



Education Together

A Report Card on Reconciliation in Indigenous K-12 Education and the fulfillment of Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action 7-10

"Education got us into this mess and education will get us out."

-Justice Murray Sinclair, Lead Commissioner,
Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC)

The Calls to Action of the TRC are a profound beckoning to the peoples of Canada and their governments to turn towards justice and away from the brokenness of colonialism. Calls to Action 7-10 focus in on the importance of this repentance in K-12 education for Indigenous children. The Residential school system caused great harm to seven generations of children and their families. A key part of healing, resilience, and reconciliation is building justice, equity and Indigenous leadership in education.

That's why the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue has been tracking Indigenous education reform for most of the last decade, and is committed to supporting the implementation of Calls to Action 7-10 through research, advocacy, citizen education, and partnership with Indigenous peoples.

Grading scale:

Excellent (A)

Promising (B)

Needs Improvement (C)

Needs Major Improvement (D)

No significant progress (F)

Education Together (crcna.org/EducationTogether) is an initiative of the Christian Reformed Centre for Public Dialogue, a place of conversation, learning and action on God's call to justice, peace and reconciliation. We are a ministry of the Christian Reformed Churches in Canada, a denomination of 255 churches and ministries and across the country. We enjoy full partnership with the Regional Synod of Canada of the Reformed Church in America, and invest deeply in the major ecumenical organizations in Canada. **Seeking Justice, Speaking Hope**

Call to Action 7

We call upon the federal government to develop with Aboriginal groups a joint strategy to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians.

2018 Grade: C-

Comments:

This *joint strategy* with respect to education includes some promising initiatives and some significant weaknesses.

Promising:

Since the 2016 Federal Budget commitments to \$2.6 billion in Indigenous Education funding, there has been a great deal of collaborative activity between First Nations representative organizations (AFN and regional bodies) and the Department of Indigenous Services. The *transformation of K-12 education* initiatives flowing out of Budget 2016 include: the convening of joint task teams on key educational and funding issues; and the joint development of a memorandum to Cabinet intended to assist in the release of education funds and policy development that supports First Nations control of education.

Regional education agreements between the Federal Government and First Nations and, in many cases, Provincial governments are tangible expressions of reconciliation and Indigenous self-determination in education. It is promising to note that two major agreements have been implemented since 2016: [The Anishinabek Nation Education Agreement](#) and the [Maskwacis Education Agreement](#). These agreements are part of a larger self-government development trend and are the product of long negotiation (20 or more years). Similar agreements in B.C. and Nova Scotia are achieving excellent results for First Nations students. In 2016-17 Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (Mi'kmaw Education authority in N.S., in operation since 1998) achieved a 89.6% grade 12 graduation rate – compared to a 92.3% provincial average. In B.C. an education agreement between First Nations, the Federal Government, and the Province has been operating since 2011-12 and has seen a 7% increase in graduation rates. (The 2015-16 graduation rate of 64% is dramatically higher than First Nations' national averages 24-46%, but below the B.C. provincial average of 86%.) Given these promising results it is good that the Department of Indigenous Services Canada (the Department) is committed to supporting local and regional self-determination agreements.

Weaknesses:

In spring 2018 the Auditor General of Canada (AG) reported that the Department's methods of determining graduation rates were inadequate. The Department's methods did not adequately account for drop-out rates between grades 9 and 11. Therefore the reported 2011-2016 graduation rate of 46% was skewed. The AG used a more comprehensive method of accounting for grades 9-11 drop-out rates and determined that the graduation rate for the period was only 24% and was in decline. [1]

Summary:

Promising results in self-determining regional and local Indigenous education systems demonstrate that the *joint strategy* envisioned in Call to Action 7 can be transformative for Indigenous children and communities. However, the basic data and statistics challenges discussed by the AG are critical for improving education planning, programming and funding – and indeed the flourishing of education agreements in the long-run.

Call to Action 8

We call upon the federal government to eliminate the discrepancy in federal education funding for First Nations children being educated on reserves and those First Nations children being educated off reserves.

