

COLLECTION OF VOLUNTARY ABORIGINAL STUDENT SELF-IDENTIFICATION INFORMATION BY THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Q and A's

The following Q and A's were developed based on feedback from schools and school boards during the development of voluntary Aboriginal self-identification policies and submission of the data to the Ministry of Education (Ministry) through the Ontario School information System (OnSIS).

Key considerations:

- It is critical that Aboriginal families and communities understand that self-identification is voluntary.
- It is also essential that the students, families and communities understand and support the ways in which school boards, the EQAO and the Ministry intend to use their personal information.
- It is important that boards communicate to Aboriginal communities that data will be shared with the Ministry through OnSIS and with EQAO.
- It is also important that Aboriginal families and communities understand that school boards are subject to the *Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (MFIPPA) and that the EQAO and the Ministry are subject to the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FIPPA) and that school boards, EQAO and the Ministry are required to protect the privacy of the personal information associated with the voluntary self-identification in accordance with these Acts.

PURPOSE OF A VOLUNTARY ABORIGINAL STUDENT SELF-IDENTIFICATION POLICY

1. Why is it important to collect Aboriginal student self-identification data?

The availability of data on Aboriginal student achievement in Ontario's provincially funded school system is a critical foundation for the development, implementation, and evaluation of programs by school boards, the Ministry and EQAO to support the needs of Aboriginal students. The development of effective voluntary self-identification policies by Ontario school boards is a significant step toward ensuring that FNMI students receive the highest possible quality of education, and that all Ontario students benefit from an appreciation of the richness of Aboriginal cultures and the important contributions of Aboriginal communities to Ontario's cultural, economic and social future.

It is a priority of the Ministry to assist all school boards across the Province to ensure that a voluntary self-identification policy is in place. The Ministry will continue to develop tools to assist school boards in the development of their policies.

2. How will this data be used?

School boards with established voluntary self-identification policies use this data at the local level to plan and develop programs that support student achievement, and communicate results to local communities.

The Ministry will use the data reported by school boards at an aggregate level to develop policies and programmes that better support student achievement across the province. Data will be used to report on results achieved, and to identify areas for improvement.

EQAO will use the data reported by school boards to report on the achievement of FNMI students to the school boards.

The Ministry of Education's *Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) Education Policy Framework, 2007* includes specific quantitative and qualitative performance measures that will be used to assess the progress of the Framework implementation. The Framework document emphasizes the importance of having accurate and reliable data in order to assess progress towards the goal of improving Aboriginal student achievement. Such data is also needed to support improvement planning and accountability, inform policy and funding decisions, ensure measurement and reporting.

3. What data specific to Aboriginal peoples is intended to be made public by the Ministry?

The Ministry of Education has committed to providing progress reports every three years on the implementation of the Framework, based on ten performance measures. The first report *Sound Foundations for the Road Ahead- Fall 2009 Progress Report on Implementation of the Ontario first Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* was released in the fall of 2009.

The following three additional performance measures about Aboriginal student achievement will require the collection of voluntary Aboriginal self-identification data through the Ontario School Information System (OnSIS) which began in the fall of 2009:

- A significant increase in the percentage of FNMI students meeting provincial standards on province-wide assessments in reading, writing, and mathematics;
- A significant increase in the graduation rate of FNMI students; and
- A significant improvement in FNMI student achievement.

The Ministry will continue to engage in on-going discussions about how best to use the voluntary Aboriginal student self-identification data to understand more about the progress of Aboriginal students.

It should be noted that because school boards are subject to MFIPPA and the Ministry and EQAO are subject to FIPPA, any person can make an access request for records associated with the voluntary Aboriginal student self-identification data. While it is highly unlikely that personally identifiable information would be required to be disclosed, the depersonalized data may be required to be disclosed if someone makes an access request.

4. How will personal information be protected in public reporting by the Ministry?

Identifiable student information is depersonalized and aggregated prior to public reporting. Unless required by law, the Ministry does not disclose 'aggregate data' when publicly reporting information if there are five or fewer people involved. This suppression of data about five or fewer people is an extra precaution taken to protect privacy.

The Notice of Indirect Collection of Personal Information and the accompanying fact sheet provide details about the protection of privacy and are available at:

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/about/access.html>
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/about/faqs.html>

5. How will a Self-Identification policy help Aboriginal students above and beyond what is already being offered through student success initiatives?

The Ministry is committed to addressing the specific needs of Aboriginal learners and all of its students through an evidence informed approach. Reliable, student-specific data is necessary to support improvement planning, accountability, and to inform policy and funding decisions, measurement, and reporting. The Aboriginal Education Office, through funding opportunities and the work of field staff, is supporting school boards through specific projects related to transitions, community outreach and partnership initiatives.

DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF VOLUNTARY ABORIGINAL STUDENT SELF-IDENTIFICATION POLICIES

6. What specifically is required in preparing and implementing individual school board Voluntary Aboriginal Student Self-Identification Policies?

The *Building Bridges to Success for First Nation, Métis and Inuit Students, 2007* document outlines a recommended three stage approach to developing voluntary Aboriginal student self-identification policies:

Step 1: Foundations

- Recognition of FNMI peoples
- Consultation with legal counsel to guide the process and policy development

Step 2: Consultation

- Broad consultation with FNMI communities and other stakeholders
- Policy development in collaboration with stakeholders
- Communication to ensure broad understanding of the policy and its purpose

Step 3: Implementation

- Development of a data collection methodology
- Data gathering and ongoing communication

7. How do school boards collect the voluntary Aboriginal student self-identification information from their Aboriginal students?

Before the collection process, it is understood that school boards have preceded the implementation phase by consulting with legal counsel, freedom of information coordinators and all appropriate stakeholders. Communication with stakeholders should involve open discussions aimed at building awareness, clear understanding, support, and addressing concerns.

It is important to note that school boards are subject to MFIPPA and can only collect, use and disclose personal information such as voluntary self-identification in accordance with MFIPPA. Among other things, school boards are required to give notice of the collection of the uses they intend to make of this personal information in accordance with s. 29(2) of MFIPPA.

8. How did the school boards in the pilot project collect the voluntary Aboriginal student self-identification information from their Aboriginal students?

Based on the information provided by the four school boards that participated in the OnSIS Aboriginal student self-identification pilot project in 2008-09, voluntary self-identification information for those pilot school boards was generally preceded by initial information letters and public awareness (surveys, posters, pamphlets, question & answer brochures, etc.) among all students. Since the initial

communication was done through the school secretary, they were also included in awareness training to support students and parents through the voluntary self-identification information collection process. Some school boards have developed question & answer guides for their support staff to use as a reference. As well, information was vetted through consultations with their local Native Advisory and/or Aboriginal Education Advisory committees, and/or local FNMI organizations.

The pilot school boards collected voluntary Aboriginal student self-identification information through a number of avenues such as student registrations at early entry in Junior and Senior Kindergarten, throughout the school year, during parent interview times, and at the secondary level during course selection and/or other information gathering opportunities (indexing cards). Forms have indicators for checking off the specific group identifier and a place for the student /parent /guardian to sign. Follow up to the collection of information is generally expected and school boards are doing this through home visits, sending letter reminders, and telephone calls home. School boards are getting returns on voluntary self-identification information through general permanent school board collection. Once the student is registered the information is put into the school board's student reporting system.

COLLECTION OF VOLUNTARY ABORIGINAL STUDENT SELF-IDENTIFICATION INFORMATION BY THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

9. What happens to the personal information that the Ministry collects?

Personal information is collected by the Ministry through the Ontario School Information System (OnSIS) at predetermined points of time during the school year. Personal information is maintained in an identifiable format throughout the data collection process to ensure data integrity, e.g. that the correct Ontario Education Number (OEN) is assigned to a student. The personalized information is only accessible by a limited number of authorized staff in the Ministry, and in the educational institutions and entities from which the Ministry indirectly collects the personal information. When the data collection process is complete, the information is depersonalized (stripped of identifiable personal information) and transferred to the Elementary and Secondary Data Warehouse (ESDW). Once the personal information has been depersonalized, it cannot be linked back to the OEN or the identifiable personal information.

Both OnSIS and the ESDW are secure environments that have undergone stringent Privacy Impact Assessments and I &IT evaluations in respect to privacy and secure access.

10. How does the Ministry protect the privacy of students' information?

The Ministry has the authority to collect personal information, directly or indirectly, under [section 8.1\(1\) of the Education Act R.S.O 1990 Chapter E.2](#). The Ministry is bound by privacy protection rules under FIPPA and takes all necessary steps to safeguard personal information collected.

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<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/about/faqs.html>

11. If we have Aboriginal students who are attending our school under a tuition agreement (School Board Residence Status = Other Pupils of the Board-Native Education Authority) who have NOT participated in the voluntary self-id process, will their information be part of performance data generated, or will the information be based solely on the voluntary self-id indicator?

Students who have not voluntarily self-identified will not be included in the public reporting of the performance measures as outlined in the Ontario, First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework.

12. What would a school board do if an Aboriginal community asks to review voluntary self-identification information that has been collected under our policy?

It is also important that Aboriginal families and communities understand that school boards are subject to MFIPPA and that school boards, are required to protect the privacy of the personal information associated with the voluntary self-identification in accordance with MFIPPA.

A school board can only disclose this personal information in accordance with MFIPPA. Each school board has a freedom of information and privacy coordinator and any questions about the disclosure of personal information can be directed to the coordinator or to the school board's legal counsel.

