

# Indigenous education

2017

*This report is an excerpt from People for Education's Annual report on Ontario's publicly funded schools 2017.*

“It is critical to raise awareness of these vibrant cultures, in the spirit of reconciliation and Canada's commitment to its Aboriginal communities.”

Elementary school, CÉP de l'Est de l'Ontario<sup>1</sup>

May 30, 2016, marked Ontario's historic adoption of *The Treaties Recognition Week Act*<sup>2</sup>—legislation that designates the first week of November each year as Treaties Recognition Week. This is just one of the many initiatives introduced in Ontario to promote awareness, both in schools and with the broader public, about the treaties, rights, and responsibilities that we all have as citizens.

The legislation (the first of its kind in Canada) is a concrete example of how governments can implement the 2015 “Calls to Action” from Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) regarding the integration of Indigenous history/worldview in schools.<sup>3</sup> Ontario's response to the TRC continues to highlight the role of education in reconciliation; specifically teacher education, the Ontario curriculum, the preservation of Indigenous languages, and targeted supports for educators.<sup>4</sup>

## In 2017:

- 66% of elementary and 80% of secondary schools offer Indigenous education opportunities, up from 49% and 61%, respectively, in 2013.
- 23% of elementary and 49% of secondary schools have a designated staff member who coordinates Indigenous education.
- 40% of elementary schools bring in Indigenous guest speakers, up from 23% in 2013.

## Majority of Indigenous students attend provincially funded schools

Eighty-two percent of Indigenous students attend provincially funded schools in Ontario school boards, and virtually every school has Indigenous students enrolled.<sup>5</sup> This reality, and the TRC’s recognition of public education as a key component in the reconciliation process, means that Ontario’s 5,000 schools can play a vital role in long-term change for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

Over the last three years, there has been a marked increase in Indigenous educational opportunities in the province’s schools. This improvement may reflect both Ontario’s commitment to act on the TRC Calls to Action, and the continued implementation of Ontario’s *First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework*.<sup>6</sup>

Two of the key goals identified in the *Framework* are increasing all students’ and educators knowledge about “the rich cultures and histories of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples,”<sup>7</sup> and improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students.<sup>8</sup> This year’s survey results indicate some progress toward these goals.

## Increased Indigenous educational opportunities in schools

Since 2013, when we first asked about Indigenous education opportunities, there has been a fairly steady improvement in a number of areas. This year, 66% of elementary and 80% of secondary schools offer Indigenous education opportunities in some form (cultural support, language programs, guest speakers, ceremonies), up from 49% and 61%, respectively, in 2013. Examples of these opportunities range from replacing the mandatory grade 11 English course with an Indigenous literature course,<sup>9</sup> or—as some boards have done—introducing a policy to recognize the land on which the school is built as a part of its daily opening exercises.<sup>10</sup>

## Professional development for teachers

The TRC highlighted the importance of Professional Development (PD) for teachers, calling for post-secondary institutions to “educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into classrooms.”<sup>11</sup> All of Ontario’s faculties of education are now required to provide mandatory Indigenous content in their teacher education programs.<sup>12</sup> However, many teachers report receiving little education in this area, and many still report a low level of comfort teaching and speaking about Indigenous topics.<sup>13</sup>

