



# **MSAC REPORT**

**Cohort 7 2015**

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On behalf of the writing subcommittee, we would like to thank every group member, writer, lead, and co-lead who gave their time to write these reports. We are all proud to say that we are a part of MSAC Cohort 7, and wish you all the very best in the future.

And to the Ministry staff, we would also like to extend our feelings of appreciation for the work you all put into keeping us organized and on task while we had the opportunity to all be together. We now have memories that we will not forget, and they are very much thanks to you. Thank you.

## *Alternative and Individualized Learning*

By: Branden Trochymchuk (Lead), Sasha Chuchin (Writer), Karlee Reece, John Gallie, Peyton Horning, Matt Milencoff, Jake McGonigal, Wendy.

### *Context*

Classroom activities should include elements of independent work where students can engage in activities and assignment of a personal interest. It has been shown that students tend to perform better and are more engaged when they are interested in the material that they are learning. Students would like to have choices when they face an activity and/or assignment so that they can learn in a way that is right for them. Providing independent classroom activities, open-box assignments and cross-curricular learning/teaching engages us in what we are learning about in a more individualized way.

### *Suggestions*

Students' learning in a more individualized way means students being more engaged in what is being taught.

Open-box assignments (aka make-your-own assignments) should be used in a classroom to encourage students to "run with" ideas. For these assignments, students can create their own projects related to what they learned and apply it. This would give students more options to find something interesting about what was taught, give them more options for ISU's and even become "free" in their learning. For evaluation, there would be general rubrics/criteria that students should follow that meet the expectations and curriculum.

Cross-curricular teaching and learning are ways of supporting the transfer of learning to thinking, give reasons and provide a curriculum more relevant to students. Cross-curricular teaching is like a theme or unit with a framework of goals/outcomes that specify what students are expected to learn as a result of the lessons that are a part of the unit. This method can increase students' motivation for learning and their level of engagement. Students will be able to see the value of what they are learning and become actively engaged. It also gives students an opportunity to learn less popular topics within the unit that they might still be interested in and provides real-world application through research.

When students apply these independent methods, they benefit from many learning skills such as initiative and self-teaching, and gain responsibility. These methods give students options to go their own way on how they learn best. For example, students would have the opportunity to choose to do their independent assignments hands-on or even by using technology.

### *Actions*

For students to accomplish independence, teachers and students need to apply changes.

A mandatory study period for students would give students more time to complete assignments and work. This period would help students learn how to be independent and use resources that may not be in the classroom (computers, books etc).

Teachers would need to be taught on how to implement things like open-box assignments or cross-curricular teaching in their classroom. They would need to know how the students would be evaluated and in what ways it could be implemented within a unit.

## *Leading Change in the Area of Mental Health & Fitness in the Ontario Education System*

By: Nathan Jeffery (Lead), Olivia Leung (Writer), Victoria Carlyle (Co-Writer), Emma Haliuk, Roman Josevski, Rachael Batty, Dawson Phan.

### *Context*

#### *Mental Health*

According to the Ministry of Ontario Children and Youth Services, approximately one in five children and youth in Ontario have a mental health challenge. About 70% of mental health challenges have their onset during childhood or youth.

#### *Health and Fitness*

In Ontario, nearly a third of children and youth are overweight or obese, conditions that can result in chronic diseases like diabetes, cancer and heart disease.

### *Disconnect*

Even though our province has dedicated many programs towards mental health, problems continue to persist in the school system that stem from ignorance, lack of awareness, biases, and insecurities. We need to do a better job connecting those who need help with the help that is available in our province. The challenge is: how do we do that?

We know nearly a third of children and youth are overweight or obese, yet students at the secondary level are only required to take one credit course in Health and Physical Education to complete their Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD).

### *Goals for Mental Health and Fitness*

- We need to educate families, teachers and students to watch out for signs of mental illness and to advocate for healthy living including daily exercise.
- We need to promote a healthy lifestyle both at home and school, which includes being educated on the importance of nutrition.
- We need to eliminate the negative stigma behind mental health and provide more opportunities to exercise including revisiting the physical education requirements to graduate.
- We need to make sure children are open to talking about mental health and know how to get help.
- We need to create a supportive environment for all students.
- We need to have a safe place for students to talk to someone.
- We need a more inclusive environment which will lead to a better learning environment for everyone; one that focuses on improvement of physical fitness rather than ability.
- Revisit available high school credit courses on mental health and fitness.

### *Action Plan*

Include mental health education for teachers and guidance counsellors during personal development days at least once per school year.

