



Sound Foundations for the Road Ahead

Fall 2009 Progress Report
on Implementation of the
Ontario First Nation,
Métis, and Inuit Education
Policy Framework



2009

Aboriginal perspectives bring the curriculum to life!



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reach every student



Ontario

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Une publication équivalente est disponible en français sous le titre suivant :
De solides bases pour l'avenir – Rapport d'étape (automne 2009) sur la mise en œuvre du Cadre d'élaboration des politiques de l'Ontario en éducation des Premières Nations, des Métis et des Inuits.

This publication is available on the Ministry of Education's website,
at www.edu.gov.on.ca.

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INTRODUCTION



The Government of Ontario is committed to ensuring that all students in Ontario reach their potential. In January 2007, the government launched Ontario's new Aboriginal Education Strategy to support learning and achievement for Aboriginal students and to raise awareness about First Nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples' cultures, histories, and perspectives in our schools.

The Aboriginal Education Strategy was launched with the release of *Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework, 2007*. The framework is the foundation for delivering quality education to all First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students who attend provincially funded elementary and secondary schools in Ontario.

About This Report

At the launch of the framework, the ministry committed to reporting publicly on implementation progress every three years. This report provides an overview of the steps the ministry, school boards, schools, and community partners have taken to implement the strategies outlined in the framework and to support First Nation, Métis, and Inuit student success. This report is not intended to be an evaluation or an assessment of individual boards. Rather, it offers an update on the progress made to date, and shares recommendations on ways in which all partners can work together effectively to reach every student, build capacity, and raise awareness.

Research Sources

The findings in this report have been informed by multiple sources. The Ministry of Education provided funding to provincial Aboriginal organizations to conduct community feedback sessions and gather input on framework implementation from a community perspective. The ministry also worked with an independent consultant, StonePath Research Group, to collect information regarding student and educator perspectives through focus groups and online surveys. Feedback was also gathered directly from school board personnel by the Aboriginal Education Office.



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REALIZING THE VISION



Strong partnerships between the ministry, boards, schools, educators, support personnel, families, students, and community organizations are essential to achieve the goals set out in the framework. Ministry programs and initiatives, as well as curriculum and resources, that focus on various aspects of Aboriginal education are also important to implementation of the framework. Remarkable progress has been made in a short period of time, and much exciting work remains ahead to ensure that the goals of the framework are fully achieved.

Forging Strong Partnerships

Great progress has been made in developing stronger working relationships with school boards and Aboriginal organizations in all regions of the province. In addition to local efforts, the following activities are advancing implementation of the framework through engaging First Nation, Métis, and Inuit families and community partners in supporting First Nation, Métis, and Inuit student achievement.

The **Minister's First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Advisory Council** was launched in 2009 to provide a forum for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit representatives from across Ontario to meet with the Minister of Education and senior ministry representatives to advance the K–12 education agenda for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students.

The **Directors' Council on Aboriginal Education** was established in February 2008. This council was created through overwhelming interest from other regions of the province in joining the original group of

Northern Ontario directors of education who had met several times with ministry senior management to discuss issues related to First Nation, Métis, and Inuit education.

The **Métis Nation of Ontario** and the **Ministry of Education** have signed a formal Memorandum of Understanding to identify opportunities to support Métis students and raise awareness of Métis history, culture, and perspectives among all Ontario students.

The **Ministry of Education**, with support from the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs, has begun discussions on First Nation education with the **Union of Ontario Indians** and with the **Fort Frances Chiefs Secretariat** regarding the Education Agreements they are negotiating with the Government of Canada.

Ministry Programs and Initiatives

The **Aboriginal Education Office** was established in 2006 to provide ministry-wide coordination and leadership on Aboriginal education issues and initiatives. It works in collaboration with Aboriginal communities and organizations, Ontario school boards, postsecondary institutions, other ministries, and the federal government.

Targeted funding for elementary and secondary Aboriginal education has increased from \$3 million to \$28 million over the past four years.

The **First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Supplement** was introduced in 2007 to provide increased funding to school boards for programs in Native languages and Native studies and for additional supports for Aboriginal students. The value of the supplement has increased from \$10.5 million in 2007 to \$19.1 million in 2009–10 because of increased enrolment in Native language and Native studies courses.

