

# INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

This report is an excerpt from the 2016 Annual Report on Ontario's Publicly Funded Schools.

While public attention is most often focused on the challenges faced by on-reserve schools, it is less well-known that in Ontario, 82% of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students attend provincially funded schools.<sup>1</sup>

For a number of years, Ontario's Ministry of Education and Ontario school boards have focused on two priorities: improving Indigenous students' chances for success, and increasing all students' access to a strong Indigenous education.<sup>2</sup> In 2015, in its "Calls to Action," Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) provided a number of concrete ways to achieve these goals.<sup>3</sup> The Calls to Action outlined the changes that provinces need to make in order to support the integration of Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into the classroom.

While there has been marked progress toward embedding Indigenous education into Ontario's schools, there are still challenges to be addressed.

Table 2

SCHOOLS OFFERING INDIGENOUS EDUCATION OPPORTUNITIES			
	2014	2015	2016
<b>INDIGENOUS GUEST SPEAKERS</b>			
Elementary	23%	20%	29%
Secondary	39%	45%	49%
<b>CONSULTATION WITH INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY MEMBERS</b>			
Elementary	12%	10%	13%
Secondary	27%	27%	38%

## QUICK FACTS

- 29% of elementary schools and 49% of secondary schools report Indigenous guest speakers.
- 31% of elementary schools and 53% of secondary schools offer professional development opportunities on Indigenous cultural issues to staff.

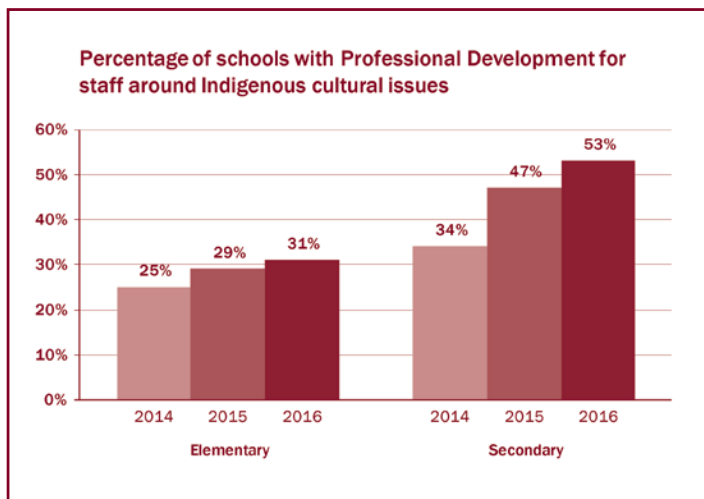
## EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

In an extensive consultation conducted by the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, Indigenous young people said they wanted traditions and teachings from elders to be part of their educational experience.<sup>4</sup> According to Indigenous education researcher Susan Dion, this access increases "opportunities for teachers and students to learn from Aboriginal people" and increases "First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students' experiences of belonging and well-being in schools."<sup>5</sup> Parent engagement also increases when stronger ties between schools and communities exist.<sup>6</sup>

Responses to this year's survey show that more Indigenous guest speakers are being invited into schools at both elementary and secondary levels, and that there has been an increase in the percentage of secondary schools consulting with Indigenous community members (see Table 2).

While these positive changes are worth celebrating, concerns persist. The majority of schools do not offer any Indigenous education activities, and urban regions lag behind rural areas in providing Indigenous education and supports. Furthermore, some principals commented that their schools had too few First Nations, Métis, or Inuit students to warrant a specific focus on Indigenous education.

Figure 1



In 2016:

- Only 10% of elementary schools offer Indigenous cultural ceremonies, and only 6% offer Native Studies programs.
- 30% of secondary schools report Indigenous cultural ceremonies, but only 11% report language programs, which has remained consistent for the past two years.
- 23% of secondary schools provide post-secondary outreach with a focus on Indigenous students.

## SUPPORTING TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

For teachers who are not familiar with Indigenous literature or First Nations, Métis, and Inuit cultures and histories, integrating Indigenous content into their courses can be overwhelming. Professional development can play a vital role in transforming their classrooms and their teaching practices.<sup>7</sup>

In 2016:

- 31% of elementary schools now offer professional development opportunities on Indigenous cultural issues to staff, compared to 25% in 2014 (see Figure 1).
- 53% of secondary schools offer professional development, compared to 34% in 2014.

