



# Strengthening Our Learning Journey

Third Progress Report on the Implementation  
of the Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit  
Education Policy Framework

## Introduction

*Strengthening Our Learning Journey*, the third progress report on the implementation of the *Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (2007), represents the culmination of a ten-year effort rooted in collaboration and co-creation. The work that led to this report reflects the spirit of reconciliation, as it was founded on building a relationship of trust, honesty, respect, and commitment. This report is offered as a celebration of that work.

The report outlines the progress achieved, relative to the ten performance measures set out in the Framework, during the third phase of the Framework's implementation. As in the first two progress reports, *Sound Foundations for the Road Ahead* (2009) and *A Solid Foundation* (2013), the ten performance measures are grouped according to four key priority areas: **supporting students, engagement and awareness building, supporting educators**, and **using data to support student achievement**.

The third progress report uses both quantitative and qualitative data to assess progress, and shares perspectives and insight gained through the engagement process from Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, parents, communities, Indigenous partners, and education partners. The report also describes the many collaborative partnerships that have been created or deepened during this period between the Ministry of Education, Indigenous partners, and education partners. These partnerships support the shared goals of improving First Nation, Métis, and Inuit student

2018

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



achievement and well-being and increasing *all* Ontario students' awareness and knowledge of Indigenous histories, cultures, perspectives, and contributions. The third progress report presents “practice highlights” – practices described during the engagement process as having had a positive impact on the boards where they were being implemented. The report concludes with a look at the journey ahead and makes recommendations for next steps to grow and deepen the Ontario Indigenous Education Strategy across the province.

### **Evidence Informing the Report**

The qualitative and quantitative evidence that informed this report included findings from a province-wide engagement process on the implementation of the Framework (conducted in 2017), student achievement results, and reports on Indigenous education initiatives from school boards and the Ministry of Education, as well as from Indigenous partners. The engagement strategy consisted of in-person, telephone, and online interviews, small-group discussions, and focus groups, and an online survey, involving a broad range of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, families, and communities, as well as education partners and members of the public.

The engagement strategy integrated Indigenous research methodologies, including the use of talking circles and respect for Indigenous protocols such as the First Nations principles of Ownership, Control, Access and Possession (OCAP).

## **Supporting Students**

The performance measures relating to this key priority area focus on the following:

### **Student Self-Esteem**

Self-esteem is a key to well-being and student success. A safe, welcoming school environment, where students can develop a positive sense of identity and feel proud of who they are, is critical to building self-esteem. During engagement sessions, it was noted that when First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students saw themselves and their communities and cultures respected and valued at school, it contributed to building a positive sense of self, attendance rates improved, and participation in voluntary, confidential student self-identification increased.



Indigenous parents and families credited student-mentoring opportunities for enhancing students' self-esteem by providing role models and sharing traditions and cultural knowledge.

Courses in Indigenous languages and First Nations, Métis, and Inuit studies were also credited with increasing self-esteem, as Indigenous students developed a stronger sense of cultural group identity and gained knowledge of Indigenous world views and cultures. These courses also promoted acceptance and contributed to a welcoming and inclusive school environment.

Well-being is fundamental to overall student success. In December 2016, the Minister's Advisory Council on First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Working Group established a subcommittee on Indigenous student well-being. The subcommittee is working to co-develop a shared vision for Indigenous student well-being that is being validated by community-led engagements.

Although First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students reported feeling more included in their schools, only 26 per cent of those who participated in the online survey felt that their points of view were really valued.

During the engagement process, Indigenous students said that racism remained a key issue in their schools. Work undertaken in connection with the implementation of the Framework to address issues related to racism and equity will now be reinforced by *Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan*. Released in 2017, the plan is the province's roadmap to identifying and eliminating discriminatory practices, systemic barriers, and bias from schools and classrooms to support the potential for all students' success.

### **Transition to Provincially Funded Schools**

Transitions are critical times in a student's educational journey. In particular, First Nation students who transition from their community schools to provincially funded schools and Inuit students who come from Northern communities experience many new challenges as they adapt to new situations, friends, cultures, and environments. Some First Nation students indicated that although the supports they received were helpful, it was disconcerting to have them reduced to a minimum as they continued through school. Students said that maintaining supports would help ease the ongoing transition.