Alternative Secondary School Programs within Native Friendship Centres were established in 1990 to address high drop-out rates among urban Aboriginal students. They are working partnerships between eight Native Friendship Centres and publicly funded school boards in London, Sudbury, Fort Erie, Hamilton, Ottawa, Sault Ste. Marie, Kenora, and Fort Frances. The program will be expanding to include four additional sites in 2010–11.





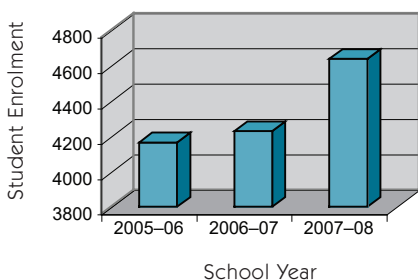
Urban Aboriginal Education Pilot Projects were launched in the Lakehead, Simcoe County, and Toronto district school boards, with a funding commitment of approximately \$3 million, to address the unique challenges faced by urban school boards and to develop effective models for supporting Aboriginal students, including effective outreach to Aboriginal families, communities, and other service delivery organizations.

The **Circle of Light 2009 – First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Conference** will be hosted by the Ministry of Education, in partnership with Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, on November 25 and 26 in Toronto. Building on the success of Circle of Light 2007, the conference will provide a chance for provincial and First Nation educators to participate jointly in professional development and share best practices related to Aboriginal education initiatives.

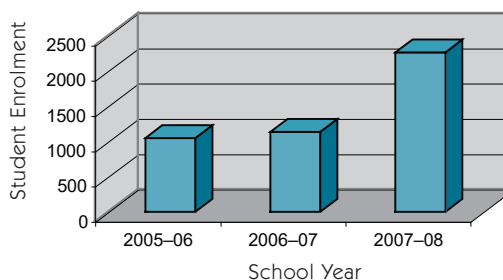
Curriculum and Resources

Enrolment in Native studies and Native language courses has steadily increased since the launch of the framework and the addition of the resources provided through the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Supplement. The significant increase in enrolment in Native studies and Native language courses has occurred in part because of the increase in the number of boards offering these course options. In 2007–08, 35 boards offered Native studies and/or Native language courses, a significant increase from the 18 boards that offered these courses in 2005–06.


Enrolment in Elementary and Secondary Native Language Courses



Enrolment in Secondary Native Studies Courses



First Nation, Métis, and Inuit curriculum content is being integrated into the revised curriculum, as part of the ministry's curriculum review process, in consultation with Aboriginal organizations.



Native language and Native studies courses are currently being reviewed. The two-year process of consultation, review, and revision is being undertaken by the ministry with the support of organizations such as the Anishnaabek, Mushkegowuk, Onkwehon:we (AMO) Language Commission, as well as an extensive network of educators, faculties of education, and education sector organizations.

Aboriginal Perspectives: The Teacher's Toolkit is a resource that has been developed to help teachers integrate First Nation, Métis, and Inuit perspectives into classroom instruction by providing teaching strategies aligned with the curriculum. It is now available on the ministry's website.

Native studies textbooks are currently being developed for two Native studies courses – Aboriginal Peoples in Canada (Grade 10) and Aboriginal Beliefs, Values, and Aspirations in Contemporary Society (Grade 11) – and are scheduled for completion in March 2011.

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PERFORMANCE MEASURES



Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework, 2007 includes ten performance measures that will be used to gauge the success of implementation of the framework. For the purpose of this report, these performance measures have been grouped under the following four categories:

- Using Data to Support Student Achievement
- Supporting Students
- Supporting Educators
- Engagement and Awareness Building

Since most boards are in the early stages of framework implementation, quantitative data related to the progress on framework themes are not available at this time. This report is therefore mostly qualitative in nature. Over the coming years as boards implement self-identification policies, reliable First Nation, Métis, and Inuit student data will become available to provide greater insight into the impact that the framework is having on student achievement.