To incorporate the topics of mental health and nutrition into the school curriculum. To dedicate a minimum of one class period per term in all Ontario schools on each of the topics. To teach all our students to

watch out for signs and behaviours of underlying mental health issues. To teach them what to do and where to get help. Parents should be notified via email or newsletter in order to build awareness. The Terry Fox Run has been a tremendously successful campaign and it has raised a lot of money for cancer research and promoted physical fitness among all school children. A fund-raising campaign for mental health is overdue. Student engagement is the key. We need to set a September 2016 launch date! To create a safe forum online or a 'Wellness Committee' for students (regulated by professional counselors) to share their challenges and successes on the topic of mental health and fitness with their peers. To revisit the physical education requirement to graduate. To consider making physical education a mandatory course for grades 9 through 12, and to expand physical education classes to the University level at certain schools.

## *Student Well-Being*

By: Francis Lao (Lead), Jaimi Plater (Lead), Mathu Chandrapalan (Writer), Hannah Ko (Co-Writer), Claire Petro (Co-Writer), Cindy Wang, Parween Taheri, Jaydon DeLuca, Dawson Phan, Sifar Halani, Jake McGonigal.

### *Context*

Student Wellbeing is a state of overall health and happiness; it is based on mental, physical, and sexual health, as well as the management of responsibilities.

### *Disconnect*

Each day, students reluctantly come to school and face many issues that diminish their wellbeing. These difficulties include stress, loneliness, insecurity, and disinterest within the learning environment.

### *Goals:*

- Eliminate the stigmatization of mental illness.
- Provide training for teachers and guidance counsellors to become more qualified to address and support students with mental health problems.
- Staff should be trained and have access to resources to cover all aspects of health instead of just teaching or favouring a certain aspect of the course.
- Encourage students to maintain a healthy lifestyle, and to accept all body types instead of body shaming.
- Increase access to judgement free resources and information regarding sexual health. .
- Advise ways to create a balance between personal and academic responsibilities to reduce student stress.

### *Action Plan (How we will implement our goals):*

- Mental Health
- Mental Health Awareness Days/Weeks that involve and inform students.
- Presentations by mental health speakers and specialists to increase awareness of mental health implications, and to outline assistance available.
- Implement a health course as a mandatory half credit, instead of just a unit of study in phys. ed. The course should cover both mental and physical health.

### *Physical Health*

Provide both competitive and recreational options. Encourage a culture of supportive, knowledgeable peers that motivate each other.

Provide affordable gym memberships using school resources, fundraising, and financial aid. (For example, some schools offer access to weight rooms and gyms before and after school.)

### *Sexual Health*

Provide judgement-free services for students seeking help with birth control, pregnancy, and STIs.

Make resources available; provide up to date, free feminine hygiene products in bathrooms. This can be accomplished by fundraising, or through sponsorships with companies as many will be delighted to provide sample packs to students.

Responsibilities

Respectful and assertive communication skills between teachers and students should be taught, allowing students to speak with teachers regarding any problems or concerns (e.g. deadlines, stress.).

Teachers should demonstrate a variety of effective study and time management strategies, making sure they appeal to many different types of learners.

## **LGBTQ+ MSAC Subcommittee Report**

By: Benjamin Bacic (Lead), Dawson Phan, Hayley Zhong, Jaydon DeLuca, Mackenzie Bass, Takoda Chamberlain, Tsahai Carte

In conference with many school and school board staff members, as well as gathering insight from friends, family, and personal experiences, the members of the LGBTQ+ Subcommittee has identified where LGBTQ+ issues arise within schools. Issues of this capacity may range from discrimination/ any type of bullying, to apathy shown towards the transitioning identities of transgender students, or denied access to sexual health education and resources for students across the LGBTQ+ spectrum. The three key root issues stemming into LGBTQ+ student problems are identified as:

Lack of exposure to LGBTQ+ issues in students, leading to many misconceptions and the development of stereotypes.

Students, especially those located within areas that do not have a large LGBTQ+ community are not exposed to current topics in the world of LGBTQ+. As such, many students do not know fundamental definitions such as what it means to be transgender, asexual, pansexual, etc., and the differences between sexualities. This leads to students forming their own definitions of what it means to be, for example, transgender, based on what the media tells them and their own perception of transgender people.

These improperly formed definitions can lead to the exclusion and/or discrimination of LGBTQ+ peoples within schools, creating a very unsafe atmosphere for any concerned students.

