MEMORANDUM TO:

Directors of Education of District School Boards  
Supervisory Officers of School Authorities  
Director, Provincial Schools Branch  
Supervisory Officer, Centre Jules-Léger

FROM:

Dominic Giroux  
Assistant Deputy Minister, French Language Education and Educational Operations

DATE:

August 15, 2006

SUBJECT:

Recruitment in the Aboriginal Education Office

One of the Ministry’s three key goals in its Strategic Direction is to close the gaps in student achievement. To this end, we are taking concrete steps to increase our collective focus on supporting improvement for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students. In May you received a copy of the Draft Aboriginal Education Policy Framework from the Deputy Minister, which has generated very positive interest. So far, over 250 people have attended consultation sessions in Thunder Bay, Stoney Creek, St. Thomas, and Barrie and consultations have occurred with the Chiefs of Ontario and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. Not only has valuable feedback been provided, but these sessions have allowed for meaningful dialogue locally among education partners. Additional sessions have been planned over the summer months with the Métis organizations and the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres. More sessions are planned in September in Ottawa, Toronto, Sudbury and North Bay, as well as with French-language school boards.

I am pleased to inform you of the impressive talent that will join the newly created Aboriginal Education Office (AEO), as we increase our internal capacity to support your work in this important area.

Alayne Bigwin joined the AEO on August 8, 2006 serving as its founding Director. Alayne holds a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) from York University, a Bachelor of Education from the University of Toronto and a Master of Education from the University of Ottawa. Since 2002, she has worked directly with over 200 First Nations community representatives on various initiatives including 26 major community-based projects as the Policy, Planning and Intergovernmental Relations Advisor for the Ogemawahj Tribal Council in Rama.

She previously served as Assistant Deputy Minister and Acting Deputy Minister for Saskatchewan Northern Affairs – where she led the implementation of the provincial government’s cross-departmental Northern Strategy and, as Executive Director of Education and Training for the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations – where she led policy development and implementation of key education jurisdiction issues on behalf of the 72 First Nations and 10 Tribal Councils in the province.

Alayne is making a return to the Ontario Public Service (OPS) where she managed the Native Affairs Secretariat in the Ministry of Community and Social Services from 1990-95 and she previously worked as Liaison Officer in the Ministry of Education. Prior to serving in the OPS, she had worked for the Assembly of First Nations, the Saskatchewan Indian Federated College and the National Indian Brotherhood.
I want to take this opportunity to thank **Keith Lickers** for stepping up as Acting Manager since January, 2006 when we created the AEO. Keith will be retiring on November 10, 2006, after 31 years of service in the Ministry. We cannot say enough about the extent of Keith’s influence over these decades on all Aboriginal Education matters within government. His wisdom, unique skill set, personal commitment and corporate memory will be greatly missed.

**Michelle Braakman** will continue to serve as Coordinator of Policy and Research in the AEO. Holder of a M.A. in History from the University of Victoria, Michelle has extensive experience working in Aboriginal Education policy and research for the ministries of Education in British Columbia and Alberta and since 2004 in Ontario. Before joining EDU, she served as Policy Advisor for the Ontario Secretariat of Aboriginal Affairs.

**Audrey Lawrence** will join the AEO as Coordinator of Liaison and Outreach on August 28, 2006. Holder of a Master of Business Administration degree from the University of Ottawa, Audrey has over 18 years of management experience in education, change management and other human resource-related activities. She has extensive cultural and social knowledge of Aboriginal issues and strategies.

In addition, to date the AEO has recruited three First Nations Education Officers, who will work directly with you in the field, effective September 5, 2006.

**Elizabeth Bigwin** will serve from the Barrie Regional Office. Holder of a Bachelor of Arts in Native Studies from Trent University, a Bachelor of Education and a Master of Education from York University and Supervisory Officers’ Qualifications, Elizabeth has 20 years of teaching experience on-Reserve, as well as off-Reserve in Simcoe County. In addition, over the past 11 years she has served as Vice Principal for the Simcoe County District School Board and more recently as Education Advisor for the Ogemawahj Tribal Council in Rama. She has an impressive track record in the area of special education, has collaborated extensively with EDU on social studies curriculum projects and has been a member of the Chiefs of Ontario Education Co-ordination Unit for the past five years.

**Bryon Brisard** will serve from the Sudbury Regional Office. Holder of a Bachelor of Arts from Lakehead University and of a Bachelor of Education from Nipissing University, Bryon served as classroom support worker for over 10 years, followed by eight years as teacher and Principal both on- and off-Reserve, lately with the Mnjikaning First Nation. For five years, he has shown his leadership as Chief of the Lake Nipigon Ojibway First Nation.

**Leslee White-Eye** will serve from the London Regional Office. Holder of a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the University of British Columbia (UBC), a Bachelor of Education from Nipissing University, a Master of Education from UBC as well as Ontario Principal’s Qualifications, she has had over 11 years of teaching experience on-Reserve for the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation Education Board. Over the past three years she has served as Aboriginal Healing Foundation Coordinator for the Munsee-Delaware First Nation in Muncey. She has exercised leadership as Band Councillor and as a board member of the Ontario Aboriginal Sports Circle.

More appointments will be announced in the coming months, as we recruit additional staff.

The AEO will focus its efforts in the coming months on three key priorities:

1. Finalizing and supporting the implementation of the Aboriginal Education Policy Framework, through capacity building efforts at the board and school levels.

2. Supporting boards in developing self-identification policies for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students, now that arrangements have been made with the Education Quality and Accountability Office on distinct data reporting.

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3. Taking action, along with the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities and the College of Teachers, to enhance existing teacher education opportunities for potential First Nations, Métis and Inuit educators.

In addition this fall, as a result of several requests from board staff, the AEO will release two resources: one, to assist boards in developing local Aboriginal student self-identification policies, the other to summarize the expectations in the revised Ontario Curriculum that incorporate perspectives of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. This second resource for teachers will allow students to learn that the developments and contributions of Aboriginal societies are central to an understanding of the social fabric of this country.

We look forward to working closely with you to reach the government’s goal to close the gap in Aboriginal student achievement.

Dominic Giroux
Assistant Deputy Minister
French Language Education and Educational Operations Division

Cc. Senior Management Team, Ministry of Education
   Senior Management Team, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities
   Doug Carr, Assistant Deputy Minister, Ontario Secretariat for Aboriginal Affairs
   Doug Wilson, Registrar, College of Teachers
   Marguerite Jackson, CEO, Education Quality and Accountability Office
   Robert Howsam, Regional Director General, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada
   Katherine Knott, Director of Education, Indian and Northern Affairs Canada
   Nelson Toulouse, Deputy Grand Chief, Chiefs of Ontario
   Tony Belcourt, President, Metis Nation of Ontario
   Board Student Success Leaders