The Information and Privacy Commissioner has published *A Guide to Ontario Legislation Covering the Release of Students' Personal Information* which may be of assistance to school boards: <http://www.ipc.on.ca/english/Resources/Discussion-Papers/Discussion-Papers-Summary/?id=350>

OnSIS DATA COLLECTION

13. Will the collection of voluntary Aboriginal student self-identification be implemented in OnSIS for all school boards for the 2009-10 school year?

OnSIS began collecting voluntary Aboriginal student self-identification information at the student level from all school boards with voluntary self-identification policies in place beginning with the October 2009-10 data submission cycle.

14. How will school boards report voluntary Aboriginal student self-identification information to OnSIS?

OnSIS has been updated for the 2009-10 data collection cycle to include an Aboriginal Student Self-Identification flag. The self-identification, if voluntarily provided to a school board, is collected as part of the school board's student school enrolment data submission.

OnSIS will continue to collect whether a student is attending a provincially funded elementary or secondary school under a tuition agreement. This information continues to be captured in the School Board Residence Status as "Native Education Authority".

It is important to note that the voluntary Aboriginal student self-identification is **DISTINCT** from the funding related information such as tuition agreements.

15. What are the four cohorts of voluntary Aboriginal student self-identification?

First Nation - First Nation students who live off reserve and attend provincially funded elementary or secondary schools (not under a tuition agreement)

First Nation Tuition - First Nation students who live on reserve and attend provincially funded elementary or secondary schools under a tuition agreement

Métis - Métis students who attend provincially funded elementary or secondary schools

Inuit - Inuit students who attend provincially funded elementary or secondary school.

The Ministry does not require school boards to report data on students who live in First Nation communities and attend *federally* funded elementary and secondary schools. In addition, these students would not be represented in the voluntary self-identification policies developed by *provincial* school boards.

16. Why are we receiving the error message “Aboriginal Self ID is First Nation, Métis or Inuit, Board Residence Status should be Pupil of the Board” when submitting data to OnSIS?

You will receive a **warning** message if the Aboriginal Student Self-Id does not align with a student’s Board Residence Status e.g. a student has voluntarily self-identified as “First Nation” and he/she is a student under tuition agreement with the board (expected to be a “First Nation Tuition” self-identification). As the self-identification is distinct from the student funding information, this is a warning only and the data submission may proceed.

Note: this was previously a critical error that would not allow the data to be signed-off. It has been changed to a warning.

17. How will voluntary Aboriginal self-identification be identified on Ministry generated reports?

Voluntary Aboriginal self-identification will be included on the OnSIS Section C-Enrolment by Attendance Type summary and detail verification reports for data validation purposes. These reports are available only through secure access to the OnSIS application by authorized school and school board staff.

As with all other OnSIS student level data, when the data collection process is complete, the individual student records are depersonalized (stripped of identifiable personal information) before being migrated to the Ministry’s data warehouse for reporting.

18. Is the Ministry collecting data about on and off-reserve status of students?

Yes. OnSIS collects whether students voluntarily self-identified as First Nation students who live off reserve and attend provincially funded elementary or secondary schools (not under a tuition agreement) and First Nation Tuition students who live on reserve and attend provincially funded elementary or secondary schools under a tuition agreement.

Information on First Nation Tuition Agreements is also collected, but in a separate section on OnSIS not related to voluntary self-identification.

19. If a student no longer wishes to self-identify as Aboriginal can she or he change the information on their student record?

As a general principle, students should be able to remove a self-id designation in a given year, in keeping with the policies and protocols developed within each school board. However, once data has been reported in final form to the Ministry, the information will remain in a depersonalized format for statistical purposes.

20. How do we record a student in OnSIS if they have identified as First Nation when we know they are First Nation Tuition?

Aboriginal students must be reported to OnSIS in the manner in which they voluntarily self-identified. For example, if a student voluntarily self-identified as “First Nation” the Aboriginal student self-identification cannot be reported as “First Nation Tuition” even if they are students who attend under tuition agreement.

21. What happens if a student voluntarily self-identifies by checking off 2 of the 4 cohort options as they have a mixed ancestry? OnSIS will not allow this type of input.

At this time the Ministry is asking that boards work with families to help make one choice only to report.

EQAO DATA COLLECTION

22. We are also reporting voluntary Aboriginal student self-identification to EQAO. How will EQAO use this information?

In March 2006, at the request of the Ministry, the EQAO agreed to report on the achievement of Aboriginal students to boards that have a voluntary self-identification policy in place. Boards may request from EQAO that school and board reports within their jurisdiction contain separate reporting features for voluntarily self-identified FNMI students.

Refer to Appendix A, *Building Bridges to Success for First Nation, Métis and Inuit Students 2007*, memo of March 21, 2006, to Directors of Education, from Assistant Deputy Minister Dominique Giroux for more information.

For additional information about EQAO reporting please contact the EQAO office directly.