First Nation students as well as board and school staff identified Indigenous counsellors and support workers as crucial in assisting students through these transitions, and also in retaining and re-engaging students who were at risk of leaving school before graduating.

## Engagement and Awareness Building

The performance measures relating to this key priority area focus on the following:

### Parent Participation

Indigenous parents indicated that there have been more opportunities for them to engage with the school about their children's education. The majority of Indigenous parents said they felt welcome at the school; some spoke of offering to help teach aspects of Indigenous cultures, while many staff spoke about asking parents to take part in both special events and regular classroom activities. A number of students said they consulted their parents to learn more about their cultures and languages.

Participants in the engagement also reported that First Nation, Métis, and Inuit parents needed more local and culturally relevant opportunities to engage in the school system, and that additional efforts were required to reach Indigenous parents living in remote Northern communities. Many school boards and schools, in partnership with Indigenous Education Advisory Councils (IEACs), are seeking to enhance Indigenous parent and family participation in school life by adopting more culturally relevant approaches to engage parents.

### Knowledge Sharing, Collaboration, and Issue Resolution

To enhance knowledge sharing and collaboration at the local level, the ministry provides funding to support a dedicated Indigenous Education Board Lead position at every board. The Lead supports the implementation of the Framework and engagement with Indigenous families, communities, and organizations. Indigenous Education Board Leads also work with their local Indigenous Education Advisory Council (IEAC) to help develop and implement Board Action Plans (BAPs) on Indigenous Education to support the implementation of Framework strategies.

Among First Nation communities and school boards with Education Service Agreements (ESA), participants in the engagement sessions said there had been greater collaboration, shared accountability, and partici-



pation in the development of BAPs. Indigenous communities and boards acknowledged that there was still room to strengthen such collaboration. In some boards in urban areas, where the school or school board may not be tied to a specific First Nation, Métis, or Inuit community, Indigenous partners felt that more-meaningful participation in supporting Indigenous education was needed.

The ministry has also worked to expand and deepen relationships with Indigenous partners over the past four years:

- Two tripartite agreements were made through the Education Partnerships Program (EPP) process:
  - Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN), Canada, and Ontario signed a historic Memorandum of Understanding to work together to improve educational outcomes for First Nation students in both First Nation–operated and provincially funded schools.
  - The Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians (AIAI), Canada, and Ontario signed a historic Memorandum of Understanding to work together to improve educational outcomes for First Nation students.
- Ontario also signed the Master Education Agreement with 23 Anishinabek First Nations and the Kinoomaadziwin Education Body. The agreement envisions a new relationship between the Anishinabek First Nations and Ontario that supports Anishinabek student success and well-being in both the Anishinabek Education System and the provincially funded education system.
- The Métis Nation of Ontario and the Ministry of Education signed their second five-year Memorandum of Understanding to work together to improve the educational outcomes of Métis students in Ontario and to support the implementation of the Framework.
- Tungasuvvingat Inuit and the Ministry of Education signed a Memorandum of Understanding to support continued collaboration in achieving the shared goal of ensuring that Inuit students are supported and successful across the province in the publicly funded K–12 education system.



## **Improving Knowledge about First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Cultures and Histories**

### **Importance of System and School Leadership**

During engagement sessions, participants noted that where school and board leadership was invested in incorporating teaching and learning about Indigenous histories, cultures, perspectives, and contributions, staff and students experienced meaningful, ongoing projects and initiatives focused on Indigenous education.

### **Importance of Initial Teacher Education Related to First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Histories, Cultures, Perspectives, and Contributions**

It is essential that teacher candidates grow their awareness and knowledge of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit histories, cultures, perspectives, and contributions. Following the modernization of initial teacher education programs in Ontario in 2013, content was added to the Ontario College of Teachers' *Accreditation Resource Guide* to ensure that new teachers will feel more comfortable incorporating First Nation, Métis, and Inuit histories, cultures, perspectives, contributions, and experiences throughout their teaching.

### **Importance of Curriculum**

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) called for the development of mandatory, age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, treaties, and Indigenous peoples' historical and contemporary contributions, to grow the awareness and knowledge of all students. In response to the TRC's calls to action, the Ministry of Education embarked on a new process to revise the curriculum, in partnership with First Nation, Métis, and Inuit partners and education stakeholders, including Indigenous teachers, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, Senators, residential school survivors, and community representatives.