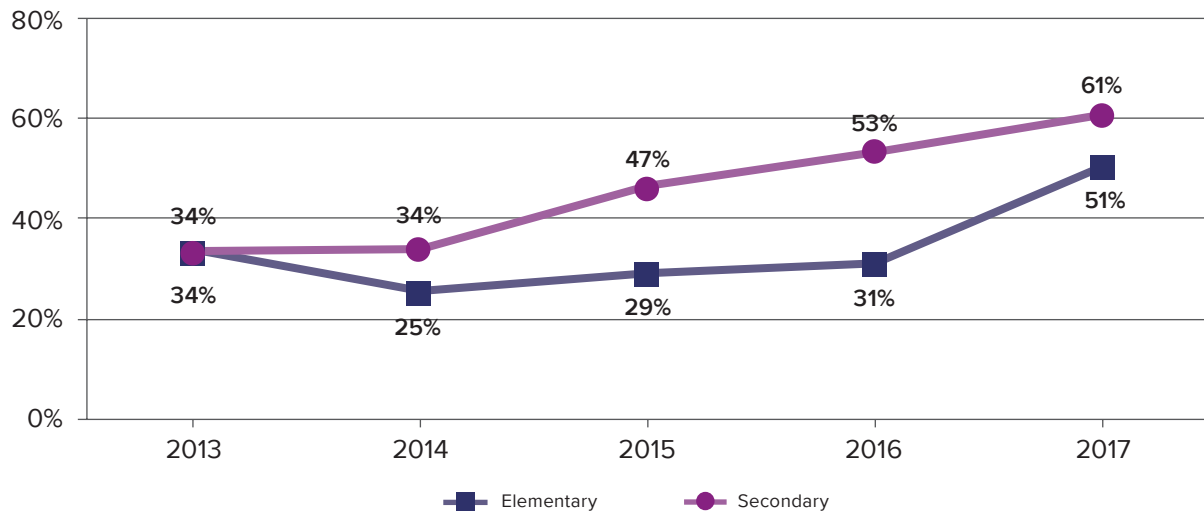
Ongoing PD can support teachers’ confidence in incorporating Indigenous perspectives in K to 12 classrooms.<sup>14</sup> Since 2013, there has been a relatively steady increase in the percentage of schools offering PD around Indigenous cultural issues (see Figure 1).

“Teachers teaching First Nation, Métis, and Inuit [courses] have received PD, but still feel very unqualified teaching First Nation, Métis, and Inuit from a relatively non-Indigenous perspective. They want to do a really good job and understand the importance, but they feel unsure.”

Secondary school,  
Upper Grand DSB

Figure 1

## Percentage of schools with professional development on Indigenous cultural issues, 2013 to 2017



“We have a staff member who has informally taken the lead on these issues. We believe that the first steps need to be in the area of education and awareness for staff and [all] students, and creating an environment where students feel comfortable to self identify.”

Secondary school,  
Limestone DSB

### Supporting achievement for Indigenous students

In the *First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework Implementation Plan*, the Ministry of Education set 2016 as the target date for closing the gaps in education outcomes (i.e. literacy, numeracy, retention, graduation) between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.<sup>15</sup> According to the 2011 National Household Survey, 24% of Indigenous 20–24 year olds living off-reserve in Ontario did not graduate from secondary school. This is 15 percentage points higher than their non-Indigenous counterparts (9%).<sup>16</sup>

The *Implementation Plan* also stated that the province would collaborate with First Nation, Métis, and Inuit partners, and key education stakeholders to explore and identify additional indicators of student achievement, well-being and self-esteem.<sup>17</sup>

The challenges faced by Indigenous students in provincial schools may reveal the need for a more comprehensive approach to ensure success. Part of the solution may be collaboration with multi-agency supports (e.g. health services, friendship centres), and with community-based programs that address issues of poverty, racism, housing, parental/guardian engagement and childcare.<sup>18</sup>

## Infusing Indigenous pedagogy in education

Some scholars refer to a need to “indigenize” education, a term that refers to the local, regional, national, and global perspectives of Indigenous peoples being seamlessly woven into a classroom and school (see Figure 2). This “indigenization” may mean, for example, that a school situated on Anishinabek lands will adopt a holistic approach to education that encompasses the physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual needs of the learners.<sup>19</sup> This re-visioning of education (i.e. curriculum, assessment, teaching strategies, etc.) also requires a specific focus on local partnerships and resources, before incorporating the knowledge of Indigenous peoples outside of that traditional area.<sup>20</sup> The local focus, in turn, requires staff time.