Using Data to Support Student Achievement

1. Significant increase in the percentage of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students meeting provincial standards on province-wide assessments in reading, writing, and mathematics
2. Significant increase in the number of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit teaching and non-teaching staff in school boards across Ontario
3. Significant increase in the graduation rate of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students
4. Significant improvement in First Nation, Métis, and Inuit student achievement



Aboriginal Student Self-Identification Policy

The availability of data on Aboriginal student achievement in Ontario's publicly funded school system is critical in order to build a foundation for the development, implementation, and evaluation of programs that support the needs of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students.

In April 2007, the ministry released *Building Bridges to Success for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Students*, a guide to developing Aboriginal student self-identification policies and practices and data collection methodologies. The ministry has also provided funding and advice to boards as they develop local self-identification policies.

As of June 30, 2009, 28 boards have approved self-identification policies and 41 boards have begun the process of consultation and policy development. This is a significant increase since 2006, when fewer than 10 of the 72 boards had self-identification policies in place.

Data Collection

The availability of information on Aboriginal student self-identification will allow the ministry to establish a baseline for tracking student achievement performance measures. In preparation for province-wide inclusion of this data in the Ontario School Information System (OnSIS), the ministry launched a pilot project in four district school boards – Rainy River, Kenora Catholic, Algoma, and Kawartha Pine Ridge – to document effective practices in the collection of this data and to resolve any issues prior to province-wide implementation. This information has been shared with all boards to facilitate data collection province-wide.

OnSIS will begin collecting student-level self-identification information from all school boards with self-identification policies in place, beginning with the October 2009 data submission cycle.

Teacher Self-Identification

The Ontario College of Teachers has begun preliminary discussions with its members to:

- explore strategies to encourage more First Nation, Métis, and Inuit teachers to self-identify;
- encourage more First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students to consider entering the teaching profession.

Supporting Students

5. Significant improvement in First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students' self-esteem
6. Increased collaboration between First Nation education authorities and school boards to ensure that First Nation students in First Nation communities receive the preparation they need in order to succeed when they make the transition to provincially funded schools



Student Self-Esteem

Generally, First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students have reported more positive feelings towards school, and participants in feedback sessions reported noticeable improvement in Aboriginal students' pride, self-confidence, determination, and self-empowerment. The following are some examples of what participants reported:

- Some educators reported improved student attendance, greater comfort at school, and improvements in attitudes and interest among First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students.
- Métis families, in particular, who attended the feedback sessions felt that schools and the curriculum were becoming more respectful and mindful of Métis and Métis realities, and participants reported that Métis students show an increase in pride and confidence when recognized as Métis in a positive way in their schools.
- Some participants emphasized the need to continue with more open dialogue among students and teachers to create a greater awareness and understanding of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit issues and contributions.
- Increased self-esteem was reported by students attending Alternative Secondary School Programs within Native Friendship Centres, although it was noted that the support services and community resources provided in these programs may also have contributed to their success in school and that additional funding and resources are required to support student needs.
- Some respondents noted that opportunities had increased for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit youth to participate in leadership development at school and within the community. Respondents also identified development of youth leadership as an area in which more work is encouraged.

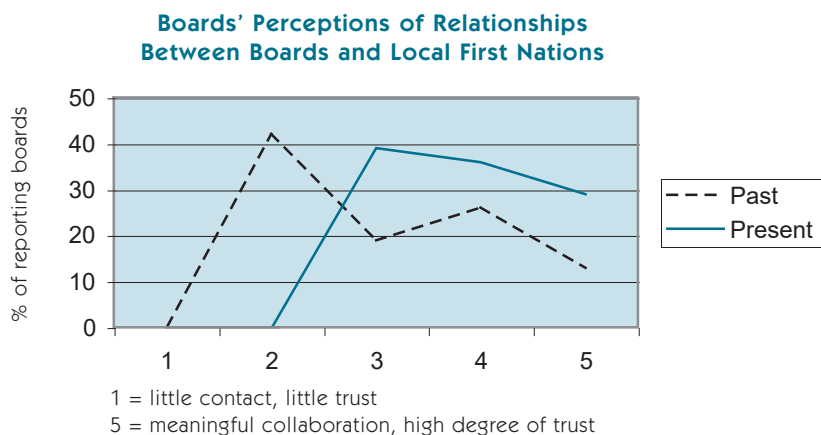
It is unclear whether increases in Aboriginal student self-esteem result directly from changes in schools or from the framework and associated funding. However, all sources reported that having Aboriginal counselors, liaison workers, and role models in schools has had a positive effect and has contributed to making students feel more comfortable in the school environment.