The ministry recognizes the key role that curriculum can play in shaping social attitudes and teaching respect, acceptance of diversity, inclusion, and intercultural understanding. Ontario is committed to supporting mandatory learning about the history and legacy of residential schools, colonialism, and the rights and responsibilities we all have as treaty people. The province has made a three-year annual investment (2016–17 to 2018–19) of \$5 million to support targeted resource development and educator capacity building, in collaboration with First Nation, Métis, and Inuit partners, to enhance age- and grade-appropriate learning and



teaching of the history and legacy of residential schools, treaties, and the Indian Act.

During the engagement process, many Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and teaching staff said that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit studies courses should be mandatory, because, from their experience, when non-Indigenous students took these courses, Indigenous and non-Indigenous student relations improved.

In addition, participants said that Indigenous community members, particularly residential school survivors, Elders and Senators, Knowledge Keepers, and cultural experts, were valuable in, and valued for, their role in the integration of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit cultures, histories, and ways of knowing in schools.

## Supporting Educators

The performance measures relating to this key priority area focus on the following:

### **Increasing the Number of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff**

It is important for students to have role models and mentors they admire and aspire to be like, and to whom they can relate culturally. Learners look to teachers, principals, and support staff in schools for advice and guidance.

Indigenous students, parents, and community members said that the inclusion of Indigenous staff was important, and that not enough was being done to facilitate Indigenous recruitment and retention strategies.

Although a few school boards have staff self-identification policies in place, without a formal staff self-identification process, there is little reliable data related to this performance measure. Through *Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan*, the ministry has committed to supporting school boards and labour partners in undertaking workforce data collection and analysis to ensure representative, equitable, and healthy work and learning environments.





## Professional Development

Over the past four years, professional development has been aimed at increasing educator capacity to better meet the needs of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students. The ministry, school boards, and schools, with the support of Indigenous Education Board Leads, Indigenous partners, and education partners, held professional learning sessions, launched research projects, and developed resources to help grow educators' knowledge of and appreciation for Indigenous histories, cultures, perspectives, and contributions. Many educators also participated in learning opportunities in trauma-informed strategies specific to historic trauma, to better understand the legacy of residential schools and their intergenerational impact.

As a result of meaningful professional development opportunities, educators are putting culturally responsive and culturally appropriate pedagogy into practice to support Indigenous students. As highlighted in *Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan*, culturally responsive pedagogy recognizes that all students learn in ways that are connected to background, language, family structure, and social or cultural identity. Classroom practices must be reflective of and responsive to the diversity of students and staff.

## Using Data to Support Student Achievement

In recognition of their diversity, the ministry reports on First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students separately, rather than as a single Indigenous group. This approach provides insight into the unique needs of the different groups, as well as the opportunity to build on areas of strength to support the success of all Indigenous students.

In *Strengthening Our Learning Journey*, the ministry is reporting the results of the following Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) assessments for the years 2011–12 to 2015–16 for the English- and French-language systems: Grade 3 and 6 Reading, Writing, and Mathematics; Grade 9 Academic and Applied Mathematics; and the Grade 10 Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT).

Performance-measurement data is aggregated at the provincial level, with one exception: EQAO results are reported separately for English-language and French-language education systems. This is consistent with current EQAO reporting practice.

The performance measures relating to this key priority area focus on the following:

## **Student-Achievement Results in Reading, Writing, and Mathematics**

### **English-Language System**

Overall, there have been notable increases in the achievement results for self-identified Indigenous students between 2011–12 (or earliest year with results available)<sup>1</sup> and 2015–16:

- Self-identified First Nation students: for 5 of the 9 EQAO assessment indicators, results have improved.
- Self-identified Métis students: for 3 of the 9 EQAO assessment indicators, results have improved.
- Self-identified Inuit students: for 3 of the 9 EQAO assessment indicators, results have improved.

In addition, the achievement gap has narrowed between self-identified Indigenous students and all students:

- Self-identified First Nation students: for 6 of the 9 EQAO assessment indicators, the gap has narrowed.
- Self-identified Métis students: for 1 of the 9 EQAO assessment indicators, the gap has narrowed.
- Self-identified Inuit students: for 2 of the 9 EQAO assessment indicators, the gap has narrowed.