To correct these issues, the LGBTQ+ subcommittee agrees that the Ministry of Education has taken an incredible step forward with the creation of the new sexual health curriculum. However, subcommittee members agree that in a secondary school, students aren't exposed to LGBTQ+ as much as they should be. As well, the extent of students' learning about LGBTQ+ issues isn't at a mature level, which it should be. Members suggest that students should participate in lessons about the history of human rights, including those of LGBTQ+ peoples, in order to learn the value of safe spaces and acceptance in a modern society. Students should also be taught how the media can impact the preconceptions of LGBTQ+ people such as Caitlyn Jenner, to give them awareness for their futures in forming ideas about LGBTQ+ people. These lessons may be taught through the already mandatory English credits in exploring and analyzing various types of media in reference to society.

Staff members within schools also need to be exposed to LGBTQ+ issues in order to create a safe environment.

Based on subcommittee members' personal experiences, staff within school are not prepared to deal with LGBTQ+ issues that their students may face. Teachers are afraid to get involved in taking disciplinary action out of fear that they do not understand the given situation and may complicate matters. Staff need education as well as students. Subcommittee members suggest that teachers participate in workshops on P.A. Days, which should be lead by students in the school's GSA or social justice club, to show staff current issues from a student's perspective or from external LGBTQ+ organizations. Schools



need to begin hosting more anti-hate assemblies and anti-hate weeks/days throughout the school year, and begin inviting guest speakers to speak to staff and students together about relevant LGBTQ+ topics.

*Heteronormativity and cis-binary normativity within schools needs to be erased.*

Students need to stop focusing on what it means to be ‘normal’ within the boundaries of their school, and begin focusing on who they uniquely are to themselves. When schools convey to students, even indirectly, that heterosexuality and cis-binary genders are normal in society; any student within the LGBTQ+ spectrum would feel as though they don’t fit into their school environment. Heteronormativity and cis-binary normativity can possibly stem from novels that are read in class to examples in textbooks to videos that teachers show in class. This also comes from the consistent reinforcement of the value of conforming within the “norm” of society as there is not much celebration for diversity and difference.

To correct this, subcommittee members suggest to textbook writers to diversify gender and sexuality in their writing; simply changing from “Jack and Jill” to “Jen and Jill” can make a big impact. As well, schools should make efforts to diversify learning in the classroom; expanding the gender spectrum of people used in example problems in class, discussing how to be inclusive with students, and teaching all to appreciate who they are and to never consider themselves as “different”. Furthermore, making LGBTQ+ members more visible within the community is a vital step to recognizing that they exist. Require LGBTQ+ workshops or activities to help students understand that they are people just like them.

*Lack of support for LGBTQ+ students leaves them to struggle alone.*

There is very little to no support for LGBTQ+ students from school to school besides the GSAs held within some schools. The education system is providing little effort to ensure that all LGBTQ+ members feel safe and welcome, and for the reasons listed above, they tend to struggle through school more than other students. Since LGBTQ+ is still considered a “taboo” discussion, many teachers are reluctant to openly talk about these issues within class. Guidance support is also lacking for LGBTQ+ students as not many people understand their daily struggles except LGBTQ+ members themselves. Finally, many “gender” oriented activities such as gym change rooms, overnight trips, etc. cause anxiety for LGBTQ+ students as they are often expected to conform to the sex they were assigned with at birth with their associated roles.

To improve this condition, provide LGBTQ+ counsellors to students at every school board/school and reinforce the Human Rights Code placed by the law. Many religious parents are in control of the parent boards in public and catholic education, which leads to many LGBTQ+ students well-beings being compromised. Lessen the power of the religious influence on education in regards to discriminatory policies, and give the teachers the power to resist phone calls and such from parents protesting LGBTQ+ discussions. Allow the promotion of any LGBTQ+ resources available in the area and make sure that they are well-known to students.

Create gender-neutral bathrooms by removing the sign on the bathroom doors for non-binary students → this is a great need as going to staff washrooms or any alternative solution isolates many students and makes them feel not normal as they are forced to go to the “other” bathroom rather than the “regular” one; at overnight trips, accommodate non-binary students → separate cabins, hotel rooms, etc. In gym classes, create a gender-neutral section for students (Gr. 9/10), and gender-neutral change rooms (all grades) to ensure the maximum level of comfort.

General

In general, delegate a research and development section of the ministry to research about LGBTQ+ issues and properly execute the ideas that improve the well-being of LGBTQ+ students through initiatives, trips, all-school workshops, etc.

