



**#CanadaWeWant
#leCanadaquenoussohaitons**

NATIONAL YOUTH MOVEMENT | MOUVEMENT NATIONAL DES JEUNES



The Future of Public Education in Canada

A #CanadaWeWant Theme



The Students
Commission
*Centre of Excellence for
Youth Engagement*



La commission
des étudiants
*Le centre d'excellence pour
l'engagement des jeunes*

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About Us

The Students Commission of Canada

The SCC is a charitable organization that purposely works with others to help create a world where young people are valued and heard and their ideas for improving themselves, the lives of their peers and communities are put into action. The SCC champions youth engagement and youth voice through innovating new youth programs, conducting research and evaluation on the impact of youth engagement, and partnering with other youth serving organizations. For more information, please see: www.studentscommission.ca

People for Education

People for Education is a unique organization in Canada: independent, non-partisan, and fuelled by a belief in the power and promise of public education. PFE creates evidence, instigates dialogue, and builds links so that people can see — and act on — the connection between public education and a fair and prosperous society. For more information, please see: www.peopleforeducation.ca

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Thank you first to the courageous young people who traveled from coast to coast to coast to build the #CanadaWeWant so we can have the #CanadaWeNeed. With representatives from First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities from across the country, we humbly gathered on the traditional territories of the Haudenosaunee, the Ojibway/Chippewas, the Anishinabek, and currently the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation.

We were also surrounded by Indigenous communities: to the North were the Chippewas of Georgina Island; to the East were the Mississaugas of Scugog Island; and to the West were the Chippewas of Kettle and Stoney Point. Through Indigenous-led ceremony, acknowledgement and respect, we recognized the enduring presence of Indigenous Peoples on this land, and were very grateful to have the opportunity to use it as a meeting place, and a space for knowledge sharing.

Thank you to People for Education (PFE) for supporting the participation of youth from across the country and for asking young people to share their voice. Thank you to the Department of Heritage's Youth Forums Canada for providing travel dollars to attend this conference.

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Thank you to the representatives from People for Education that attended the Conference and who will be responsible for ensuring that youth voices are heard and valued.

Executive Summary

The Future of Public Education (FOPE) theme-team at the 2020 #CanadaWeWant conference included ten youth participants from across Canada. They worked together to develop recommendations for People for Education, a non-partisan non-governmental organization (NGO) fueled by a belief in the power and promise of public education. The theme group focused on developing recommendations for how the public education system needs to change and identifying steps that can be taken to achieve that vision. These ideas emerged from in depth discussions among youth participants, who shared their unique experiences with the education system.

Youth participants were encouraged to explore the topic of education through a rights-based lens. Over the conference week, youth participated in several activities to learn about their own rights. They explored the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and learned to differentiate between their own wants, needs, and rights. These activities helped participants identify gaps, both systemically and individually, in how their rights are currently being respected in the education system. After exploring these challenges, young people were then supported to propose creative solutions so that current and future students experience a high quality, rights-respecting education.

The youth participants identified the following recommendations for their 10-year vision for the future of public education, in which their right to a quality education is respected:

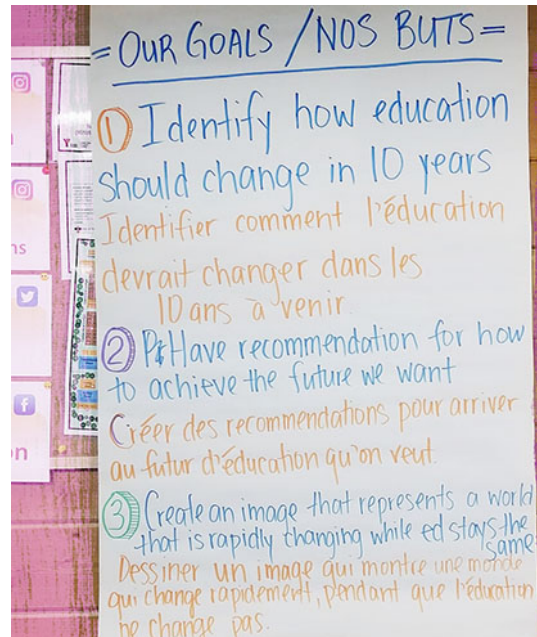
1. Create national curriculum standards
2. Create national standards for teacher-training
3. Make key curriculum updates (Arts, Life-skills, Technology, UNCRC, Modern Jobs, Health)
4. Foster cultural respect and address social barriers
5. Provide a wide variety of educational opportunities
6. Offer free access to resources in schools (contraceptives, toiletries, menstrual products)
7. Ensure schools are safe and accessible
8. Enhance opportunities to learn multiple languages
9. Decrease class sizes
10. Enhance community participation within schools
11. Demonstrate respect and support for our educators

This report presents a summary of the conference process, as well as a detailed description of each of the recommendations identified above. The recommendations are visualized in a people-friendly Dream Tree that lays out young people's aspirations for the Right to Education and Future of Public Education initiatives.

About the Conference

The Conference Process

The Canada We Want (CWW) Conference took place March 3rd to March 10th, 2020. Young people traveled from across Canada to YMCA Cedar Glen in Nobleton, Ontario. Youth aged 12 to 25 years old identified in many ways, including Indigenous, racialized, differently abled, religious, 2SLGBTQ+, and many more identities. Young people spoke a variety of languages as well, including English, French, their own culture's languages, and many Indigenous languages. All aspects of the conference were presented in both national languages and translation took place across formal and informal interactions at the conference, with many bilingual youth taking leadership roles to include their unilingual friends in conversation.



