

Circle of Voices: Dialogue for First Nations, Inuit and Métis Student Success



**A Research Report on First Nations, Inuit and Métis Education
In
Regina Catholic Schools**

Executive Summary

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Section I- Introduction

The Regina Catholic School Division carefully considered the best practices required for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students. The Regina Catholic School Board acknowledges that the First Nations, Inuit and Métis student population is growing within Regina Catholic Schools. The school division is seeking to learn from past and current educational practices to create a dynamic educational vision for the future, to enable success for all students.

According to the current January 2006 statistics of First Nations, Inuit and Métis populations, it has shown that the population is growing at a significant rate within the city of Regina, and the province of Saskatchewan which in turn has changed student demographics within Regina Catholic Schools.

As a school division we continue to ensure that Regina Catholic schools are able to meet the needs of and preparing students to be contributing, faith-filled members of society in the 21st century. In keeping with the Regina Catholic School Board Policy, the Board *“recognizes that pupils of Aboriginal ancestry represent a significant minority group. Divergent educational responses may be required to help them succeed in their educational development (Aboriginal Education Policy 1300)”*.



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A Change of Terms

Aboriginal peoples are defined in Section 35 of the 1982 Canadian Constitution as “Indian, Métis and Inuit.” The term Aboriginal was used within the Regina Catholic School Division from 1980-2005. The term has since been replaced within the Regina Catholic School Division to First Nations, Inuit and Métis in accordance with the 2006 Saskatchewan Learning’s First Nations and Métis Branch name change. Throughout this research the term “Aboriginal” is used in its most inclusive sense which is reflective in past practices. However, Regina Catholic School division honors and respectfully acknowledges the uniqueness of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples and uses these distinct terms.

Change with a Purpose

The Regina Catholic School Division’s First Nations, Inuit and Métis long term educational plan allows for the full opportunity and participation of First Nations, Inuit and Métis students in all of their schools in the areas of education programming, curriculum and successful student transition.

Planning, Process and Development Tasks:

The research project process;

1. Review and document successes and challenges of past Board direction for First Nations, Inuit & Métis education.



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2. Meet with stakeholder groups and representatives who included First Nations, Inuit & Métis Elders, school division students, teachers, parents, and school based administrators. In addition, collaboration with key stakeholders and representatives from First Nations University of Canada in Regina, Saskatchewan Learning, Saskatchewan School Board Association, and Saskatchewan Teachers Federation took place and dialogue groups occurred around the visioning for First Nations, Inuit & Métis education.
3. Complete a review of literature cross Canada to determine common goals and visioning in other provinces on the area of First Nations, Inuit and Métis education.
4. Develop a plan from compiled results and findings to be presented to the School Division Board of Trustee and School Division Senior Level Management Team with future recommendations.
5. Report findings and approved recommendation to all dialogue groups and stakeholders.

Acknowledgements

The Regina Catholic School Division First Nations, Inuit and Métis Department wishes to acknowledge and thank the stakeholder groups and individuals who provided historical insight, personal experiences, research summaries and suggestions for the Regina Catholic Schools Division to consider for further course and program development. Regina Catholic Schools consulted



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with a total of 65 participants comprised of the following groups:

- First Nations and Métis teachers in Regina Catholic Schools
- Principals and Vice Principals in Regina Catholic Community Schools
- Regina Catholic School Administration
- Educational Partners
- First Nations and Métis Elders and advisors
- Regina Catholic School Parents
- Regina Catholic Schools Students
- Regina Catholic School Research Committee

Section II- Past Practices

Initiatives within Regina Catholic Schools from 1980 – 2005

This section includes historical best practices incorporated in the plan for First Nations and Métis in education in Regina Catholic Schools:

- 1980 Community Schools Program established in four schools
- 1986-2005 Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission - Education Equity Committee established
- 2001 two more elementary schools designated as community schools. In addition Miller High school was recognized by Regina Catholic School Board as a community school.
- 2002 O'Neill High School was designated as a community school making it a total of seven Sask Learning designated community schools.