2018 Grade: C

Comments:

The historic funding commitments of 2016 will, presumably, go a long way to addressing this particular funding gap. The details will be important:

Promising:

Again, regional and local First Nation Education agreements provide hopeful signs in addressing this funding gap. For instance, the First Nations Education Steering Committee (B.C.) notes that their Tripartite Education Funding Agreement “provides a flexible funding model for First Nation schools based upon the B.C. public education funding formula, with adaptations to reflect First Nations schools’ unique characteristics.”[2] In the first 2 years (2011-13) of this agreement Band-operated school per-student funding rates grew by 28%.[3]

Weaknesses:

Analysis and reporting of the Parliamentary Budget Officer (PBO) and the AG between 2016 and 2018 reveal weaknesses in data and costing estimates that would support a concerted effort to eliminate the gap. In 2016 the PBO reported that a costing analysis to support the 2016 budget commitments was not available, and encouraged the Department to “obtain reliable and consistent information on the actual costs of delivering education and compare these costs with those of the provinces.”[4]

2 years later, the AG noted similar data and costing issues: the Department “did not collect relevant data, or adequately use data to improve education programs and inform funding decisions.”[5]

Summary:

There is no doubt that the budget commitments of 2016 were a significant step towards addressing the gap in education funding. It’s also promising to see that clear funding increases are making a difference on gaps in funding and educational results, in B.C., Nova Scotia, and elsewhere. But the weaknesses in data collection and analysis noted by the PBO and the AG make it clear that more info is needed to understand if this gap is on the way to being eliminated.

Call to Action 9.

We call upon the federal government to prepare and publish annual reports comparing funding for the education of First Nations children on and off reserves, as well as educational and income attainments of Aboriginal peoples in Canada compared with non-Aboriginal people.

2018 Grade: C

Comments:

It is clear that there are data sources for a comparative annual report such as this.

Promising:

All of the existing regional and local education agreements track attainment data and provide transparency about funding uses by means of annual reports. The Department has made an expressed

commitment to tracking key educational data points: high school graduation rates; post-secondary graduations; First Nation language instruction; special education learning plans; and percentage of students enrolled in First Nation school boards.[6] First Nations and Departmental data would be helpful raw material for the annual reports envisioned in this Call to Action.

Weaknesses:

The PBO reported that it “could not find any examples in [Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada] documents on how the factors that influenced per-student funding levels are considered of what meaningful information or funding comparisons would look like.”[7] And further, the AG notes that the Department promised, in 2000, to report on the education gap every two years. As of December 2017 there were no such reports. [8]

Summary:

First Nation Education systems are required to provide detailed reports to the Department. For whatever reason, these and other sources of data have not yet been used to create detailed comparative reports on Indigenous education. Implementation of this Call to Action is a significant tool for good policy development and is within reach if Departmental promises are kept.

Call to Action 10

We call on the federal government to draft new Aboriginal education legislation with the full participation and informed consent of Aboriginal peoples. The new legislation would include a commitment to sufficient funding and would incorporate the following principles:

- i. Providing sufficient funding to close identified educational achievement gaps within one generation.*
- ii. Improving education attainment levels and success rates.*
- iii. Developing culturally appropriate curricula.*
- iv. Protecting the right to Aboriginal languages, including the teaching of Aboriginal languages as credit courses.*
- v. Enabling parental and community responsibility, control, and accountability, similar to what parents enjoy in public school systems.*
- vi. Enabling parents to fully participate in the education of their children.*
- vii. Respecting and honouring Treaty relationships.*

2018 Grade: Ranging from B to C (differences in sub-points)

Comments:

No national level education legislation plans are currently in place. There are ongoing consultations on a renewed fiscal arrangement (for education, health, & social welfare programs); and robust dialogue on the formation of new regional and local educational self-determination agreements. The Assembly of First Nations Chiefs Committee on Education has called for this region-by-region approach. This is not legislative action per se, but it is important and transformative work.