Collaboration Between First Nations and School Boards

The level of engagement between First Nations and school boards varies widely throughout the province. Longstanding collaborations and strong relationships exist in some cases, especially in areas where students who live on a reserve attend provincially funded schools. In other areas, where relationships are still developing, board representatives report a significant overall shift towards more meaningful relationships.

Board representatives were asked to rank the quality of engagement and collaboration between their board and neighbouring First Nations in the past and in the present on a scale of one to five. A ranking of one would represent little or no contact or interaction and the perception of a low degree of trust, and a ranking of five would represent meaningful collaboration and a high degree of trust. Since the launch of the framework, all boards have reported a shift in the perceived quality of their relationships – that is, movement towards higher degrees of collaboration and trust.



Tuition Agreements and Funding

Tuition agreements are formal contracts between school boards and First Nations. They enable First Nations to pay school boards for services so that students residing on a reserve may attend provincially funded schools. Each board and First Nation is responsible for negotiating these agreements at a local level. Although this approach allows for customization based on local needs, it also creates significant variance across the province in the specific terms and application of these agreements. As of January 2009, more than 20 school boards have tuition agreements in place.

Most boards reported improved relationships regarding the negotiation of these agreements. Identified indicators of progress are: growing consistency in the approach to negotiation, better communication, and ongoing discussion regarding data sharing and reporting on student achievement.

The ministry, the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, school boards, and First Nations participated in a series of local workshops on the topic of tuition agreements. Some viewed these workshops as successful for gaining a better understanding of tuition agreements. However, in some cases, more work needs to continue at the local level to develop harmonious working relationships.

Differences in funding approaches between the federal and provincial governments were identified as a consistent concern. Specifically, there is a significant gap between the provincial funding for school boards and the level of funding provided to First Nations by the federal government through the Band-Operated Funding Formula.

Also reported as a consistent concern were issues related to students' making the transition between First Nation schools and the provincial school system.

The ministry is currently working with First Nation representatives and the federal government on the development of a guide to assist with negotiations at the local level.





Transition Support

Several boards reported having structures in place to plan and monitor the transition of First Nation students to board schools and to solve problems related to transition. Board initiatives include the following:

- having an Aboriginal education coordinator
- setting up advisory committees
- establishing transition programs, peer-mentoring programs, and after-school programs
- making use of transition kits and outreach activities
- expanding services for students and their families

Many of the programs and services are being offered to students in Grade 8 in First Nation schools.

Community Advisory Committees

Approximately 40 per cent of boards that participated in the survey indicated that they had established an Aboriginal education advisory committee. These committees are generally perceived as being inclusive. They include First Nation, Métis, and Inuit community members, as well as teachers, trustees, and family members of Aboriginal students.

Results of the work of advisory committees include relationship building, information sharing, development of self-identification policies, and development of strategies to facilitate input from Aboriginal community members or to address specific perspectives or concerns.

Achievements reported include the following:

- Students are more engaged, they show more confidence in communication, and their attendance has improved.
- Intervention teams have been established, efforts are more coordinated, and there is training for Aboriginal lead teachers.
- Student support programs have been set up, as well as student leadership workshops, a breakfast program, and orientation kits. There is a better comfort level for incoming students. There are also family and celebration activities.

Supporting Educators

7. Increased satisfaction among educators in provincially funded schools with respect to targeted professional development and resources designed to help them serve First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students more effectively

Views of Educators

There is evidence of success related to this performance measure within boards, but there is more to be done. Although some boards have provided significant professional development, staff generally indicated that they would benefit from more professional development related to First Nation, Métis, and Inuit issues to improve the way they teach, address specific issues, and interact with their diverse student bodies. Many participants cited the need for more classroom resources and support materials, such as lesson plans, kits, and games, as well as more financial support for teacher professional development, training, and resources, including resources focused on First Nation, Métis, and Inuit perspectives.