When the youth arrived, they were presented with eight theme teams to choose from and then broke into smaller groups to get started on tackling the projects involved in each theme team. To explore the issues, young people shared their feelings, beliefs, experiences, and aspirations surrounding their theme team topics. They also consulted with research, experts, and other young people at the event. Each theme-team worked towards creating key recommendations for policy and program change. As a conference finale, each theme team selected two young people to present at a showcase event at Roy Thompson Hall in Toronto, Ontario to an audience of community stakeholders, policy and decision makers. Additionally, young people participated in creating other outputs, such as videos, program material, and in the case of the FOPE theme team, the young people helped create this very report!

Theme-Team Topics

The FOPE theme team came together through a partnership between the SCC and PFE. The purpose of the theme group was to:

- Provide youth perspectives to PFE on two key initiatives: the Right to Education and the Future of Public Education in Canada
- Educate young people about their rights and specifically the right to a quality education
- Enhance young people's critical understanding of what it means to have a quality education
- Empower young people to stand up for their rights
- Provide concrete recommendations to PFE and SCC on the future of education in Canada, including how youth can continue to be engaged in the discussions



Youth participants engaged in interactive activities and discussions to explore their topic and come up with recommendations. This included a rights-based activity to understand the UNCRC as well as deep conversations about their own experiences within the education system across Canada. As the first step to developing the recommendations that appear later in this report, participants shared what they hoped the education system would look like in 10 years to best serve youth in the future.

The Four Pillars™

According to the SCC, The Four Pillars™ are the foundation to creating a safe space for positive and constructive youth engagement. The Pillars are: Respect, Listen, Understand, Communicate. With youth and adult allies coming from all corners of Canada, their language, culture, beliefs, and other ways of being in the world are bound to be diverse. The Four Pillars™ helped the group build guidelines for how they wanted to work together and were key to ensuring that challenging conversations about children's rights and education could happen in a safe and respectful way. Through discussing and designing how these pillars looked for each person, theme team, and the conference as a whole, a common language was created that recognized the diversity in the room and made space for inclusion and participation in every way.

Before diving into the theme team topics, each team spent time developing a set of guidelines to embody The Four Pillars™ in a way that honored everyone in their group. These ideas were then displayed on large pieces of paper so that the youth could refer to them if/when there was an issue that came up in the group. By referring to The Four Pillars™ in times of need, youth were able to promote their own agency and ensure that the group connection was maintained.

The following are images of The Four Pillars™ from the FPE theme team:

RESPECT/RESPECTER
 Treat others with dignity / traiter les autres avec dignité
 Respecter les idées et les opinions de tout le monde / respect the ideas and opinions of everyone
 * même si tu n'es pas en d'accord !!! / even if you're not in agreement
 HATE ≠ opinion! Haine ≠ un opinion
 Pose des questions pour comprendre la réalité de l'autre personne / Ask questions to understand the reality of the other person
 Communiquer notre émotions difficile / Communicate our difficult emotions

ÉCOUTER LISTEN
 - PROCESS & COMPREHEND WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING
 - DIFFERENT WAYS OF LISTENING (BODY LANGUAGE/EYE CONTACT)
 - SOCIAL & BODY CUES
 - LISTENING WITH OUR HEAD, HEART & OTHER SENSES
 - LISTENING IS A FORM OF RESPECT
 - WHEN WE TRULY LISTEN WE CAN FULLY UNDERSTAND
 - IN ORDER TO LEARN YOU HAVE TO LISTEN
 - VERBAL AND PHYSICAL RESPONSES
 - LISTENING TO THE SILENCE
 - BODY ISN'T TURNED AWAY DURING CONVERSATIONS
 - LISTENING IS LEARNED
 - BE OPEN MINDED

S'ENTENDRE UNDERSTAND
 - The willingness to listen and to gain perspective.
 - to gain an education on a subject.
 - interpret a view in a particular way.
 - the familiarity of a character/explanation.
 - look beyond your bias.
 - To believe or infer something to be the truth.
 - practicing "OARS" (open-ended questions, Affirmation, reflect, summarization)
 - La volonté d'écouter et gagner du perspective.
 - gagner une éducation sur un sujet.
 - interpréter un sujet dans un façon particulier.
 - D'être capable de l'exploration d'une façon trait.
 - D'être ouvert.
 - D'être capable de croire ou inféré la vérité.
 - pratique des "OARS" (questions ouvert, Affirmation, réflexion, et récapitulation).

COMMUNIQUER COMMUNICATE
 - INFORM - L'écriture - Parler de tes idées
 - INFO RME - Writing - Talk and share your ideas
 - SIGN LANGUAGE - Parler pour sentences
 - Body language - Talking to listen
 - Si tu besoins quelque chose - Être confortable
 - If you need something - To be comfortable
 - Traduire - Communiquer via à l'art
 - Translate - To communicate with art
 - Essayer de parler / communiquer - To communicate with art
 - Trying to speak / communicate
 - Se communiquer avec des images - Communiquer via aux mathématiques
 - To communicate with images / picture; - To communicate with mathematical.
 - Pour faire passer une message - To share a message
 - Pour comprendre les autres - to understand others
 - Les réalisations des autres langues, et faire les différences dans le monde, / Sharing other languages, and making differences in the world.