In 2017:

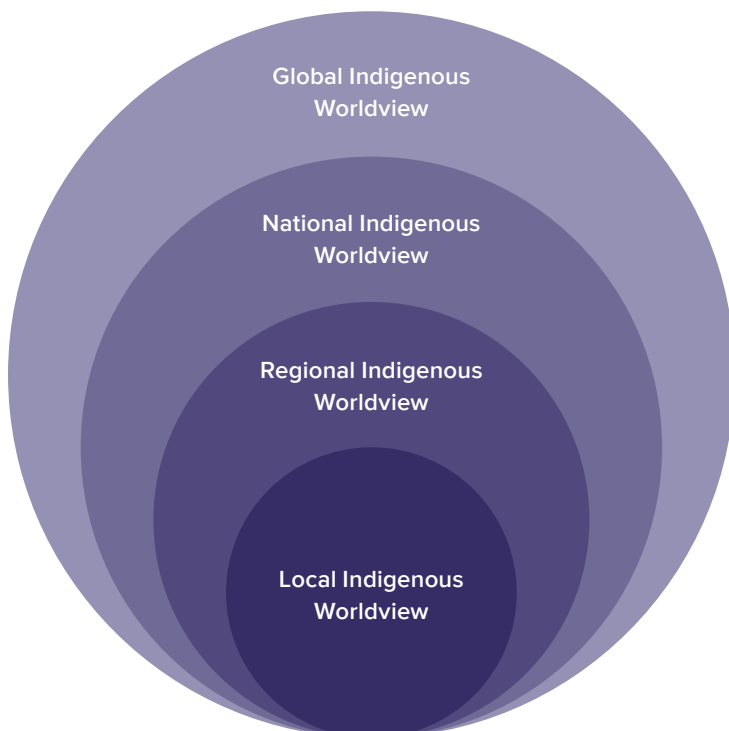
- 19% of elementary and 29% of secondary schools report that they consult with Indigenous community members.
- 23% of elementary and 49% of secondary schools report that they have a designated staff member at the school level who coordinates Indigenous education.
- 90% of elementary and 93% of secondary schools report that there is a designated staff member at the board level who is responsible for Indigenous education.

“We are a tri-lingual school where the languages and cultural diversity of all groups is celebrated. We are emphasizing the need to teach [the] positive contributions of Indigenous people throughout history while we discuss Indigenous people within the context of then and now.”

Elementary school,  
Kawartha Pine Ridge DSB

Figure 2

### An approach to infusing Indigenous pedagogy in schools



“I believe that the educational opportunities need to be embedded within existing courses, as well as continuing to offer the [*Current Aboriginal Issues In Canada* course] and other stand-alone courses. Time release is needed for teachers to have time to develop this work within their own subject/course areas.”  
Secondary school, Peel DSB

The Ministry encourages secondary schools to embed Indigenous themes and perspectives into existing courses via the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Studies Allocation.<sup>21</sup> In 2016/17, \$24.8 million was allocated to schools, based on the number of students enrolled in First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Studies courses.<sup>22</sup> Specifically, for every 12 students enrolled in a qualifying course, an extra 0.167 of a teaching position is allocated to the school.<sup>23</sup> In one Bluewater DSB secondary school, the staff has developed an outdoor education course delivered in an Indigenous context.<sup>24</sup> The course generates extra funding for the school and allows students to engage with Indigenous culture.

## Funding for Indigenous education

In 2016/17, \$64 million was allocated to support learning as outlined in the *Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework*.<sup>25</sup> The funding included support for a supervisory officer level position in each board to support the work described in the framework. Ontario is also beginning to phase in data from the Statistics Canada National Household Survey (NHS) to support more effective and targeted funding.<sup>26</sup>

Data from the NHS and from the Office of Ontario's Auditor General show that both Indigenous enrolment and self-identification of Indigenous students are increasing steadily in Ontario schools. These increases may result in additional funding to address educational gaps and increase cultural opportunities for all students.<sup>27</sup>

## Notes

1. This quote has been translated from French. Original quote: “Sensibiliser les élèves à cette culture bien vivante dans l'esprit de la grande réconciliation de l'engagement du Canada envers ses communautés autochtones.”
2. Government of Ontario, “News Release—Ontario Proclaims First Week of November Treaties Recognition Week—Province Working with Indigenous Partners to Build Awareness,” *Government of Ontario Newsroom* (Toronto, ON: Government of Ontario, May 30, 2016).
3. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth of Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Winnipeg, MB: National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation—University of Manitoba, 2015), 319-37.
4. Government of Ontario, *The Journey Together: Ontario's Commitment to Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples* (Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2016).
5. Kelly Gallagher-Mackay, Annie Kidder, and Suzanne Methot, *First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education: Overcoming Gaps in Provincially Funded Schools* (Toronto, ON: People for Education, 2013).
6. Ontario Ministry of Education, *Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2007).
7. *Ibid.*, 22.
8. *Ibid.*, 21.