The LGBTQ+ subcommittee firmly believes that if these subtle changes were to be implemented within the Ontario education system, students spanning the entire LGBTQ+ spectrum would feel more comfortable and safe within their school environments. Students will become enriched in their learning by discussing the implications, benefits, and dangers of media coverage on LGBTQ+ issues, and learn to appreciate the diversity and human rights history of our province.

## *Technology within the Classroom*

By: Hayley Zhong, Dawson Phan, David Briggs (Writers) and Clarissa Gordon, Darian Britton, Nick Hewko, Jaydon Deluca, Denzel Avwenagha, Wendy Wang, Sam Yacob (Members & Key Ideas)

### *1. The teachers require more training about technology.*

The teachers are not given professional development to use technology and so the types of software and hardware introduced in the classroom is limited to the teacher's willingness and knowledge of technology.

Because many teachers find it difficult to learn how to use technology on their own time, they often ignore it as a tool and resource.

Principals do not invest or train staff with technological change, which makes it difficult for teachers to be able to teach with it.

The growing importance of technology is largely ignored and it is seen as a nuisance. Technological literacy is desperately needed for problem solving in a digital age, so it needs to be incorporated within the elementary level of education.

### *2. Students with access do not know/have the education to fully utilize the technology given to them.*

In some boards, a culture around tech making work easier makes students feel rushed.

While devices allow work to be accomplished faster, some school boards have the culture that these should translate directly into shorter time given for assignments. This makes students feel rushed and anxious.

Education regarding privacy and the permanence of data on the internet needs to be emphasized.

A lack of control over devices means that students use their devices for gaming / goofing around instead of learning. It should be clear that the devices given to students (chromebooks / ipads) should be used for learning, and not gaming.

Elementary school level education should emphasize web technologies and how the internet works (networks / the internet as a distributed network of servers / etc). Similarly, office tools should be taught about in some way.

### *3. Variance of tech levels between boards means some boards are technologically left out.*

Conversely, some boards have so much technology on hand that it increases the barrier to learning.

Many students only know how to use the basic functions of technology for their own use rather than for other applications beyond things such as games and social media. This impedes on their literacy skills as a technological learner.

Technology or Information Technology classes need to be mandatory in the elementary level; classes such as computer science do not actually involve the use of computers rather the nature of it, so they do not need to be mandatory as many people would think

Outdated hardware and software as well as the lack of technology in a wide range of schools impact the ability to actually learn these skills and succeed as a 21st-century learner.

Unless the schools and boards value technology, it is not reinforced; this gives an advantage for certain boards over others

This is indicative when boards such as the TDSB only have 1 central IT Technician in order to help with technological issues; others have 1 at every school, while other still have none at all.

## *Gender Issues: Gender Inclusion in the Classroom*

By: Spencer Julien, Esegent Lemma

### *Introduction*

Students not only learn their educational curriculum while they are at school but they are also learning the tools of how to conduct themselves in real world. By providing each student with comfort to express themselves and teach non-tolerance for exclusion teachers are allowing the next generations to become critical thinkers with compassionate hearts. There are many ways to think about how gender affects teaching and learning. With simple speech to sexist remarks the way teachers conduct themselves and their students needs to be in a manner that that supports and tears down. What changes can be made to create a more equitable learning environment for all children? First, teachers need to be made aware of their gender-biased tendencies. Next, they need to be provided with strategies for altering their behaviour. Finally, efforts need to be made to combat gender bias in educational materials.

### *Language*

By using gender neutral language teachers are able to eliminate the assumptions about someone's or a student's gender identity or sexual orientation based upon their appearance. Using inclusive language avoids reinforcing gender binaries and it respects diverse identities. The use of gender-specific language tends to be biased towards masculine words, contributing to gender power imbalances. Teachers as moulders of children's minds have the obligation to make sure each student leaves school knowing that their gender does not limit their potential. The words children hear affect their perceptions of the gender appropriateness of certain careers, interests, and activities. For students who identify as trans or intersex, constant reminders about gender binaries like assigning pronouns they are uncomfortable with to them can be stressful and reinforce traditional gender roles and expectations. This environment is unhealthy for students and could cause avoidable concerns.

### *Curriculum*

Gender bias is also taught implicitly through the resources chosen for classroom use. Using texts that omit contributions of a specific gender or identification, or that stereotype a genders roles, further exemplifies the gender bias in a school's' curriculum. While research shows that the use of gender-equitable materials allows students to have more gender-balanced knowledge, to develop more flexible attitudes towards gender roles, and to imitate role behaviours contained in the materials schools continue to use gender-biased textbooks.

