



## **REGIONAL SESSIONS 2008**

### **FEEDBACK SUMMARY**

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

Each year, the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) sponsors a series of meetings in communities across British Columbia (BC) to discuss vital issues in First Nations education. Those meetings, known as Regional Sessions, are led by Board members and the staff of FNESC. Representatives of the BC Ministry of Education Aboriginal Education Enhancements Branch and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) also assist in sharing information about relevant initiatives and policies.

At the Regional Sessions, representatives of local First Nations communities and stakeholders of all backgrounds are invited to provide feedback and raise topics that are of local importance.

In 2008 Regional Sessions were held in the following communities.

Prince Rupert	September 23 & 24	33 community participants
Kamloops	October 6 & 7	26 community participants
Lytton	October 9 & 10	17 community participants
Prince George	October 9 & 10	39 community participants
Campbell River	October 14 & 15	20 community participants
Cranbrook	October 14 & 15	19 community participants
Port Alberni	October 16 & 17	17 community participants
Lower Mainland	October 20 & 21	20 community participants
Victoria	October 23 & 24	22 community participants
Williams Lake	November 13 & 14	20 community participants
Kelowna	November 20 & 21	12 community participants

This document compiles the feedback collected from the Regional Sessions in the fall of 2008. Feedback from the Regional Sessions is vital to FNESC's ability to plan future strategic directions and to be accountable to the First Nations communities it serves.

FNESC is grateful to everyone who participated in the Regional Sessions this year and also to those communities that helped to host the meetings.

## **COMMON THEMES FROM THE 2008 REGIONAL SESSIONS**

In reviewing the feedback received at the Regional Sessions, several topics appear to be of significant interest to the participants. Those “themes” arose in multiple locations. Below is a summary of the major themes that arose, although it is not intended to be an exhaustive list of the issues that were raised for discussion.

### **Data Collection Support for First Nations Schools and Communities**

The regional session participants who work within the K-12 and the post-secondary education systems consistently acknowledged the necessity and value of data collection. But in every Regional Session, there were reports that the growing demands for data represent a major burden for schools and communities. The participants offered many suggestions for improving data collection processes, including increasing the resources available for data training and staff support, and streamlining the data collection tools.

### **Relationships of Schools with First Nations Parents/Communities**

The formal relationships with parents that are outlined in Local Education Agreements (LEAs) and Enhancement Agreements are very important, but those relationships need to be reinforced at the local level by efforts to nurture strong relationships between schools and First Nations communities and, especially, parents. A number of approaches are already being used to achieve this goal, such as community potlucks, open door school policies for parents, and year-end celebrations. More awareness of the importance of this issue, plus resources and “best practices” sharing, would be appreciated.

### **First Nations Education Jurisdiction Learning Resources**

First Nations education jurisdiction is a topic that is still new to many people in BC, and when it was discussed at the Regional Sessions there were several questions about how jurisdiction will function and where to go for the latest jurisdiction information. More communication materials on this topic were requested and some “catch-up” assistance may be needed for communities that might still like to enter the process.

### **Equity and Recognition for First Nations School Educators and First Nations Schools**

Achieving equity in the recognition and salaries of teachers working in First Nations schools is important. Participants reported that there is still an incorrect perception that the First Nations school system is “less than” the public system, and many people indicated that the challenge of retaining teachers and sharing the successes of First Nations schools is an ongoing priority.

### **Local, Culturally Relevant Curriculum Development**

There is a great deal of excitement regarding the new English 12 First Peoples course and, more generally, regarding the design of local curriculum under First Nations direction. Schools would appreciate more support from FNEESC, the FNSA and the Ministry of Education to help them undertake this work, including access to flexible funding resources.

## FEEDBACK ON KEY TOPICS

The following are the major questions, comments and suggestions generated at the Regional Sessions, grouped by the major topics included on the Regional Sessions agenda. To inform the discussions of each of the agenda topics, FNESC distributed discussion papers on each agenda topic.