The Guiding Lenses

The #CanadaWeWant conference uses four guiding lenses to explore conference topics and to frame recommendations. These lenses were selected based on recurring themes that emerged during previous youth conferences and encourage young people to take an intersectional approach to tackling their topic area. The four guiding lenses are: Rural and Remote Experiences, Addressing Structural Racism, Truth Leading to Reconciliation, and Children's Rights. The FOPE theme team included youth with lived experiences related to each of the guiding lenses. Below is a summary of key themes that emerged from discussions about the four guiding lenses:

Rural, Remote, and Northern youth

"[There is] stigma around schools from different areas. Example: Maritime[s] may be seen as 'easier' which may affect ability to go to university"

- Youth participant

"I shared my story as well as the stories of others from Northern Ontario in regards to discrimination in school systems."

- Youth participant

As the theme team had youth from six provinces, the impact of geography on quality education and rights was discussed at length. Young people from rural and remote communities highlighted

experiencing unequal access to schooling due to their distance from schools, available course options, limited staffing, and an absence of diverse methods (i.e. distance learning) to complete credits. These youth stressed that urban education tends to offer more educational options than those in rural, remote, and northern areas.

Addressing Structural Racism

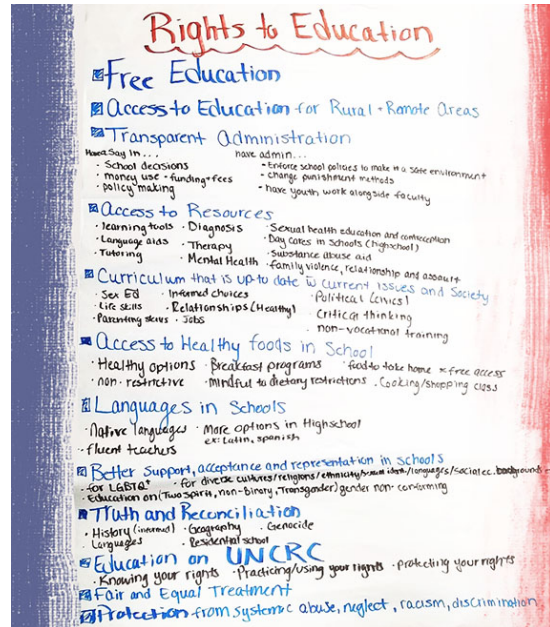
"Over-representation of POC [people of color] who are suspended and disciplined"

- Youth participant

"Systems against people of colo[u]r: prevents POC [from] having success in schools, minorities are not treated equally, being placed in a box based on their race and getting limited support"

- Youth participants

The theme team included youth who were ethnically diverse. With their diversity came experiences of discrimination on both an individual and a structural level. Some young people shared their personal stories of being denied equal opportunities to pursue scholarly achievements based on their ethnic





identity. Many participants also shared stories of how Black, Indigenous, Person of Color (BIPOC) students are systemically targeted with harsher tactics than their non-BIPOC peers. Some of the young people also felt that they were taught curriculum that was biased and discriminatory.

Truth Leading to Reconciliation

“Culturally relevant and Indigenous content must be correct, have depth, taught by someone who knows what they’re talking about. Example: a paragraph [about Truth and Reconciliation] isn’t enough, students [are] having to correct teachers”

- Youth participant

“For some Indigenous students it can feel normal to have racist teachers. How is this a safe learning environment? In schools, teachers have power so it’s not safe.”

- Youth participant

Supporting Indigenous rights and realities are key components of the #CanadaWeWant conference framework. Inuit, First Nations, and Métis youth made up one-third of the youth attending the Conference. Several Indigenous young people shared their realities of losing their language, and experiencing discrimination in their classrooms and schools. They also talked about the challenge of embracing their Indigenous identities in a Canadian/settler society. The non-Indigenous youth in the group, who listened to these stories, learned a great deal about Indigenous realities and highlighted the importance of ensuring that Indigenous histories are told through education. They identified that Truth Leading to Reconciliation needs to be a key component of any discussion about the Future of Public Education in Canada.

Children's Rights

"I will make sure my younger siblings know their rights."