### *Conduct*

Every time students are seated or lined up by gender, teachers are affirming that students are treated differently just based on their gender. When an administrator ignores an act of sexual harassment, he or she is allowing the degradation of a student. Being lenient toward one gender when it comes to punishment reinforces the growing acceptance of not being held accountable for your actions that young people have today.

*How can you teach in a gender inclusive manner?*

- Avoid dividing the class by gender, or make statements just addressing one gender, such as “The boys in this class...”
- Avoid using words like chairman, fireman, and stewardess when discussing careers or occupations. These are gender-specific; instead use the corresponding gender-neutral terms such as chairperson (or chair), firefighter, and flight attendant.
- Instead of using the term you guys, use gender-neutral terms like everyone or people or Division 12 to refer to all students in your class
- Avoid assigning classroom or school tasks based on historical roles of gender. For example, asking boys only to move chairs or desks.
- Include as many resources as possible within your classroom and curriculum that depict women and men in non-traditional ways.
- Ask students who identify as transgendered or intersex which gender they would prefer to be identified with and address them as such.
- Start clubs and groups that break gender roles
- Assign gender diverse class projects and history lessons
- Bring in adult guest speakers that have broken gender roles
- Have open, honest, and appropriate class discussion in regards to gender issues around the world and in the class room
- Take ALL sexual harassment complaints seriously.

## *Resource Accessibility*

By: Babacar Faye (Lead), Chris Butler (Writer), Kenzi Karsikas- Ouellet (Co-Writer), Eden Blanchard, Tanya Nguyen, Matthew Milencoff.

### *Resources*

- Students who are francophone, French immersion, and indigenous need more resources in and out of the classroom.
- Classes based around Canada's indigenous history and languages in surrounding areas should be an option and encouraged as second language classes
- Francophone and French immersion classes/students need easier access to videos, literature and study tools that are up to date with the curriculum
- Francophone and indigenous students need more opportunities outside the classroom in order to gain real-world experience and facilitate transition into higher education or the job market.
- Students with learning disabilities don't have adequate access to testing and tools to improve their quality of education even more so in rural and small communities.
- Testing for learning disabilities (trouble reading and writing) needs to be easier to obtain as soon as its recognized
- Students that require additional personal assistance must be able to have access to that at whatever the level may be; whether it's for explaining in further detail, help writing or functioning
- Updated and relevant textbooks are needed especially for history and social studies.
- Online textbooks are an easy way for schools to stay up to date as well as making it easier for students to work from home if they are sick or traveling without fear of losing or damaging the textbook
- In rural areas, small communities and underprivileged students need better access to computers during the day.
- Schools in rural areas and small communities don't have an adequate amount of computers for student use considering most jobs require you to have basic computer skills
- Students in rural areas as well as underprivileged students don't always have access at home to computers as well so having assignments due that are completed at home using a computer may hinder a student

### *Health and Wellbeing*

- Mental health is a constantly overlooked area with a lot of stigma around it.
- Educators need to discuss mental health, reassure students that it is normal while breaking down common misconceptions such as someone can just "get over it"
- Lack of access to outside counselling is an issue that students face that needs to be fixed
- Positive, safe, and healthy environments are the best places to encourage better learning atmospheres
- School cafeterias/lunch programs need to offer healthy, affordable food that reinforces what the curriculum teaches.
- Culturally diverse lunches as well as alternative options should be available for those with diet restrictions such as celiac disease and vegans

- Given that francophone High Schools are regional, more resources need to be added in order to level work-life balance.
- School start times should be adjusted depending on the average distance traveled by students
- Positive and relaxing spaces should enforced in order to reduce fatigue as well as stress
- Funding should be added in order to allow students, as well as teachers to participate in extracurricular activities, indiscriminate of the distance or travel time necessary



**First Nations, Metis and Inuit Awareness Subcommittee Report**

A proposal for implementing Indigenous Studies as a mandatory course at the elementary level (specifically grade levels four to six) in the publicly funded education system in the province of Ontario. We understand that Ontario's Ministry of Education and its curriculum offers many different branches for Indigenous awareness, including (minimal) integration of Indigenous facets within curricula, however, ultimately it is up to the school board, the school, the teacher and its effectiveness.

To focus on the elementary level, the 2013 revised Social Studies curriculum, mainly Grade 5 has integrated some key points on Indigenous history, however, it fragments of a massive culture, history, spirituality (Focuses entirely on the interactions between European Settlers and the Native Community).

The following image is derived from the 2013 Revised Social Studies Curriculum in Ontario, see that the overall expectations revolve solely on the interactions between the First Nations and the European settlers.