- Only 15% of elementary and 35% of secondary schools report that they have a designated staff member (other than the principal or vice principal) who coordinates Indigenous education in their school.
- Of the elementary and secondary schools reporting no designated staff, more than 85% report having access to staff support from their school board.

## ADDRESSING IDENTIFIED GOALS

In 2007, Ontario's Ministry of Education introduced its *First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework*, which identifies specific goals aimed at closing both the achievement gap for Indigenous students and the knowledge gap experienced by all students.<sup>8</sup> The Ministry set 2016 as its target date for closing the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in literacy, numeracy, student retention, graduation rates and pursuit of post-secondary education, and providing Aboriginal education opportunities for all students.<sup>9</sup>

In spite of programming and monetary investments, these goals appear to be unachievable by the Ministry's target date. Achievement levels for most Indigenous students remain below that of their non-Indigenous peers,<sup>10</sup> with the most recent available data from the Education Quality and Accountability Office (2011/12) showing a gap of more than 20 percentage points on reading, writing and math test scores between First Nations students and all students in English language school boards.<sup>11</sup> The fact that the majority of schools do not offer other Indigenous education supports and programs also limits their capacity to reach the Ministry goals.

## INDIGENIZING EDUCATION

While there are signs of progress in Indigenous education, the biggest challenge may be the true Indigenization of education. Indigenizing education is not merely a matter of ensuring that Indigenous students have specialized programs and services; it requires learning environments that go beyond brief cultural experiences to include far broader expressions of Indigenous identity. In a truly Indigenized system, Indigenous concepts and ways of viewing the world are woven into the entire curriculum, rather than delivered as stand-alone curriculum expectations.<sup>12</sup> This requires reconceiving learning environments so that physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual elements are valued in addition to literacy and numeracy.<sup>13</sup>

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**Nous aimerions bien avoir des personnes ressources qui viennent faire des cérémonies et servir de mentors auprès de nos jeunes Autochtones, Métis et pour la population en général.**

*Elementary school, CSD du Grand Nord de l'Ontario<sup>14</sup>*

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Some principals expressed concern that their schools contained too few Indigenous students to warrant a specific focus on Indigenous education. As one principal stated, “Small numbers mean limited interest or perceived need.”<sup>15</sup> Yet, as Dion, Johnston, and Rice have shown, all students benefit from a better understanding of Canada’s history of colonization and its influence upon current relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.<sup>16</sup> One promising option at the secondary level is the granting of a compulsory English credit to students who take the grade 11 Contemporary Aboriginal Voices English course.<sup>17</sup>

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**Through collaborating with our Board's First Nations Resource teacher, our grade 5 students and teachers were able to engage in authentic learning experiences.**

*Elementary school, Peel DSB*

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## **THE IMPACT OF FUNDING AND STUDENT NUMBERS ON INDIGENOUS EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

In the 2016 surveys, some principals commented that they did not receive as much funding for Indigenous cultural opportunities as schools with higher Indigenous populations. This may be a result of targeted funding in the *First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Supplement*<sup>18</sup> that provides a base amount to all school boards to support implementation of the *FNMI Education Policy Framework*, plus additional support for boards with higher proportions of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students.

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**Since the person who carries the Aboriginal portfolio also has numerous other responsibilities, and our school would not be a priority school, I feel as though we are missing out on many wonderful learning opportunities for the Aboriginal students within our building.**

*Elementary school, Superior North CDSB*

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In the 2016/17 school year, school boards will receive \$64 million to support *First Nation, Métis and Inuit* education.<sup>19</sup> For the first time this year, the Ministry has included a requirement that a portion of the funding in the basic per-pupil allocation must be used to establish a supervisory officer-level position focused on the implementation of the *Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework*. Responsibilities will include “working with First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities, organizations, students and families...supporting programs to build the knowledge and awareness of all students about Indigenous histories, cultures, perspectives and contributions; and supporting implementation of Indigenous self-identification policies in each board.”<sup>20</sup> Boards are not only required to spend at least half of the targeted amount on this dedicated position, but they must also confirm that any remaining amount has been used to support the *First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework*.