Engagement and Awareness Building

8. Increased participation of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit parents in the education of their children
9. Increased opportunities for knowledge sharing, collaboration, and issue resolution among Aboriginal communities, First Nation governments and education authorities, schools, school boards, and the Ministry of Education
10. Integration of educational opportunities to significantly improve the knowledge of all students and educators in Ontario about the rich cultures and histories of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples

Implementation of the framework has occurred much more quickly in schools with larger self-identified First Nation, Métis, and Inuit student populations than in schools with smaller Aboriginal student populations. As implementation of the framework deepens, building awareness among all students of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit perspectives, histories, and cultures will continue to be a key priority. Encouraging all students to



consider the benefits of taking Native studies and Native language courses may be a positive step forward in building awareness.

Family Engagement

More Aboriginal families are being asked to participate in levels of governance and to have a voice within schools through committees and other forums. Their involvement, however, has been predominantly related to self-identification policy development. The survey showed a fairly high level of Aboriginal family involvement, and individuals who were not as involved cited poverty and high degrees of mobility as important factors.

Aboriginal family members expressed a level of interest in being consulted about curriculum and other matters that was similar to the level of interest of non-Aboriginal families and communities. Some Aboriginal family members felt that schools only asked for their input when they needed something and that the consultation process was frequently one-sided.

Agencies that were consulted felt that Aboriginal youth who have non-Aboriginal parents/guardians were a special concern, particularly with the growing number of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit children in care. It was suggested that there was a need for programs and facilities that would attract families to the schools, such as daycare services, public libraries, and GED (General Educational Development) and continuing education courses.

Knowledge Sharing and Collaboration

Overall, all parties reported more collaboration and partnerships between the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities and school boards.

Some Aboriginal parents and community members noticed the increased use of First Nation languages in schools and of posters in schools celebrating First Nation and Métis cultures, and saw it as an important first step.

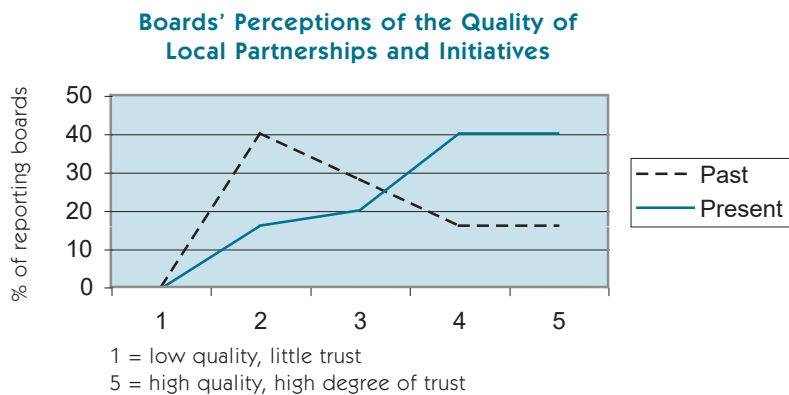
There has been a significant increase in events and outreach sessions designed to promote knowledge sharing and collaboration. Examples are consultation and information sessions, awareness sessions with



teachers, parent outreach through school councils, community information forums, cultural gatherings, symposia, meetings of regional leaders in Aboriginal education, and expanded family services.

The benefits of this level of engagement have included collaborative problem solving, ongoing communication, collaboration of superintendents regarding elements that contribute to overall school effectiveness, access to initiatives that support schools and communities, and increased trust and confidence.

Board representatives were asked to rank the perceived quality of local partnerships and initiatives in the same way that they ranked the quality of relationships between the board and First Nations in the past and in the present. The majority of boards reported a significant shift towards more meaningful collaboration and trust with respect to partnerships and initiatives.