Overall Expectations	Related Concepts of Social Studies Thinking	Big Ideas	Framing Questions	Sample Spatial Skills/Activities to Be Introduced/ Developed
<b>Strand A. Heritage and Identity: First Nations and Europeans in New France and Early Canada</b>				
<b>A1.</b> analyse some key short- and long-term consequences of interactions among and between First Nations and European explorers and settlers in New France prior to 1713	Cause and Consequence; Continuity and Change	Interactions between people have consequences that can be positive for some people and negative for others.	Why might the same event have a different impact on different people?  Why is it important to understand that people have different perspectives?	<b>Maps* and Globes</b> Analysing historical maps to determine settlement patterns (see, e.g., A2.3)  Analysing and constructing thematic maps to show connections between types of land and settlement (see, e.g., A2.3)
<b>A2.</b> use the social studies inquiry process to investigate aspects of interactions among and between First Nations and Europeans in Canada prior to 1713 from the perspectives of the various groups involved	Perspective; Interrelationships	When studying interrelationships between groups of people, it is important to be aware that each group has its own perspective on those interrelationships.	How do we form our own perspective? How do other people form theirs?  What causes conflict?  Do all conflicts have a resolution?  Why is it important to cooperate with others?	
<b>A3.</b> describe significant features of and interactions between some of the main communities in Canada prior to 1713, with a particular focus on First Nations and New France	Significance; Interrelationships	Cooperation and conflict are inherent aspects of human interactions/ relationships.		

Furthermore, it is up to the teacher to decide upon what information they believe is important to share, which brings up the following problems:

- If a teacher is not supplementary educated on this topic they may not feel it is appropriate for them to teach it.
- If an area doesn't have a large Indigenous population a teacher might not address the topic it as much as an area with a large Indigenous population.
- If a teacher has certain prejudices (which is very possible) they might not feel inclined to teach.

So the idea of having an equal education provincially (or sufficiently having an accessible course established for all students provincially), so students can receive the proper education on a course that is solely based on Indigenous history, culture, spiritually, etcetera... Instead of a fragmentation throughout the publicly funded education experience, where courses and information are up to the teacher's interpretation.

There is an online petition accessed on 'Change.org' with upwards of 1,626 signatures (2016), promoting this idea of a compulsory course.



<https://www.change.org/p/mandatory-indigenous-studies-course>

*Some supporter comments of the petition include:*

“As long as teachers are given the choice of whether or not to present authentic history integrated into their lessons, they will deliver the stereotypes to avoid anything controversial. For there to be reconciliation there must be truth.”

Michelle Parkin, Toronto, Canada.

“Editorials should not be the sole source of education related to Indigenous studies.. or the chance of attending post secondary institutes. This is a start for correcting the injustice the ongoing acts of genocide or assimilation.”

Denise Bouchard-Wood, Nipigon, Canada.

“I believe that this course requirement is necessary in understanding the true and rich historical roots of Canada. This knowledge is essential to an individual's reflections of what it means to be Canadian. It is a legacy is important and needs to be carried throughout the generations of the world.”

A.L Dunn, Toronto, Canada.

Post-Secondary Initiatives

At Lakehead University and the University of Winnipeg, students must take a course in Indigenous studies to graduate. The University of Winnipeg stating, “This change will result in students forming positive relationships with Indigenous people and learning to see from new perspectives.”

This arises the following question, If this is happening postsecondary why can't it happen at the elementary level?

It is strongly believed that the root of all education is at the elementary level, furthermore, if students are educated earlier on, they can build an authentic knowledge on the first peoples of Canada. This will assist in reverting preconceived notions on the Indigenous people, like them being "drunks", "uneducated", receiving "tax-breaks", and "welfare cheques."

Those especially located within areas that do not have a large Indigenous population are not exposed to current topics involving the Indigenous community. As a result, many students do not know fundamental definitions such as to what it means to be Indigenous, so they are limited to only stereotypes of this community. These improperly formed definitions can lead to the exclusion and/or discrimination of Indigenous peoples within schools, creating a very unsafe atmosphere for any concerned students.

### Calls to Action

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) makes the following calls to action:

Section 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.

Section 14. We call upon the federal government to enact an Aboriginal Languages Act that incorporates the following principles:

- i. Aboriginal languages are a fundamental and valued element of Canadian culture and society, and there is an urgency to preserve them.
- ii. Aboriginal language rights are reinforced by the Treaties.
- iii. The federal government has a responsibility to provide sufficient funds for Aboriginal-language revitalization and preservation.
- iv. The preservation, revitalization, and strengthening of Aboriginal languages and cultures are best managed by Aboriginal people and communities.
- v. Funding for Aboriginal language initiatives must reflect the diversity of Aboriginal languages.