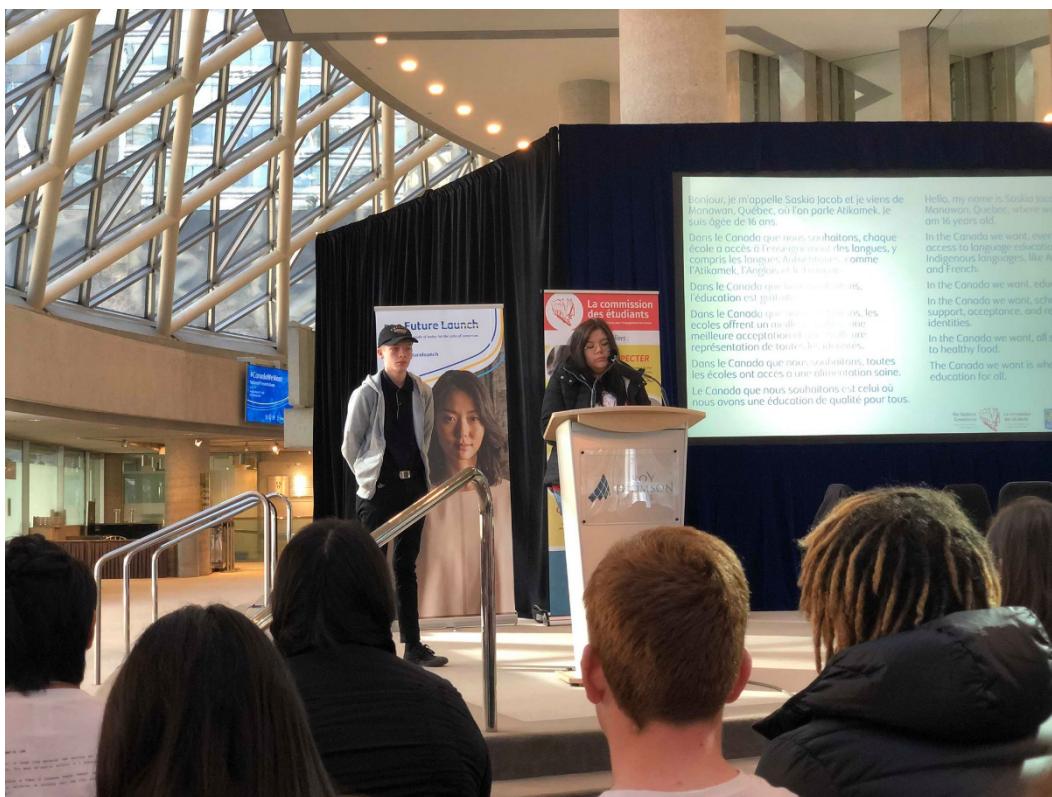
- Youth participant

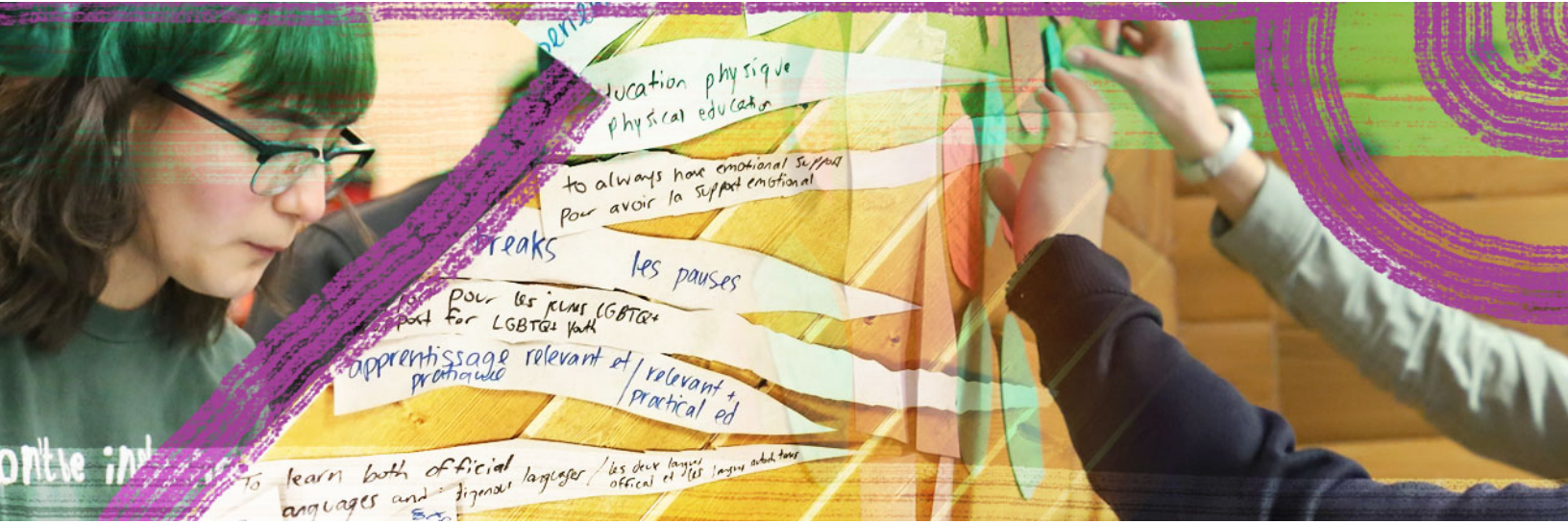
Children's rights formed the foundation of the theme team's conference experience. Several activities focused on educating young people about their own rights, using the UNCRC as a basis of understanding. Youth participants also explored the differences between wants, needs, and rights, which helped them unpack their beliefs about what they are and aren't entitled to as youth. These activities led to some difficult realizations in which youth recognized where their rights were not currently being met by the education systems. Rights outlined in the UNCRC that youth felt had been violated during their education included: the right to freely express their opinion and have it listened to and taken seriously (Article 12); the right to access information from a variety of media sources in school (particularly online media surrounding marginalized identities which was reportedly blocked at several participants' schools) (Article 17); the right to freedom of expression (in particular artistic expression) (Article 13); and the right to know about your rights and have them explained to you in a way that you understand (Article 42). When participants found out that they had the right to know their rights, several had strong reactions to being deprived of this information throughout their schooling. Many young people in the group were inspired to advocate for young people's rights, highlighting the need for youth-friendly accountability mechanisms.

Meet the Theme Team Members

The theme team was guided by two facilitators throughout the conference. With a staff facilitating from each organization, the two facilitators represented the partnership between PFE and the SCC.

The youth participants represented many communities and identity groups. The group included men, women, and transgender and nonbinary individuals. Several of the youth identified as members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, including bisexual, pansexual, queer, lesbian, transgender, and nonbinary. Five youth were Indigenous and represented four different First Nations communities. One youth was Black and a first-generation immigrant. The young people in the theme-team came from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds. The participants came from six different provinces as well as urban, suburban, rural, and remote communities. Several young people shared having learning disabilities/differences and mental health diagnoses. The youth varied in ages, ranging from some currently still in middle-school to others currently finishing university and college degrees.





Vision for Change: Future Recommendations



Large group discussions, small group conversations, written reflections, and even drawings inspired the information in this report, as multiple methods of gathering voice is key to including diverse youth perspectives.