**For a copy of the discussion papers, please visit the publications catalogue on the FNESC website [www.fnesc.ca](http://www.fnesc.ca) . Here you can find the publication: *Regional Sessions 2008 Discussion Papers*.**

### 1.0 Jurisdiction

At the Williams Lake Regional Session, there were questions about how jurisdiction will be implemented and where to find the most current jurisdiction information. There were also questions about the possibility of extending jurisdiction to post-secondary education and about whether curriculum development would be funded through jurisdiction funding.

At the Prince Rupert Regional Session, a request was made for more user-friendly jurisdiction materials that are oriented toward communities.

In Prince George, a comment was made that jurisdiction funding must be somewhat flexible and also indexed to the cost of living in various regions of the province. It was mentioned that it is difficult for some First Nations to have a representative attend the jurisdiction meetings because of people's workloads and local responsibilities, and because of the travel expenses involved. It was asked how a community can get "caught up" and whether some alternate system might help First Nations more easily enter the process. There were also questions about how jurisdiction will impact adult learning centres.

During the Lower Mainland Regional Session, questions were asked about the jurisdiction process, including whether adult students in K-12 are included and how jurisdiction will change the relationship with the BC College of Teachers.

At the Prince George Regional Session, participants expressed the need of First Nations schools for a block rate that is equitable with provincially funded public schools.

In Prince Rupert, there was enthusiasm for reciprocal tuition and there was support for giving this issue more attention because it has an important impact on budgets.

## **2.0 English 12 First Peoples**

In several regional sessions, it was reported that local schools are planning to offer English 12 First Peoples (EFP12).

In Lytton/Kamloops, it was commented that more locally approved materials for this course should be developed. It was also noted that Secwepemc language classes are offered through video conferencing to make the classes available to smaller schools, and this was suggested as a possible model for EFP12. Kamloops is already adapting EFP12 for online delivery.

In Port Alberni, it was suggested that EFP12 be made available through distance education and to also offer an adult basic education version of the course. The importance of increasing funding for language/culture teachers was raised, and it was suggested that resources for this increase should logically follow from the reconciliation efforts of the residential school apology.

At the Williams Lake Regional Session, participants wanted to know what other First Peoples curriculum and courses might be developed next. First Peoples History was suggested.

In Kelowna, participants suggested offering EFP12 to adult students too and also building a distance education course.

Prince George participants commented that feedback from the EFP12 teacher training (which was very positive) should be posted to promote the course and training. The course also should be publicized in teacher education programs in order to interest future teachers and lessen their anxieties about teaching the course.

At the Lower Mainland Regional Session, there was support for the idea of having a version of EFP12 created for the post-secondary level, and it was mentioned that X'itolacw Community School will be introducing EFP12 and delivering it over a two-year time span. There was also a comment that First Nations should hold the copyright to these types of courses.

It was suggested at the Victoria Regional Session that FNEC distribute a list of the schools offering EFP 12 and also communicate to students that many universities and colleges were already accepting the course. Other suggestions were to strengthen the poetry component of the course and provide more EFP12 training to share ideas related to the successes and challenges of delivering the course.

In the Campbell River Regional Session, support was expressed for the EFP12 curriculum and participants expressed hope that it would contribute to improved graduation rates.

### **3.0 DRAFT Funding Proposal for New National Funding for First Nations Education**

Participants in the Cranbrook Regional Session wanted to know how much of the proposed new national funding would be used to help students directly rather than paying administrative costs, and they suggested offering additional financial support to communities to assist them in developing LEAs.

The Prince George Regional Session participants emphasized the need to ensure that too much funding does not stay at the regional level, and that the funding must be accessible to the more remote schools. It also was suggested that some of the funding should be used to sponsor data positions, given that the increasing INAC data collection requirements have resulted in a growing burden on communities. It was also commented that FNEESC should seek funding for the development of English 10 and 11 from the BC Ministry of Education rather than INAC. Other comments offered included the need for more school nutrition programs and the promotion of First Nations language courses in schools.

At the Lytton/Kamloops Regional Session, the issue of supporting transitions from Early Childhood to K-12 was discussed as an important area to address within the Education Partnership Program, and it was suggested that the development of more Indigenous curriculum in the sciences should be considered.