It is also important to note that Canada has agreed to implement the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Article 14 of the Declaration is most certainly echoed in the principles laid out in Call to Action 10. When the Declaration was first affirmed by Canada, Indigenous leaders said that its implementation should begin with education. That is a key reason why we at the Centre for Public Dialogue have been working on reconciliation in education ever since. Education encourages resilience, and self-determination (a core element of the Declaration) makes reconciliation possible.

Education → Resilience → Rights → Reconciliation

Please note: Our analysis of Calls to Action 7 and 8 (above) covers *principles* i and ii (i grade C, ii grade C) in this Call to Action. Below we'll focus on iii-vii.

Promising: (Grade: B)

iii: Culturally appropriate curriculum are features of existing and developing educational agreements. For example Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (MK – a Mi'kmaq education self-determination agreement) works with these *Guiding principles*:

“We will operate in a way that is consistent with the seven sacred teachings: respect, honesty, courage, love, truth, humility, and wisdom. We will be accountable and transparent. We will continually uphold the importance of language, the quality of education providing common opportunity, treaty and aboriginal rights and land. We are Mi'kmaq.”[9]

iv: There are current consultations focused on the development of a First Nations Languages Act. Furthermore, language instruction is common in existing educational self-determination agreements.

V: Elder consultation on curriculum, language, etc., and community dialogue and reporting are incorporated into all MK practices.

vii: MK has an existing Treaty education agreement with the province of Nova Scotia.

Weaknesses: (Grade C)

iii. The Department's community well-being index does not include data on health, environment, land and culture.[10] This is a barrier to good planning for the implementation of this principle.

Summary:

In almost a decade of studying reconciliation in education, we have learned that Indigenous students succeed when language, culture, and values are prominent in curriculum, and when communities and Elders play a part in the education system. These best practices are beautifully articulated in Call to Action 10, and are reflected in great self-determining education systems (Such as MK and the Tripartite agreement in B.C.). The results of these systems (as we see above) are *very* promising and hopeful. Deepening support from government for these systems will be helpful for the fulfillment of this call to Action.

Final Comments:**Overall Grade: C**

The current Federal Government has made solemn commitments to fulfill all Calls to Action of the TRC, to fully implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and to pursue renewed nation-to-nation relationships with Indigenous Peoples. Each of these commitments are connected to justice, equity, and reconciliation in Indigenous education. The shameful history of discrimination in funding and services to Indigenous students has led to stunning injustices like a 24% graduation rate for on-reserve First Nations students, in contrast to a national graduation rate around 90%.

There have been good steps taken: the 2016 Budget made historic commitments that are a helpful start to addressing chronic inequities, and existing and developing self-determination agreements in education show great promise and results for equity and excellence in Indigenous education. These good steps on the journey of reconciliation can continue and must include careful attention to the voices and experience of Indigenous students, communities, Elders and educators, and take into account the critical analysis of the Parliamentary Budget Officer and the Auditor General.

[1] Auditor General of Canada: *Report 5 – Socio-economic Gaps on First Nations Reserves – Indigenous Services Canada. 2018 Spring Report to the Parliament of Canada.* Section 5.84 (AG 2018)

[2] First Nation Education Steering Committee (B.C.) Annual Report 16-17. p. 21

[3] Parliamentary Budget Officer: Federal Spending on Primary and Secondary Education on First Nations Reserves. December 2016. p. 28 (PBO 2016)

[4] PBO 2016, p. 6.

[5] AG 2018, 5.38. (It is also important to note that the AG echoes the PBO in noting that the Department's analysis did not support the \$2.6 billion allocation for education from 2016-2021. See 5.70)

[6] Indigenous Services Canada 2018-19 Departmental Plan. p. 21.

[7] PBO 2016, p. 18

[8] AG 2018, 5.31

[9] <http://kinu.ca/introducing-mikmaw-kinamatnewey>

[10] AG 2018, 5.17