### **French-Language System**

There have been notable increases in the achievement results for self-identified First Nation and Métis students between 2011–12 (or earliest year with results available)<sup>2</sup> and 2015–16:

- Self-identified First Nation students: for 4 of the 9 EQAO assessment indicators, results have improved.
- Self-identified Métis students: for 3 of the 9 EQAO assessment indicators, results have improved.

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1. For Inuit students in the English-language system and First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students in the French-language system, many assessment results were not available in 2011–12 and some subsequent years (e.g., because of “suppression” or the absence of student results). To summarize change in assessment results over time, the earliest year with results available for each assessment was used for comparison. (Note that the ministry applies standard data-suppression rules to protect individual privacy and ensure indicator reliability; for details, see the [technical appendix](#) to the report.)

2. See footnote 2, above.



- Self-identified Inuit students: for all EQAO assessment indicators, results for Inuit students were suppressed, or no Inuit students self-identified.

In addition, the achievement gap has narrowed between self-identified First Nation and Métis students and all students:

- Self-identified First Nation students: for 4 of the 9 EQAO assessment indicators, the gap has narrowed.
- Self-identified Métis students: for 2 of the 9 EQAO assessment indicators, the gap has narrowed.

Regarding the narrowing of the achievement gap related to self-identified Inuit students, in all assessment indicators, results for Inuit students were suppressed, or no students self-identified in French boards.

Through the engagement process, Indigenous students reported feeling that there was an improvement in their achievement levels. In addition to better-integrated First Nation, Métis, and Inuit content in the curriculum, Indigenous students viewed the presence of and access to First Nation, Métis, and Inuit education and graduation counsellors, coaches, and cultural experts in the school system as a positive step – one that made them feel more supported. It is clear, however, both from the data and from what researchers heard from teachers, board staff, advisory council members, and Indigenous community members, that there is still room for improvement.

### **Graduation Rate of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Students**

Graduation rates for self-identified Indigenous students in Ontario are provided for the first time in *Strengthening Our Learning Journey*. The graduation rate is calculated based on each group of students (or cohort) that enters Grade 9 in Ontario in a given year. The percentage of the original Grade 9 cohort that receives a diploma within four years is the reported four-year graduation rate, and the percentage that does so within five years is the reported five-year graduation rate.

For the 2011–12 baseline cohort, five-year graduation rates for self-identified First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students are lower than provincial rates for all students. However, the achievement gaps<sup>3</sup> for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students are narrower after five years (five-year graduation rate) than after four years (four-year graduation rate).

3. The achievement gap is calculated as the difference between the graduation rate for self-identified First Nation, Métis, or Inuit students and the graduation rate for all students.



Boards have implemented several targeted strategies and supports to help improve the achievement of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students and support them towards graduation. During the engagement sessions, some community partners and First Nation education authorities referred to increasing graduation rates among students from their communities as a clear marker of the success of the various wraparound services they were providing for students at provincially funded schools. They considered graduation rates to be a very useful indicator that their approach was effective.

### **Credit Accumulation as an Indicator of Student Achievement**

Earning eight or more credits by the end of Grade 9, sixteen or more by the end of Grade 10, and twenty-three or more by the end of Grade 11 are indicators that a student is on track to graduate with her or his peers.

Credit accumulation rates have increased for self-identified First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students in all cases, with the exception of Grade 10 credit accumulation rates for Inuit students.

These gains outpace the gains made by all students, so achievement gaps have narrowed between self-identified First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students and all students.

## **Looking Ahead**

Through the lessons learned from the strategies, programs, and resources launched over the past ten years, we have deepened our learning about effective practices for improving Indigenous student achievement and well-being and for increasing the awareness and knowledge of all students and staff members about Indigenous histories, cultures, perspectives, and contributions.

It has been ten years since the Framework was launched. Today, a different context and a new landscape call for the revitalization of the Framework. In the spirit of partnership and collaboration, the Ministry of Education and Indigenous partners will work together to co-develop the refreshed Framework, including reviewing the performance measures and areas of focus, while continuing to support the goals of the Framework as we journey towards reconciliation.

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