### **4.0 First Nations Schools Association**

At the Port Alberni Regional Session, it was suggested that the First Nations Schools Association (FNSA) should employ one or more First Nations language coordinators to support language education in First Nations schools.

Prince George participants voiced support for a dedicated FNSA staff person to help communities with data collection projects, and it was suggested that data collection software should be further investigated. They also called for more promotion of the successes of First Nations schools in the media.

In Williams Lake, concern was expressed about the fact that teaching time in First Nations schools is “non-transferable” out of province. School representatives also expressed that they need more support for data collection and to oversee work plans because it is very time consuming. Appreciation was expressed for the level of support shown by FNEESC and the FNSA.

In Campbell River, participants discussed the importance of First Nations schools being able to offer competitive salary and benefits packages in order to attract and retain school personnel. The idea of having FNSA meetings that include Band Council members was also suggested.

In the Victoria Regional Session, the ability of First Nations schools to retain teachers once they gain experience was flagged as a concern. It was also reported that teachers who go to work in public schools sometimes have difficulty getting their years of experience working at First Nations schools fully recognized.

In Victoria, participants noted that parents need support to enable them to become more involved in schools. Several ideas were suggested in this regard, including more “meet and greet” potlucks, resources to prepare parents for what to expect at parent teacher interviews, and school newsletters that are at a more accessible literacy level. It was commented that teachers and schools need to become more involved with Aboriginal communities and that Aboriginal communities should also invite teachers and principals to social events.

## **5.0 FNSA Data Collection**

In Prince Rupert, participants commented on the need for more money for support staff to complete the data collection required for all FNSA/FNESC projects. Currently, data collection is something that people are trying to do in addition to their regular duties. Because data collection is labour intensive, it would be best if the forms were shortened to just the most relevant information. There also needs to be more funding for data collection staff and possibly opportunities to combine efforts/resources regionally. Appreciation was expressed for the FNSA’s efforts in this area and there was acknowledgement of the value of having good data.

In Prince Rupert, it was commented that sometimes data collection information doesn’t get to the right people and that staff are often overwhelmed by the volume of reporting that is required. It was suggested that the FNSA supply templates to help schools/bands collect the data they will need at reporting time (for example, Parents Club participation sheets). Efforts to streamline the process at the local level would be appreciated.

In Kelowna, participants suggested making more use of checklists and tip sheets for data collection, and also recommended that there be more reporting about the purpose of the data gathering and its value.

At the Victoria Regional Session, it was commented that the data collection tools were too lengthy and not as high a priority for completion as other reporting that is more directly tied to funding. It was mentioned that October is a bad time of year for data collection. Schools would like any changes that would make the process easier and they would like to better understand how the data is used and where it goes.

In Campbell River, schools and communities reported experiencing “overload” due to the quantity of data collection requests. Participants discussed the importance of communicating

why the data is important, allowing enough time for the data collection, and watching the timing of the request.

At the Port Alberni Regional Session, it was commented that the FNSA data collection around student attendance should use the principle that absenteeism for a cultural reason should not be counted as absent, but rather as a complement to the curriculum.

## **6.0 Special Education Program**

In Prince George, appreciation was expressed for the services of the FNEESC/FNSA Special Education Team, and it was suggested that more teachers in First Nations schools should be trained to do speech-language assessments.

Prince Rupert participants expressed appreciation for the Special Education Program and recommended that FNEESC and the FNSA could do further work to increase special education staff at the local level.

At the Lower Mainland Regional Session, the special education funding gap between First Nations schools and independent schools was discussed. There was interest in learning more about the special education funding policies in other provinces.

In Williams Lake, the importance of addressing special needs prior to children reaching school age was discussed, and so was the importance of supporting bridging programs.

In Victoria, it was commented that as knowledge about special needs grows, communities and schools are identifying more children and youth with language delays, behavioural problems, and other special education needs. However, local services are already strained to adequately support students. There are funding gaps for children who turn 5 but who are not ready for school, and also for youth who turn 19 and are no longer eligible for support.

## **7.0 Seventh Generation Club and the Daytimers**

In Cranbrook, the idea of a virtual daytimer was suggested. It was also suggested that perhaps fewer senior level students use the Club daytimer because they already have school daytimers that include school-specific exam dates and materials.