The following section includes data and voice from the ten youth who participated in the FOPE theme team as well as other youth whom they consulted in order to include multiple perspectives on the topic. The section is broken down into eleven subsections. The first presents a visual of the future of public education using a “Dream Tree” diagram. This section also includes the theme group’s nine recommendations.

“Today, I learned that youth won’t be stopped. They will stand their ground and demand their voices/silence to be heard”

– Youth participant

The Dream Tree: A visual representation



The Dream Tree is a tool that is used to synthesize young people's ideas into a youth-friendly logic model for a given topic. When building a Dream Tree, the roots represent the inputs or the foundation, the trunk is the activities, the leaves are the outputs and indicators, and the fruit are the outcomes (the dream results they are working towards). The theme-team first started at the roots, or the foundation, which they identified as the rights of young people within the context of education. The "apples" represented what young people wanted to see changed in 10 years and the leaves were the small steps that could be taken to get there. Due to time-constraints, the group was unable to fully flush out the trunk of their dream-tree. The quotes included in the following diagram are entirely representative of their original language, aside from spelling corrections, for the sake of clarity. The recommendations are displayed as young people categorized them (root, leaf, fruit...).



The Dream Tree

The Fruit (Outcomes)

All schools have access to information regarding diversity, i.e., non-discriminatory online resources/library resources

Don't penalize students based on the bell curve

Grading based on knowledge

Whole class dedicated to health, sexual health, sexuality, gender, healthy relationships, and communication for all students (all year)

Changing the ways of learning by using different ways

Experiential learning and education based on modern job world

Easy access to therapy

Better national standard for education

Positive depiction of vocational schools to students

Free tutoring for students

The Fruit (Outcomes)

Different avenues of artistic expression for all

Arts valued as much as other subjects

Cultural respect and removal of racialized barriers

Change in school/class schedules, ex: longer breaks between classes, fewer classes per day (university model)

Access to wifi/technology for all students to have help with research/assignments

More classes on all students' cultures

More inclusive environments

More languages in school: Native, Latin, French, Spanish, Italian

More school activities (make it more fun) including visual learning and hands on

The Leaves (Outputs & Indicators)

Unblock necessary websites regarding diversity, i.e., LGBTQ.ca and BlackLivesMatter.com

Don't penalize students based on the bell curve

More active administration willing to list and connect with youth and maintain discipline/structure

Teach teachers different ways of explaining

Le support des personnels de l'école

Every school needs to have a health educator

More support for teen pregnancy

Not allowing government to change to old curriculum

Update health curriculum every five years

Stigma campaigns

Dramatic arts respected as much as other arts

More arts classes and teachers and resources

The Leaves (Outputs & Indicators)

More art classes and teachers and resources

Emotional support animals in schools

Creating more opportunities for tutors to benefit from their jobs

Indigenous studies courses MANDATORY in high school for ALL students

Breakfast/food programs for all students

Hire more Migmca teachers

Sensitivity training for administrators given by minority populations

Avoir foi de notre culture

After schools programs

Include and LISTEN to qualified and education individuals AND aboriginal people when making a curriculum!

Better representation of Indigenous groups and Peoples

Bringing more language diversity into the schools

Bring more teachers that speak other languages

Provide extra-curricular opportunities about

The Leaves (Outputs & Indicators)

Each student or groups <10 students should have an academic advisor and support person to talk with and check in with them at least once a week (mostly for middle/high schoolers)

Vocational school is not for dumb people!

Removing seat caps to university based on province

Merit based acceptances

Same training for teachers from coast to coast

Education federally mandated instead of provincial

Less personal critiques

Updated technology

Provide information about vocational schools to students

Diversity of arts: visual, dramatic, musical, graphic, design, written, animation, photography, screen printing, videography

More opportunities for students to express their opinions and protest

The Roots (Inputs / Foundation)

Access to the history of Canada

Experiential learning

Respect for all identities without being judged or targeted for who you are

The Roots (Inputs / Foundation)

Breaks

To always have emotional support

Physical education

Qualified teachers

Sexual health education

The Roots (Inputs / Foundation)

To learn both official languages and Indigenous languages

Relevant and practical education

Learning about and support for LGBTQ+ youth

Right to play



Create national curriculum standards

"[I learned] how different educational standard are across the country."

- Youth participant

"I feel shocked w[ith] the lack of unity in education across Canada. The amount of prejudice that exists again[st] other provinces when applying for post-secondary"

- Youth participant

Given the regional diversity among the participants in the theme-team, youth immediately noticed how different their educational experiences had been. Some young people were quite outraged to learn that youth in other provinces have access to different (and often better) educational experiences than they do. While some youth had extensive health education, Indigenous-specific history lessons, inclusive and experiential teaching methods, and exemplary language courses, others had little to none of these learning opportunities. Participants felt that all young people in Canada deserve access to the highest and most up-to-date standards of education. They felt strongly that the content of key courses/subject areas needs to be federally determined to ensure consistency and therefore equity across the country. In particular, young people felt that history and health class could benefit from federal regulation. They highlighted how differently history is taught across Canada and all young people in the group felt that their health classes were lacking. The theme team's desire for equity across regions in Canada highlights the complex relationship between federal and provincial jurisdictions when it comes to education.

Create national standards for teacher training

The theme-team participants also learned that curricula for teacher education are often region and province specific. Many youth felt that this had led to large disparities in their learning. The youth participants felt that federal-level curriculum standards for teachers studying to work in public education would help ensure that all young people had more consistent and equitable educational experiences.