Welcoming Environments and Student Participation

It is generally acknowledged that creating a welcoming environment is key to meaningful engagement, collaboration, and awareness building. Effective practices in this area include the following:

- providing event-based opportunities
- establishing a school-wide practice of equality
- using visual elements such as posters and flags
- holding teacher-awareness sessions on classroom practice
- creating alternative programming to keep students engaged
- providing tutoring, mentoring, and leadership development activities and programs



- increasing the use of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit resources in classes, so that students see themselves represented in books and other materials
- increasing the number of Native language and Native studies programs and student forums

Increasing Awareness of Aboriginal Perspectives in the Classroom

Integration of Aboriginal perspectives into the curriculum for all courses is improving. Eighty per cent of students participating in the online survey reported that Aboriginal content was included in the courses in which they were enrolled.

Although progress has been made, participants reported the need to ensure authenticity of the material and avoid tokenism. Métis people, in particular, noted the need for respectful representation and acknowledgement of the distinct histories, language, and Métis culture within the curriculum.

Additional work is required to reinforce the relevance and importance of raising awareness of Aboriginal perspectives among all students, regardless of the proportion of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students enrolled in a school.

Many respondents viewed the framework as an important tool in supporting First Nation, Métis, and Inuit student achievement, but few acknowledged or commented on the role the framework plays in addressing the needs of non-Aboriginal students.

Access to Native studies and Native language courses was identified as an area of concern for some students and parents – 61.8 per cent of students stated that they did not have the opportunity to take Native studies or Native language courses at their schools. The qualifications or expertise of teachers to instruct students in these subject areas was also identified as an area of concern. Community members and, to a lesser extent, educators mentioned the need to ensure that Native language and Native studies teachers have a high degree of proficiency in Native languages and a strong knowledge of Native studies.



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FUTURE DIRECTIONS



Overall, the findings of the feedback sessions and surveys conducted regarding progress in implementing the Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework point to significant movement forward and growing awareness of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit perspectives. However, much remains to be done.

Deepening Implementation

Throughout the province, there is significant variance in the degree to which boards have integrated the strategies outlined in the framework into daily practice. Communication and collaboration between boards and community associations that encourage sharing information and resources have been identified as mechanisms that support implementation.

Raising awareness among all students is as fundamental to the successful implementation of the framework as are those activities specifically intended for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit learners. This is especially true with regard to understanding the plurality of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit perspectives.

Two elements were identified as being fundamental for the ongoing success of and movement towards deepening the implementation of the framework. These are as follows:

- the availability of resource materials that are contemporary and inclusive of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit perspectives
- the benefit of having dedicated school and board personnel who are focused on supporting the needs of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students



Self-Identification

Boards, in partnership with local communities and Aboriginal family members, must continue to discuss the development and implementation of voluntary, confidential First Nation, Métis, and Inuit student self-identification. Processes for sharing and evaluating this information also need to be developed and implemented in order to support student achievement.

Professional Development

Supporting educators by providing opportunities to deepen their awareness and understanding is also essential. Approaches may include ongoing professional development at all levels, including division-specific content, additional qualification courses, training symposia at the regional and provincial levels, and train-the-trainer programs with clear benchmarks, outcomes, and reporting.

Consultation and Partnerships

One of the most significant changes reported since the launch of the framework is the increase in collaboration and consultation between First Nation, Métis, and Inuit communities and school boards. Although there is much more to be done in these areas, conversations are taking place across the province on topics never before discussed, with the shared objective of ensuring that all First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students in Ontario reach their full potential, and that all students leave the Ontario public education system with a greater appreciation and awareness of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit peoples and perspectives.

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SUMMARY



Tremendous progress has been made in the past three years. In this short period of time, stronger working relationships have developed between school boards and Aboriginal organizations in all regions of the province. Overall, there is growing awareness of the framework and dedicated support for its implementation. There is also greater recognition of the need for and value of engaging First Nation, Métis, and Inuit families and communities in supporting First Nation, Métis, and Inuit student achievement.

The work that has been done since the release of the framework in 2007 has built a sound foundation for the road ahead. We look forward to continuing, in collaboration with all of our partners, to support improved student achievement for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students in provincially funded schools in Ontario, and, equally, to ensure that all students in Ontario have knowledge and appreciation of contemporary and traditional First Nation, Métis, and Inuit traditions, cultures, and perspectives.