In Williams Lake, there was support for the new, smaller style of the senior daytimer and it was suggested that the junior level daytimer is also too large. In addition, to enhance the daytimers, they should include more student photos from the schools

At the Port Alberni Regional Session, it was suggested that an art contest should be held to design the daytimer covers, and that a primary level version of the daytimer should be

developed. A clear deadline for submitting photos is also needed. Other suggestions were to include more role model interviews and more scholarship information.

In Prince Rupert, it was mentioned that the Club is helpful. There were reports that senior students like the new, smaller format of the daytimer and are finding the daytimer useful, although the junior students miss the photos on the cover. It was suggested that the Parents Club might enjoy the daytimer format.

There was a comment from a Prince Rupert participant that the money used for the daytimers could be applied to other programs, because many schools have their own daytimers. A survey might be helpful to find out whether they are being used.

At the Lower Mainland Regional Session there was some discussion about how to incorporate more local content into the daytimers, perhaps based on the FNSA regional structure, and there was some interest in having a student contest to design the covers.

In Kelowna, participants suggested expanding the club's presence in public schools and adding more local content to the daytimers. The idea of offering a digital daytimer was mentioned.

The Campbell River Regional Session participants commented that the junior daytimer is well-liked, and it is a good tool for helping students stay organized. Both daytimers are enjoyed and the new, smaller format is appreciated. Suggestions for enhancing the daytimer included adding stickers, increasing the local content, and displaying more photos and role models. A contest could be held to design next year's daytimer cover.

The participants at the Lytton/Kamloops Regional Session also expressed appreciation for the daytimers and the Club. The Senior Daytimer could have more messaging on health and social responsibility. They recommended continuing the daytimers and adding timetable blocks to reflect the school semester.

## **8.0 Early Childhood Education**

At the Port Alberni Regional Session, support was expressed for FNEESC's continuing efforts to bring organizations together to address Early Childhood Education because that stage is such an important foundation for future learning.

At the Williams Lake Regional Session, participants expressed support for FNEESC's work in the Early Childhood Education field. It was suggested that more funding is needed for programs like the one offered in Williams Lake, which prepares parents for involvement when children become school age.

In Victoria, it was suggested that Friendship Centres should be invited to join the Early Childhood Development Council.

In Prince Rupert, it was commented that putting our efforts and money into preschool, K4, HIPPY and related programs is an excellent investment with a very high potential for future returns. Participants also suggested that INAC increase the childcare funding available to adult students and provide more supports for young parents.

In Prince George there was a comment that Early Childhood Education should be community-based and that FNEC would be more effective if it kept its focus on K-12.

At the Lytton/Kamloops Regional Session, it was commented that not all students are prepared for the transition from HeadStart to K4. There was some discussion about the need for a provincial body to share more information with all First Nations regarding ECE standards in HeadStart/nursery programs. An information forum might be helpful. The need for set standards for salaries was also expressed. It was commented that a more coordinated effort is needed in this area. Kamloops has a model for a coordinated approach that is working well.

In Kelowna, participants suggested that more in-community training was needed in early childhood education and HeadStart programs needed more funding and resources. More emphasis could also be put on prenatal care.

In Prince Rupert, the idea of having an Early Childhood Education theme for the provincial conference was suggested. It was also commented that finding and retaining qualified ECE staff can be challenging.

In the Lower Mainland Regional Session, some questions were asked about the Ministry's consideration of all-day fully funded K4 education and the implications for existing K4 programs on-reserve. Participants from First Nations schools referred to the challenge of working in a situation where they are considerably underfunded compared to provincial schools.

## **9.0 Aboriginal Languages Subcommittee**

At Port Alberni, it was suggested that FNEC prepare a summary of what the Developmental Standard Term Certificate Program looks like after 3 years, then after 5 years. This would be a useful example for communities that are considering establishing their own DSTCs.

In Campbell River, participants commented that they would appreciate an increased sharing of language resources and information on language programs by the Aboriginal Languages Subcommittee.