Make key curriculum updates (Arts, Life-skills, Technology, UNCRC, Modern Jobs, Health)

"I learned that [the] education system really needs to change"

- Youth participant

"Thinking back to how education was for me in high [and] elementary school is interesting and hearing how not much has changed."

- Youth participant

Many participants felt that their educational experience and the information they learned were quite out-of-date with current social contexts and their needs. They highlighted six areas in particular, that require new or updated curricula: arts, life skills, technology, UNCRC, modern jobs, and health class.

Arts

Several participants discussed their educational experiences lacking arts options, either having access to one choice or even none in some cases. They felt that they were truly missing out on an important aspect of their education. Additionally, they felt that arts were not promoted as a valid career option and hoped to see more resources and discussion about artistic careers.

Young people wanted to learn about a variety of artistic media including: visual, dramatic, musical, graphic, design, written, animation, photography, screen printing, and videography. They emphasized the importance of having teachers who were educated in the arts rather than having a teacher who is trained in another subject.

Life skills

Youth participants also discussed the need for more supports and resources to help students develop life skills. In particular, young people were interested in learning more about paying taxes, cooking, economics, as well as learning about cultures, religions, ethnicity, and the social backgrounds that exist in our diverse world. Young people wanted to leave their school experience with enough knowledge to survive and thrive in the current and rapidly changing social context.

Technology

Many of the youth felt that their schools were lacking in relevant technology – for both teaching and learning purposes. They felt that this was a major issue for two reasons in particular; first the diverse learning needs of students are often best supported by access to appropriate technology, and second, our world is increasingly becoming a place where knowledge is shared through technology - meaning that access is critical to learning.

Participants felt that all schools should have updated learning tools, open Wi-Fi for students to use for research as opposed to it being password protected and kept from students, and relevant online security protocols that do not discriminate against 2SLGBTQ+ and racialized media.

UNCRC

"I know what a mitochondria is but I don't know my rights"

- Youth Participant

After learning about the UNCRC and realizing that children have specific rights in Canada, the young people at the conference were quite surprised. Though some had previously learned about their rights, many had never heard about them nor did they know that the UNCRC existed to protect them.

They felt it was essential that the education system teach young people about their rights and how to protect them, and that education workers model rights respecting behaviours. Youth believed the UNCRC should be included in all school curricula, but must also be taught to teachers, parents, and community members so that they may support young people in having their rights respected.

Preparation for modern jobs

"[The] Industrial school system [was] created to work in factories. It is not relevant to today."

- Youth Participant

Theme team participants felt that their public education experience was not as relevant to modern jobs as they would prefer. Some youth described the school system as still functioning in an industrialized model, aiming to train students for factory-style careers. With the career landscape changing and evolving at an ever-increasing rate, youth desired an educational experience that would prepare them for modern careers, beyond an industrialized setting. Youth participants wanted to learn relevant skills and knowledge in school such as those related to computer and digital media, multilingual language knowledge, cultural knowledge and sensitivity, and socio-political awareness. Additionally, young people wanted to see more focus placed on developing critical thinking relevant to modern jobs and an equal treatment of career options from academic or trade/vocational fields. They noted that vocational fields tended to be discouraged as ideal career paths and at times were considered as the option for "dumb" students despite the growing importance of vocational skills (i.e., graphic design, coding, technical arts). They recognized how important vocational and trade-based careers are for society and felt that this stigma needs to be addressed and changed.

Whole class dedicated to health (sexuality, gender, healthy relationships, hygiene)

Quality education surrounding health was a theme that emerged consistently among young people. Their conceptions of health moved beyond medical, including the following topics in their definition: contraception, substance abuse aid, family violence, healthy relationships, dating violence and assault,

mental health, therapy, sexuality, and genders (including nonbinary and gender non-conforming genders).

Most participants felt that there should be a dedicated health educator at each school who is committed to keeping up-to-date on the most advanced and relevant research in these areas. Young people said they would rather learn about health topics from a health professional than from their English or Math teacher, for example.

Youth felt that this course should be offered throughout the school year and at each grade-level, rather than having a small part of their semester focused on the basics of health, which they often found to be outdated.

Foster cultural respect and address social barriers

"I learned a lot about how Indigenous students experience the education. The common thread was a lot of systemic racism even from teachers - which broke my heart."

- Youth participant

"I've learned that there are lots of rude people who act racist against other cultures at other schools."

- Youth participant

"I will continue to think about how to make education a more accepting space for everyone."

- Youth participant

The theme team participants all had stories to share related to experiencing or witnessing discrimination at school. The following are highlights from their narratives:

- Disproportionately harsher punishments towards students of colour (i.e., suspension, detention)
- Racially charged interactions with teachers and other educators
- Socioeconomic divisions between public schools resulting in unequal access to quality education
- Lack of support for students with learning differences/disabilities and a decrease in support staff
- Lower academic expectations based on geography (rural/remote) resulting in an inability to qualify for university admissions
- Lack of diversity and respect for diversity in schools

Theme team participants felt strongly that school system needed to become more inclusive in order to provide equitable education, and address discrimination towards minority communities. They wanted an educational environment without harassment or systemic racism, instead promoting respect for diversity and inclusion of minority languages, cultures, and knowledge.