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- 2002 School^{Plus} established
- 2002-2003 Aboriginal Education Working Group
- 2003 School^{Plus} Coordinator position established
- 2003-2005 Aboriginal Education Committee
- 2005 Aboriginal Career Exploration position established
- 2007 First Nations, Inuit and Métis Coordinator established

Regina Catholic Schools Education Equity Plan Based on the Five Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission Reporting Principles from 1987 – 2005

1. An affirmative action hiring plan to increase the number of teachers of First Nations ancestry;
2. Cross-cultural training for all teachers employed by the Board;
3. A review of curriculum to include Aboriginal content and perspectives
4. A plan to increase and improve the participation of parents of Aboriginal ancestry;
5. A review of each school's policies and procedures as they affect persons of Aboriginal ancestry.



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Some Common Practices Resulting from the Education Equity Action Plan

- Community cultural resource personnel which involved school and classroom presentations of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Elders, Storytellers, role-models, entertainers and artists
- Personnel on special assignment such as Native Liaisons, High School Guidance Counselor specific to First Nations, Inuit and Métis students and Aboriginal Career Exploration
- Student participation in community events such as Career Fairs, Leadership Conferences, Writing Workshop Conference and activities designed to promote Aboriginal cultural awareness

Section III- Research Report

Circle of Voices: Dialogue for Student Success

The purpose for Circle of Voices: Dialogue for Student Success is to provide a voice for First Nations, Inuit and Métis people and educators to address social, spiritual, and academic educational successes, opportunities and challenges for PreKindergarten to Grade 12 students in Regina Catholic Schools. Based on the outcomes of the dialogue with First Nations, Inuit and Métis educators, students, parents, Elders and partners in education there was valuable information obtained and served as a guide to enable the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Department to develop a school division plan, vision, goals, and



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recommendations for First Nations, Inuit and Métis education. There were many positive contributions to the research.

- Successful evidence of cultural experiential learning
- The community school concept has illustrated evidence of success in terms of available social, emotional spiritual, physical and academic supports
- There is on-going evidence that school communities are working to create inclusive environments
- There is a need to create an educational co-governance model; school boards should be representative of the people it serves
- Provide training for understanding, respect and implementation of the Indigenous worldview
- Recruit and educate staff to be culturally competent
- A need to recruit and increase the number of First Nations, Inuit and Métis staff members

Literature Review for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Education

Based on the literature review, discussion, examination of common practices, and the identification of unique and promising ideas, the committee concluded that it is no longer effective to force First Nations, Inuit and Métis students to adapt to the education system. There is a growing need to adapt the system to meet the needs of our First Nations, Inuit and Métis students. The committee formed the following recommendations to help move Regina Catholic Schools toward this change:

1. Enhance professional development and in-service to familiarize teachers with the Aboriginal experience (Silver, Jim et. Al, 2002; Dorion, Leah, et.



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- Al, 2006; Malatest, R.A. and Associates, 2002; Edmonton Catholic Schools, 2004).
2. Create resource kits (similar to the Pre-Kindergarten theme units) for various K-8 subject area units of study that incorporate Aboriginal content, resources, and perspectives and have these resources rotate among teachers and schools (Silver, Jim et. Al, 2002; Dorion, Leah, et. Al, 2006; Malatest, R.A. and Associates, 2002; Edmonton Catholic Schools, 2004; Saskatchewan Learning, 2005).
 - a. Have these units replace existing instructional units, rather than have them as additional units
 3. Have the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Coordinator work with the various curriculum consultants to develop and share ways in which teachers can integrate Aboriginal content in the various subject areas (Silver, Jim et. Al, 2002; Dorion, Leah, et. Al, 2006; Malatest, R.A. and Associates, 2002; Edmonton Catholic Schools, 2004; Saskatchewan Learning, 2005).
 4. Allow more flexibility in scheduling high school classes for Aboriginal students, recognizing different family needs (Silver, Jim et. Al, 2002).
 - a. Encourage scheduling to allow students to take three classes per semester.
 - b. Recognize that some students may take 5 or 6 years to finish high school.
 - c. Coordinate transition between elementary and high school to identify students who require a reduced load



- d. Offer (but do not make mandatory) tutorials during the unscheduled time for students
5. Identify and implement ways to have First Nations and Métis Elders and/or community members (respected role models) in schools on a regular basis (Saskatchewan Learning, 2005; Dorion, Leah et. Al, 2006).
6. Explore the possibilities of mentorship programs that link successful Aboriginal people with Aboriginal high school students (Svidal, Shelley, 2003).
7. Recognize that schools located close to where the students live help bridge social, cultural, and financial gaps. This can be done by keeping existing small schools open within their communities (Malatest, R.A. and Associates, 2002).