At the Lytton/Kamloops Regional Session, language preservation and education were discussed. The idea of a mentoring program for First Nations languages had local support but there was not yet sufficient funding. The practice of giving accreditation for language knowledge through the DSTC program was discussed, and participants discussed a similar model in the Yukon that sponsors language teachers to become certified. In terms of action following the residential school apology, it was suggested that we push not only for more support for First Nations schools, but also for more support in the areas of technology and language.

In Williams Lake, there was interest in FNEC developing and sharing more information around language curriculum development.

## **10.0 Post-Secondary Education**

In Cranbrook, it was suggested that, given the growing demand for Aboriginal people with higher-level post-secondary degrees, FNEC should work toward getting more targeted Aboriginal seats in Masters and PhD programs.

In Port Alberni, it was commented that more post-secondary options are needed at the local level. Regarding post-secondary data collection, participants related that the form was too time-consuming. It was also suggested that links might be made from the Aboriginal Learning Links website to local programs.

Prince George participants recommended that INAC post-secondary funding guidelines should be more specific regarding eligible Masters level courses and programs. They also recommended sharing more success stories from First Nations institutes to counter negative stereotypes. Regarding data collection, the high turnover of Education Coordinators was suggested as a factor that makes collecting data difficult. Information about scholarships and bursaries needs to be shared with Education Coordinators as well as students, and successful scholarship recipients should be asked to share their stories with other students to show the benefits of applying.

In the Victoria, support was expressed for more funding to sustain and expand the Education Coordinators program.

At the Lytton/Kamloops Regional Session there was a comment that online delivery of the Education Coordinators courses might not always be the most effective means of delivery.

In Prince Rupert, there was a suggestion that a question and answers document should be developed to support the data collection process. It would also be helpful to have more funding available for student field trips to post-secondary institutes and more funding for additional post-secondary support staff at the Band level.

In Williams Lake, it was commented that the one-year limit on funding for upgrading is not meeting the needs of many students. A suggestion was made that FNEESC hold a multi-day workshop for Education Coordinators to encourage mentorship, and then seek additional funding to support Education Coordinators in attending training courses.

Post-secondary education was a key topic at the Lower Mainland Regional Session. When asked by INAC why not all communities are using the protected pool of money, it was mentioned that some schools accept applications for funding as late as August, which is beyond INAC's deadline. Some students are still waiting to hear if they have been accepted into programs.

At the Lytton/Kamloops Regional Session, participants requested more workshops for PSE coordinators. To support communication with the coordinators, various ideas like regional meetings, training and conference calls were suggested.

In the Lower Mainland session, another issue raised was a lack of funding for summer and co-op employment for individuals 30 years of age and older who aren't eligible for the SSEOP program. It was also noted that underfunding of the SSEOP program was a concern and that INAC needs to increase funding to this program. Participants commented that the cost of living and tuition rates have been rising and the PSE funding has not been keeping pace.

Also in the Lower Mainland Regional Session, it was reported that the data collection form took much longer to complete than the suggested 15 minutes. One Education Coordinator reported spending 9.5 hours on the reporting and another reported needing a whole day, despite having individual assistance from FNEESC. Participants commented that they were committed to being comprehensive and truthful in their reporting, but that it is difficult to wade through the forms. In terms of what might help, the following ideas were suggested: additional training on data collection; greater use of Excel sheets or different format options (Word, Excel, PDF); reducing data repetition; having a "new this year" bulleted list to highlight changes; providing more support for data collection at the local and provincial levels; and having fewer but bigger deadlines. Participants noted some existing models that might be useful, such as the conference calls used by the Special Education Department and the guidelines "acknowledgement" receipt system used by the FNEESC Post-Secondary Subcommittee.

Other discussion items from the Lower Mainland Regional Session were that most First Nations have a maximum time limit for funding any particular students and they give priority to first time applicants and undergraduate degrees. For some students, the time limit is a challenge. Participants discussed possible solutions, such as doing assessments routinely, improved counseling, and ongoing monitoring of student progress.

In Campbell River, it was reported that the directions on the data collection forms should be clearer. It was also suggested that on-line data collection systems should be investigated.