This year the Ministry will also begin to phase in data from the 2011 National Household Survey, which will be used to allocate the per-pupil funding amount. In addition, 45% of the funding for the Board Action Plans required by the Ministry will be allocated based on voluntary Indigenous student self-identification. By the end of the phase-in period, it is expected that the 2016 census data will be available for use in implementing further updates. More accurate demographic data will help to ensure that funding is allocated where it is needed.

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**We work in grade teams to provide educational opportunities for all students on Aboriginal perspectives and culture. We have a community member who will be working with the staff on the Medicine Wheel teachings and the Seven Sacred Teachings.**

*Elementary school, Toronto DSB*

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# NOTES

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- 3 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action*. Retrieved from [http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls\\_to\\_Action\\_English2.pdf](http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf)
- 4 Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. (2014). *Feathers of Hope: A First Nations Youth Action Plan*. Retrieved from: [http://cwrp.ca/sites/default/files/publications/en/Feathers\\_of\\_Hope.pdf](http://cwrp.ca/sites/default/files/publications/en/Feathers_of_Hope.pdf).
- 5 Dion, S. (2014). *The Listening Stone: Learning from the Ministry of Education's First Nation, Inuit and Métis- Focused Collaborative Inquiry Project*. Toronto: Council of Ontario Directors of Education, p.4.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Dion, S. (2014). *The Listening Stone: Learning from the Ministry of Education's First Nation, Inuit and Métis- Focused Collaborative Inquiry Project*. Toronto: Council of Ontario Directors of Education; Dion, S.D., Johnston, K. and Rice, C.M. (2010). *Decolonizing Our Schools: Aboriginal Education in the Toronto District School Board*. Toronto.
- 8 Ministry of Education, Ontario. (2007). *Ontario First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework*. Ontario: Queen's Printer. Retrieved from <https://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/aboriginal/fnmiFramework.pdf>.
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- 10 Ministry of Education, Ontario. (2014). *Implementation Plan: Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Policy Framework, Ontario*. Ontario: Queen's Printer. Retrieved from <http://www2.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/aboriginal/OFNImplementationPlan.pdf>.
- 11 Ministry of Education, Ontario. (2014). *Implementation Plan: Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Policy Framework, Ontario*. Ontario: Queen's Printer. Retrieved from <http://www2.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/aboriginal/OFNImplementationPlan.pdf>; People for Education. (2013). *First Nations, Métis, and Inuit: Overcoming gaps in provincially funded schools*. People for Education: Toronto. Retrieved from <http://www.peopleforeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/First-Nations-M%C3%A9tis-and-Inuit-Education-2013.pdf>.
- 12 Toulouse, P. (2016). *What Matters in Indigenous Education: Implementing a Vision Committed to Holism, Diversity and Engagement*. In *Measuring What Matters*, People for Education. Toronto: March, 2016. Retrieved from <http://peopleforeducation.ca/measuring-what-matters/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/P4E-MWM-What-Matters-in-Indigenous-Education.pdf>.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 English Translation: [We would love to have resource people who come to the ceremonies and serve as mentors to our Aboriginal youth, Métis, and the general population].
- 15 Secondary School, Durham CDSB.
- 16 Dion, S.D., Johnston, K. and Rice, C.M. (2010). *Decolonizing Our Schools: Aboriginal Education in the Toronto District School Board*. Toronto.
- 17 Ministry of Education, Ontario. (2000). *Ontario Curriculum Grades 11 and 12: Native Studies*. Ontario: Queen's Printer. Retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/nativestudies1112curr.pdf>.
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- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Sékaly, G.F. (2016). *Grants for Students Needs changes for 2015- 16 and 2016- 17 [Memorandum]*. P.4. Retrieved from [http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/funding/1617/2016B06\\_en.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/funding/1617/2016B06_en.pdf).



People for Education is a registered charity that works to support public education in Ontario's English, French and Catholic schools.

For more information, contact us:

phone: 416-534-0100 email: [info@peopleforeducation.ca](mailto:info@peopleforeducation.ca)

web: <http://www.peopleforeducation.ca>