In order to move in this direction, theme team participants recommended curricula be inclusive of multiple peoples' histories, in particular the histories and lived realities of Indigenous Peoples in Canada, who are often misrepresented or ignored in history and social studies curriculum. They also emphasized that removing social barriers and promoting cultural respect must occur across multiple levels and involve the students, teachers, administration staff, as well as communities at large. If students learn about cultural respect, teachers and parents need to learn about it as well so that equality is reinforced and maintained throughout the community. Additionally, many youth participants felt that increased cultural sensitivity training for teachers might result in a decrease in systematic discrimination targeting minority groups (such as harsher punishments and biased course content). Most of the social barriers that youth identified experiencing had more to do with adults and those in power than with other youth. Some young people felt that workshops and other formalized community education could aid in bringing this information to parents, staff, and other adults so that they may then advocate for changes on a social and systemic level along with young people.

Provide a wide variety of educational opportunities

The youth discussed a desire to learn in many ways, including:

- E-classes (virtual courses that are run through online platforms)
- Learn from home options (independent learning/courses through physical resources like textbooks and course packs)
- Experiential courses (course that prioritize hands-on experience of the subject matter)

They felt that having a variety of educational opportunities was an equitable practice for those who are in rural and remote locations, those with different learning abilities and needs, as well as those who otherwise might miss out on positive developmental experiences. They discussed previous experiences of trying to enroll in virtual courses ("e-class") or learn at home options, as well as fieldwork-focused activities. Unfortunately, some participants (from East coast provinces) who attempted to enroll in e-classes and learn at home options were not able to access these educational opportunities due to financial and administrative difficulties. In terms of fieldwork and experiential learning, young people spoke of enjoying these hands-on experiences as they were able to engage with the material in a richer manner than through attending lectures.

Although not necessarily requirements of the public school curriculum, young people were interested in many fee-based courses that they could access remotely. A key barrier that emerged from this dialogue pertained to costs; fees associated with these types of education opportunities tend to be hefty. Young people felt that those who would benefit most from accessing these types of programs, often could not afford to.



Offer free access to resources in schools

Though school is primarily seen as an educational facility, the youth participants felt that school also serves as a resource center or hub of services. They believed that young people should be able to access free and higher-quality resources that are relevant to leading a healthy life as a young person. The following were several resources that young people would like to see available at schools for free, organized into three key categories: physical health and wellness, mental health and social support, and learning tools and technology.

Physical health and wellness

- Contraceptives
- Toiletries
- Menstrual products
- Healthy and non-restrictive food options
- Breakfast programs
- Take-home food plans
- Food that is inclusive of dietary restrictions

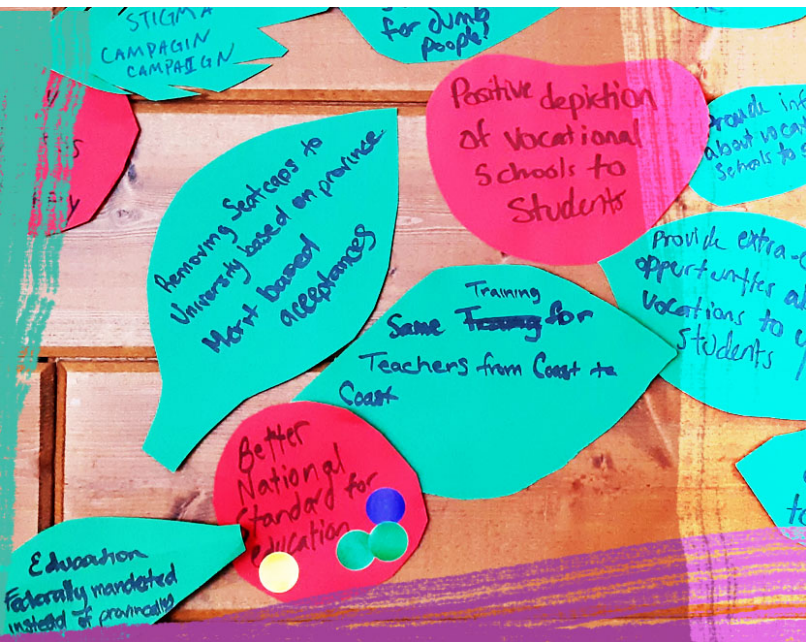
Mental health and social support

- Mental health support (therapy, diagnosis)
- Daycares for young parents
- Substance abuse aid
- Family violence, relationship, and assault support

Learning tools and technology

- Learning tools (physical and technological)
- Language aids
- Tutoring

Additionally, the youth felt that schools should provide meal programs for anyone who could benefit from them, as healthy and available food is important to development.



Ensure schools are safe and accessible

"The topics were deep and really made a difference in how I think of this subject."

- Youth participant

Some young people shared stories about unhealthy school environments. One participant explained that their school is located in a highly polluted location, where factory waste has literally caused a higher prevalence of asthma among the students. Another participant shared that their school's water was tested and found to have high rates of lead, which meant that students no longer have access to water fountains for drinking. Youth said they don't want their access to education to come at a cost to their health.

In addition to being safe, participants wanted schools to be geographically accessible to students. The topic of distance and travel was a concern for some members of the group who shared about the extra burden this places on them. Unfortunately, some young people shared they have to travel 2-3 hours to go to school or move to another community for the school year in order to access an education. This places a huge disadvantage on these students who have to navigate extensive travel times or living apart from their family in addition to the demands of their education. The youth participants in the theme-team felt that young people should not have to travel more than an hour to get to their school.

School safety also relates to the social experiences that young people have at schools. The youth from the theme team felt strongly that greater efforts need to be made in order to ensure the safety of students, physically and emotionally. In particular, they highlighted students who experience marginalization from peers and teachers due to socio-demographic identities (ranging from race, class, sexual orientation, gender, ability status, language, immigrant status, or otherwise). The group felt that marginalization happens at an individual (internalized stigma), social (bullying), and systemic level (institutionalized discrimination) within many public schools and thus must be addressed in a manner that can create change across all levels. As previously described, many youth felt that more awareness and training should be provided to students and staff surrounding cultural diversity and respect. They believed that if every single person involved in the school system could participate in cultural sensitivity education/training - be that teachers, administrative staff, students and even parents - then larger systemic issues of discrimination could be addressed in order to provide a safe environment for students of all cultures and identities.