Section III

Practical Future Directions Based on Inquiry

The data of this inquiry suggests that progress has been made in successful First Nations, Inuit and Métis student outcomes, particularly over the past two decades. However, a significant gap remains according to the elicited dialogue groups. There is need of continued success for First Nations, Inuit and Métis students which have implications for the Regina Catholic School Division. The Regina Catholic School Division has incorporated Saskatchewan Learning



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First Nations and Métis Education Branch's vision and goals into school division policies and guidelines for First Nation, Inuit and Métis students.

Suggested Areas of Focus to Enhance First Nations, Inuit and Métis Students and Families

- Refine recruitment, interviewing and hiring processes of First Nations, Inuit and Métis staff.
- Refine application process and requirements for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis people
- Provide cultural sensitivity awareness training for Regina Catholic School Division staff
- Enhance professional development to familiarize teachers with First Nations, Inuit and Métis worldview experiences
- Enhanced staffing guidelines to provide for higher student achievement for First Nations, Inuit and Métis personnel
- Continue to enhance the mentorship program to link successful First Nations, Inuit and Métis people with First Nations, Inuit and Métis high school students
- Enhance the role of First Nations, Inuit and Métis Elders and community members in our schools on a regular basis
- Define how academic success is measured for First Nations, Inuit and Métis students
- Work with the Learning and Assessment Department to identify student outcome data that will further identify the academic learning needs for First Nations, Inuit and Métis students
- Develop claims and evidence to communicate to parents that the educational programs and procedures used within Regina Catholic Schools are making a difference in student learning



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- Establish a First Nations, Inuit and Métis Advisory Group using the same parameters as in past
- Review transportation policy and guidelines and catchments areas for prek-12 inner city schools to address issues of mobility, attendance and poverty
- Work to develop collaborative partnerships that includes the Church parents, school, and the wider, general community to enhance First Nations, Inuit and Métis student learning
- Catholic School Community Council (CSCC) – Schools should provide opportunities for parents to work together to develop a holistic, culturally-relevant Catholic education that builds on the strengths of First Nations, Inuit and Métis students and their families
- Continue to access support services within the city of Regina for First Nations, Inuit and Métis students

Response:

Based on the data obtained through this research, it is recognized that the educational needs of First Nations, Inuit and Métis students in Regina Catholic Schools continues to grow. In order to meet the educational needs for First Nations, Inuit and Métis student learning, the following recommendations and three plan was put into place and built on each year due to external and internal changes.



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3 Year Plan with Recommendations:

Year 1- Awareness

To build capacity and develop leadership within Regina Catholic Schools

- Awareness Presentations- Professional development
- Develop School Leadership Teams
- Create A First Nations, Inuit and Métis Advisory Committee

Year 2- Action

- To Implement the Ministry of Educations professional development strategy - A Time for Significant Leadership
- Continue to provide support for Cultural understanding and awareness among staff
- Support teachers to fully implement Mandatory Teaching Treaties in the Classroom grade K-6 Resource

Year 3- Empowerment

Accountability Framework- Data Collection

- Create a locally developed data management and assessment tool specific to First Nations, Inuit and Métis students within Regina Catholic Schools
- Revise and reuse Regina Catholic Schools locally developed *Aboriginal Support Rubric: Setting the Stage for Aboriginal Student Success* created in 2004. A rubric created as an indicator of teachers and staff level of cultural competencies.
- Utilize the Office of the Treaty Commission assessment tool for Grade 7 students to be used as a benchmark for Regina Catholic School students awareness of Treaties in Saskatchewan
- Use current Assessment for Learning data and disaggregate data specific to First Nations, Inuit and Métis students from individual schools within Regina Catholic Schools to plan programming for success.