Under Section 10-iii, of the TRC call to action specifies the development of culturally appropriate curricula.

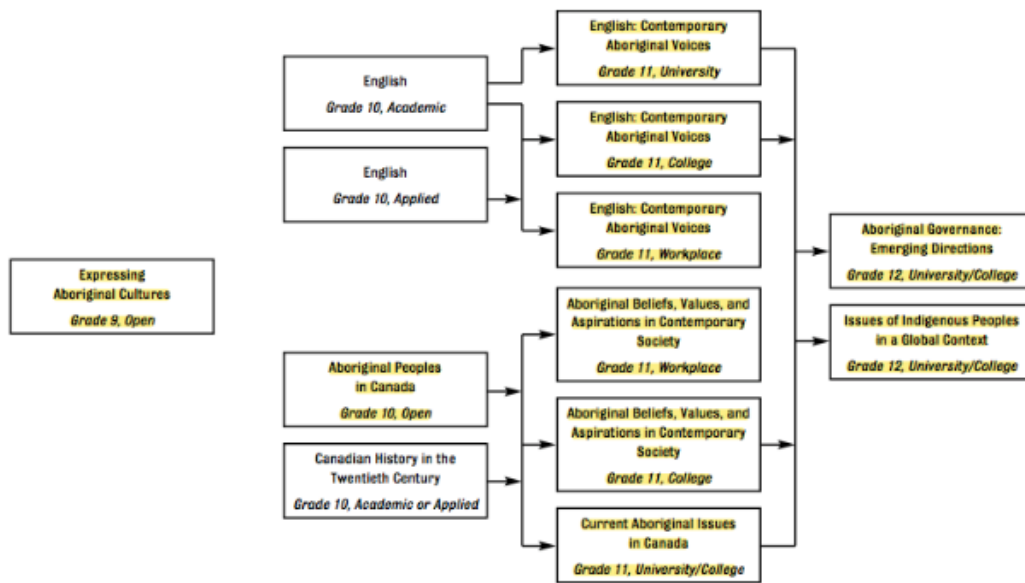
The issue with following and attaining this call to action is the primary principle that Eurocentric history, and culture, is the core curriculum and Indigenous history, and culture is either an elective or minimally integrated within the already withstanding curriculum. Such that, Eurocentric influence is often brought upon Indigenous facets which ultimately doesn't project a culturally appropriate curriculum.

Under Section 14-i, and Section 14-v, of the TRC call to action specifies Aboriginal languages within the education system must be preserved and also have adequate funding for initiatives in the preservation. The issue with following and attaining this call to action is that there is a lack of demand with the students to take these (languages) courses.

The Ministry of Education has developed and implemented Native Studies curriculum at the secondary level. However, based on the experience of a member of this subcommittee, (Specifically, TiCarra Paquet, Marymount Academy, Grade 10, Sudbury, Ontario, 2015.) the secondary school was not able to offer any Indigenous or interdisciplinary Indigenous Studies courses on account of the minimal knowledge and information obtained from the elementary level. Even more so, the generalization of the Indigenous community (Drunks, uneducated, tax-breaks, welfare-cheques) might deter students in taking these courses.


It is important to note that the courses are available but actual delivery of the courses are only determined by numbers of students who enrol for the courses. If the numbers are not sufficient, then the courses are not offered.

The following chart is derived from the Native Studies Curriculum in Ontario.



Statistics

The following survey was conducted to analyze the amount of information students knew about Indigenous facets, that suggestively were obtained through the Ontario publicly funded education experience.

<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;">  <div> <p><b>Indigenous Knowledge and Comprehension Survey</b> Created By: Preston Swan-Merrison &amp; TiCarra Paquet</p> <p>Grade: Do you have Aboriginal ancestry?: YES OR NO</p> </div> </div> <p>1) What does "Aboriginal" mean?</p> <p>2) What is the difference between First Nations, Inuit and Métis in Canada?</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">First Nations:</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">Inuit:</p> <p style="margin-left: 20px;">Métis:</p> <p>3) What does "culture" mean?</p>	<p>4) What parts of Aboriginal culture do you know?</p> <p>5) Do all Aboriginal groups in Canada speak the same language?</p> <p>6) Where do these Aboriginal groups live now?</p> <p>7) What does the word "Indian" mean to you?</p> <p>8) Do you know any Aboriginal people?</p> <p>9) Would you like to learn more about the Aboriginal history?</p>
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A grade 7 English class (26 students) from Marymount Academy, Sudbury completed the survey and the results are as follows:

