of these are being taught to children – 3,000 languages will be in disuse within a couple of generations, (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) "endangered, seriously endangered or dying".
- Each language that is lost is a culture that is lost. Worldwide, almost all of these are indigenous.



### 4.3 Cultural Identity and School Achievement

*The Significance of Culture and Education on Secondary Achievement: A Survey of Chinese-American and Korean-American Children* Bilingual Research Journal, 26, 2, 327-338.

#### Results

“Greater diversified learning and interest. Students had superior cognitive, meta-cognitive, and socioaffective strategies to help them in school. Rather than emulating their peers to conform to the dominant culture (enrichment strategy), these students were interested in empowering themselves by developing pride in their cultures while undergoing personal experience in mainstream culture.”

- Benefits for students who utilized the enrichment strategy, drawing upon the positive experiences of at least two cultures from which to adapt the learning needs of the classroom.
- Bilingual education programs in which the student’s first language and cultures are valued, respected and encouraged – while students are exposed to new language and culture – are invaluable to the student’s eventual success in school.

## Section 5. OCCUPATIONAL SKILLS

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### 5.1 Statistics From Ontario

*You and the Job Market: Quick Reference for Today's Job Market for Career Counselling and Career Planning.* Ontario Minister of Education, Minister of Training Colleges and Universities

Ontario Government projects a job growth in the following:

- Managerial and administrative;
- Professional and technical;
- Skilled trades.

All occupations require post-secondary education and training.

Automotive parts manufacturers estimate that 15,000 skilled workers will be required in the automotive industry.

Projected job creation between 2000 and 2005 in Ontario:

- Professional and technical over 22%;
- Skilled trades 10%.

More jobs require higher levels of education and training.

### 5.2 Summit of Technology and Education

The report indicates that the rapidly changing labour market is demanding new and higher levels of education and skills.

- According to the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) survey (2000), 300,000 jobs went unfilled because of skill shortage.
- Conference Board of Canada found that 83% of those surveyed reported:
  - shortage of skilled workers in technical and middle managerial skills;
  - situation in skilled trade areas is expected to get worse in the future.

## Section 6. IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH

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### 6.1 Student Abilities

*Preschool teachers' beliefs concerning the importance of various developmental skills and ability.* Kowalski, Pretti-Frontczak, Johnson (2001).

- Research studies in developmental child psychology provide a deeper understanding of the various abilities of children at different ages.

### 6.2 Education Policy and Reform

*Does Educational Research Matter?* Mortimore (2000)

#### Highlights

- Research studies in special education have shown how to use knowledge to improve the lives of people with special needs.
- Research provides and monitors trends and changes in educational aspirations, attitudes and attainments.
- Research requires “the systematic and critical eye that research can provide and this is where researchers have been so successful.”
- Research reports influence educational policy and reform.

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