9. Joseph Brean, "Ontario School Board Tosses Shakespeare for Indigenous Writers," *National Post* (Toronto, ON), May 11, 2017.
10. "Acknowledgment of Traditional Lands and Territories," *Toronto District School Board*, accessed May 2, 2017.
11. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, "Education for Reconciliation," *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action* (Winnipeg, MB: National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation—University of Manitoba, 2015), 7.
12. Government of Ontario, *The Journey Together*, 19.
13. Angela Nardozi and Angela Mashford-Pringle, "Engaging Teacher Candidates about Aboriginal Education Perspectives in Ontario," *First Nations Perspectives* 6, no. 1 (2014): 52-66.
14. Rhonda G. Craven, Alexander S. Yeung, and Feifei Han, "The Impact of Professional Development and Indigenous Education Officers on Australian Teachers' Indigenous Teaching and Learning," *Australian Journal of Teacher Education* 39, no. 8 (2014): 85-108.
15. Ontario Ministry of Education, *Implementation Plan: Ontario First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework*, (Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2014), 16.
16. Statistics Canada, "Secondary (High) School Diploma or Equivalent (14), Labour Force Status (8), Aboriginal Identity (8), Area of Residence: On Reserve (3), Registered or Treaty Indian Status (3), Age Groups (13B) and Sex (3) for the Population Aged 15 Years and Over, in Private Households of Canada, Provinces and Territories, 2011 National Household Survey," *2011 National Household Survey: Data tables* (table), Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 99-012-X2011044 (Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada, February 14, 2017).
17. Ontario Ministry of Education, *Implementation Plan: Ontario First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework*, 16.
18. Pamela Toulouse, *Beyond Shadows: First Nations, Métis and Inuit Student Success*, (Ottawa, ON: Canadian Teachers' Federation, 2013).
19. Pamela Toulouse, *What Matters in Indigenous Education: Implementing a Vision Dedicated to Holism, Diversity and Engagement* (Toronto, ON: People for Education, 2016).
20. Susan D. Dion, Krista Johnson, and Carla M. Rice, *Decolonizing Our Schools, Aboriginal Education In The Toronto District School Board: A Report on the Urban Aboriginal Education Pilot Project* (Toronto, ON: York University, September 30, 2010).
21. In 2017/18, the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Studies Allocation was renamed the Indigenous Studies Allocation, and reduced the allocation per pupil credit to \$1,153.48. For more information, please see the 2017/18 Education Funding Technical Paper. Ontario Ministry of Education, *Education Funding: Technical Paper, 2017/18* (Toronto, ON: Government of Ontario, 2017), 52.
22. Ontario Ministry of Education, *The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 9-12: Course Descriptions and Prerequisites* (Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2011), 84.
23. Ontario Ministry of Education, *Education Funding: Technical Paper, 2016-17*, 48.
24. Bruce Peninsula District School, *2017-2018 Course Calendar*, accessed May 1, 2017, B-41.
25. Ontario Ministry of Education, *Education Funding: Technical Paper, 2016-17*, 46.
26. In 2017-18, the ministry has sweated the Per pupil Amount of the Indigenous Education Grant, meaning the \$25.3 million in the Per Pupil Amount must be spent by boards on a dedicated Indigenous Education Lead, and remaining funds on the implementation of the *Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework*. For more information, please see Ontario Ministry of Education, *Education Funding: Technical Paper, 2017-18*, 50-1.
27. Office of the Auditor General of Ontario, "Chapter 3: Follow-Up on Reports Issued by the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (Summary)," *2016 Annual Report Volume 2* (Toronto, ON: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2016), 221-5.