Enhance opportunities to learn multiple languages

The place of language in education was discussed at length in the theme team. The young people felt that all students should have access to quality education regarding Canada's official languages. Several youth shared that though they had completed French language courses throughout their education, the curriculum was limited and did not promote a continuous development of learning the language. In a

bilingual country, most youth felt that schools should provide bilingual education, particularly from teachers who are bilingual themselves.

Additionally, participants felt strongly about including Indigenous languages in school curricula. Both non-Indigenous and Indigenous youth were alarmed by the fact that many Indigenous youth do not have access to learn their own language. All youth in the theme-team believed that students should have access to learning their own language, stressing how important this right is for Indigenous youth in Canada, who have had so much of their culture dismantled by colonialism.

Decrease class sizes

With many regions experiencing economic cutbacks to public education, the youth reflected on the ever-increasing class size. Most felt that this negatively impacted their learning experiences, reducing the quality of their education and the level of attention they received from their teachers. The participants believed that maintaining small class sizes was key to a positive educational experience. In some cases, they suggested that 1:1 teaching was quite important, particularly to those who may need more support based on learning disabilities and/or differences.

Enhance community participation in schools

Given that schools function as part of a community, the theme-team wanted to see more connection between community programs and organizations and their school environment. Young people valued learning about and from their community and felt that it was an important part of their development. Youth in the theme team highlighted that community members and organizations can offer learning opportunities and resources that school might not be able to on their own. They also believed that since young people spend such a significant amount of time at school, by integrating community resources, it will increase young people's access.

Mentorship for high school students

Whether they had not yet entered high school, were currently completing high school, or were already finished their degree, the youth participants in the FOPE theme team felt strongly that high school students would benefit from greater opportunities to engage with adult role models and mentors. They felt that having access to adult mentors from the broader community, particularly those already in established and successful careers, would help high schoolers make wiser choices and feel more prepared to enter the career world.

Elders and intergenerational involvement

Young people would like to see the education system create opportunities to connect with elders from their communities. They felt that having connections across generations, particularly with older adults who are elders in the community, would strengthen intergenerational connections and provide positive learning opportunities.

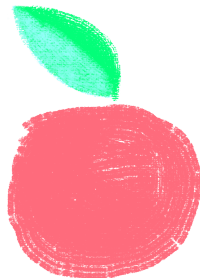
Demonstrate respect and support for our educators

*"Teachers are doing what they're asked of [by] the system.
It is not their fault. They work too much/are not always well-paid."*

- Youth participant

One message that was quite clear was that the theme team members did not blame teachers for the systemic barriers they had experience in their schools. They recognized that teachers are under-paid, over-worked, and deserve more support within Canada.

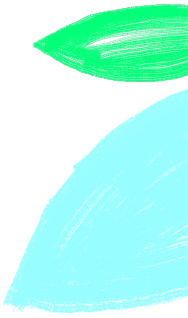
The youth felt immense respect for their teachers and recognized that in many cases they are going above and beyond what they are mandated to do in order to provide the best education they can. Though there are some individual teachers who may act in discriminatory and disrespectful ways, participants felt that teachers are generally positive and important individuals within the education system. They highlighted that government and society must first better support teachers so that they in turn can properly support their students.



Conclusion

The participants of the FOPE theme team worked hard and authentically to create the recommendations found in this report. They cared deeply about building a better public education for students in Canada and have outlined concrete steps for moving forward. Now it is time for adult allies to advocate for these recommendations and partner with youth to do the work authentically.

The youth involved in this project were immensely appreciative for the opportunity to engage with such an important topic and for the hard work of everyone involved in the PFE organization.



Hello, my name is Saskia Jacob and I come from Manawan, Quebec, where we speak Atikamek. I am 16 years old. In the Canada we want, every school has access to language education, including Indigenous languages, like Atikamek, English, and French. In the Canada we want, education is free. In the Canada we want, schools have better support, acceptance, and representation for all identities. In the Canada we want, all schools have access to healthy food. The Canada we want is where we have quality education for all.

~ Youth presenter from the FPE theme-team speaking at the Showcase event

“My name is Lachlan Brown, I come from Halifax Nova Scotia. What is the Canada I want? We want a Canada where students feel safe and comfortable in their schools. A Canada where students learn about the true history of this nations. Where truth and reconciliation is taught and discussed. We want a Canada where the curriculum is relevant to where the job market is heading. A Canada where students have access to menstrual products, toiletries and contraceptives. We want to see a Canada where school try to break down social barriers and accept students for who they are. A Canada where schools are close to students and optional online courses are free and accessible. We want a Canada with a culturally relevant curriculum. A Canada where the arts are valued and promoted in school. A Canada where Indigenous students have access to learning and speaking their language. A Canada where there is a federal curriculum for certain subjects. A Canada where class sizes are small and our educators are respected and supported. We want a Canada where students have a say in the way their school is run. I believe that all off this can become a reality, and the way we can do this is for the people who have power and influence in this government is to listen to the youth. We cannot do this alone but with your help and backing we can implement these ideas. I thank you for your time today and listening to what youth want for our nation”

~ Youth presenter from the FPE theme-team speaking at the Showcase event