## **11.0 Local Issues**

In Prince Rupert, participants said they would like to see more 5-year teacher education programs in the north, and particularly in the communities of Terrace, Prince Rupert and Prince George. The recruitment and retention of school personnel and specialists is a local concern, and contributing factors are the high retirement rate and inadequate salary levels. The participants highlighted the need to encourage students to train in the North so that they would be more likely to stay and work in the area. A need for more university-level seats was also expressed and the Ministry of Education representatives made a commitment to take this issue back for discussion.

In Williams Lake, gang violence was raised as a major issue and the First Nations representatives in the area are seeking assistance to address this concern. Examples of successful programs would be appreciated.

In Kelowna, a priority was to support families and students who have to transition between schools. Gangs and student retention were also concerns.

In the Prince Rupert area, often Grade 8-12 are not available on reserve so the children have to go to another community at those stages. Room and board is an issue and a program is needed for those families who need or want to keep their kids close to home in their own communities. Perhaps a coordinator is needed to access and manage a distant education program on reserve.

In Campbell River, a local priority is to have more community presence in schools to reduce the number of negative student behaviours in classrooms. Students need to have opportunities to take specialized training without having to leave their community. Data collection and the amount of administrative work involved also were issues for all local schools and communities.

## **12.0 Ministry of Education Topics**

In Port Alberni a comment was made that it is not productive to post Foundation Skills Assessment results by school. Regarding board approved courses, it was commented that the Ministry should raise awareness that only a limited number of credits from those courses can be used for graduation purposes.

At the Prince George Regional Session, the participants spoke about the Language IRP for the Gitanma'ax language, which is awaiting approval, and also about the need for targeted funding to provide more social and cultural supports.

Participants in the Victoria Regional Session expressed some concern that teachers aren't adequately involved in the Enhancement Agreements process. There was also a comment that targeted funds should not be used to fund assessments; they should be funded from the regular school budgets. Also, there should be more equitable distribution of targeted funding among districts. It was suggested that it is currently difficult to share information between the Ministry of Children and Families and the teachers who work directly with the children, even though this would help both parties to better serve the children. Concern was also expressed that parents and students still misunderstand the requirements for a Dogwood diploma and the entrance requirements for universities and colleges

In Williams Lake, it was commented that the September 30 head count still has a major impact on communities and students, even though the capacity exists within LEA and Enhancement agreements to solve this issue. It was also commented that targeted funding should not have to be used to fund language teachers, who should instead be recognized as fully certified teachers in school districts. More counseling funding is needed to address residential school impacts on all generations.

At the Lower Mainland Regional Session, the challenge of enhancing school level relationships with First Nations and parents was highlighted, and it was noted that a large amount of targeted funding goes to the salaries of staff, leaving little to support relationship building with communities. It was also discussed that parental involvement in LEA development is valuable and some LEAs have provisions requiring parent participation in school and district planning efforts. Just inviting parents to participate is not good enough.

Also at the Lower Mainland Regional Session, it was noted that it is unfortunate that Enhancement Agreements are not accompanied by extra funding to help achieve the goals that are developed.

In Campbell River, it was reported that there is racism toward Aboriginal teachers in schools. More anti-racism and anti-bullying workshops for teachers/students would be helpful. Also, to improve the relationship of schools with First Nations communities, transportation is needed to help parents get to the schools and working parents often find it difficult to make school appointments. Having an open door policy for parents at schools is one effective practice, and other ideas include having a strong cultural component in schools, incentives prizes for parents, and regular year-end celebrations of student successes.

### **13.0 INAC Programs and Reporting**

In Cranbrook, there was support for carrying out reporting to INAC using the Internet or other computer-based reporting systems, rather than the paper reporting forms that have been used in the past.

In Prince Rupert, participants spoke of the need for more funding and resources to introduce on-reserve Grade 9-12 students to trades career opportunities.

In Campbell River, it was suggested that INAC bring back post-secondary and nominal roll training, and also that the directions on INAC forms for post-secondary and nominal roll be clearer. It was commented that the timing of the post-secondary submissions from communities to INAC for funding is too early, as communities don't know whether students have graduated, and there is generally an overwhelming amount of paperwork for accessing post-secondary funding. The administrative burden at the community and school level for the post-secondary programs is a major barrier.