- When asked if the students knew the differences between First Nations, Inuit and Metis people in Canada, not one student successfully identified the differences between the groups.
  - 50% partially identified differences.
- However all statements were generic, such as “different languages, and different cultures.”
  - 50% did not know the differences.
- When asked if the students knew parts of Aboriginal culture, most students did not identify parts of Aboriginal culture or if they did it was common knowledge.
  - 23% identified parts.
- However, 67% of the identified parts were generic aspects, such as “powwows.”
  - 77% did not successfully identify or did not know parts of Aboriginal culture.

The entire issue with these statistics is the fact that these students are products of the 2013 Revised Social Studies Curriculum in Ontario, so either students obtained little to no information from previous years or they just weren't taught it in general or effectively. This defeats the purpose and integrity of Indigenous education, which is to:

- Increase the demand of Indigenous electives or interdisciplinary Indigenous Studies courses at the secondary level.
  - Sustain a basic knowledge on the Indigenous community at the elementary level.
  - Revert stereotypes.
  - Attain an appreciation and respect on/for Indigenous people and Indigenous cultures.
  - Unite the Indigenous and Non-Indigenous communities.
- When asked if students would like to learn more about Aboriginal history, an overwhelming amount stated they would.
    - 65% of students said yes to learn more about Aboriginal history. (That is more than half of the grade 7 students surveyed.)
    - 27% of students said no to learn more about Aboriginal history.
    - 8% of students were undecided.

### The Secondary Level

A grade 11 World Religions class (16 students) from Marymount Academy, Sudbury completed the survey and the results are as follows:

- When asked if the students knew the differences between First Nations, Inuit and Metis people in Canada, an overwhelming amount of students did not the difference.
  - 81% did not know the differences.
  - 6% partially identified the differences.

- 13% identified the differences.
- When asked if the students knew parts of Aboriginal culture, students either identified standard aspects or did not know parts of Aboriginal culture.
  - 50% identified parts.
  - However 88% of that stated generic aspects such as, “medicine wheels and powwows.”
  - 50% did not know parts of Aboriginal culture.

In summary, the need for the mandatory Indigenous Studies course is to increase the demand of Indigenous Studies courses at the secondary level, or sufficiently sustain a basic knowledge on Indigenous facets at the elementary level, which in turn will revert stereotypes, attain a respect and appreciation for the Indigenous community and its facets, and overall unite the Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

## **School Budget**

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### **Background**

School principals currently have absolute authority over school budgets. The principal alone manages the school's budget, is responsible for agreements and contracts with suppliers and decides how much money will be allocated for each sports team and department (for books, manuals, etc.). The principal often has a secretary, who acts as treasurer, and obviously any large expenses must be approved by the Superintendent, with all expenses being checked by the school board. However, the principal still has a lot of latitude in terms of spending amounts on those things that he or she thinks are the most important. There is no mandatory consultation with teachers, parents or students during which the principal is required to disclose the budget or the various expenses.

### **Issues**

School principals have too much authority, are not supervised enough and have too much confidence placed in them, in the belief that they will exercise good judgment. The funds that principals are responsible for are public funds, including funds that are raised by means of activity fees and school fees, which are additional mandatory fees that must be paid to the school. There is also fundraising, as well as fees for being involved in sports. Those funds, which are either public or are paid directly by the parents and students, should therefore be disclosed. The system currently allows school principals to allocate a large amount to sports teams and allocate less for cultural activities. The principal could show preference for the Science Department, rather than buying new books for the English department. They could also use the money to buy a new banner rather than a microwave for the cafeteria. A lot of confidence is placed in the good judgment of principals. Students, parents, staff members and the whole community should have the right to know where their money is being spent and why. Consultation with those people and getting their feedback would allow principals to make clearer and better informed decisions.

### **Suggestions**

- That the school budget should be made available to the public from the beginning of the school year.
- That expenses and the actual allocations should be made public, just as the school boards are required to do at the end of the year.
- That consultations that are both mandatory and open to everyone should be conducted every year with teachers, parents and students.
  - A consultation and reading of the proposed budget should be done with students during school hours in order to facilitate student participation, promote learning in the Ontario educational system, create a sense of belonging to the school and forge better links between students and the principal. All students should have the right to participate in a consultation.



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