

First Nations Schools Association 1998/1999 Annual Report and Proposed Activities for 1999/2000

First Nations Schools Association (FNSA)

The First Nations Schools Association became a registered non-profit society in 1997/1998.

Approximately 50 First Nations Schools have become FNSA members since 1997/1998, and 15 organizations and individuals have joined as associate members. That number has grown steadily throughout the past year, and the FNSA appreciates the support shown to the Association by First Nations schools.

The FNSA Board of Directors is elected at each Annual General Meeting (AGM). The 1998/1999 Board of Directors included:

President

Vice President

Secretary

Treasurer

Directors

Darwyn John	Nt'akmenlhkalha Skul (Our Way of Life School)
Verna Stager	Xit'olacw Community School
Marie Matthew	Neqweyqwelsten School
Margaret Noble	Bella Bella Community School Society
Barbara Barltrop	Snaw-Naw-As School
Wayne Bobb	Seabird Island Community School
Corrine Cahoose	Ulkatcho Band School
Jack Smith	Stu'ate Lelum Secondary School
Barbara White	Qwam Qwum Stalict School
Keith Zabetel	Bonaparte School

A process that will ensure regional representation will be used to elect the FNSA Board for 1999/2000.

FNSA Initiatives

Throughout the past year, the First Nations Schools Association has supported a variety of initiatives, as outlined on the following pages. Two particular areas of focus in 1998/1999 were capacity building and special educa-

Capacity Building in First Nations Schools

First Nations schools have made significant progress in their efforts to assist their students in attaining their educational and career goals while also developing a positive cultural identity and strong sense of pride. To continue that progress, many First Nations schools have indicated that further capacity building could strengthen their ongoing efforts to provide stimulating, comfortable and safe learning environments for their students. Recognizing this need, throughout 1998/1999, the FNSA undertook a variety of initiatives aimed at capacity building in First Nations schools.

In 1998/1999, the FNSA, in cooperation with the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC), continued its long-term investigation of issues associated with education “standards” for First Nations education. A series of regional workshops were held to consider issues associated with the establishment of expectations and measures of school success. That work resulted in the publication of *Reaching for Success: Considering the Achievements and Effectiveness of First Nations Schools*.

Considering First Nations Education “Standards”

In preparing *Reaching for Success*, a number of issues were identified for further research and exploration. Three of those issues are: (i) the variety and effectiveness of school governance systems; (ii) the critical need for strong parental and community involvement in school activities and decision-making; and (iii) the possibility of altering the conventional school calendar and scheduling structure to better meet the needs of First Nations students and communities. Those three topics were a focus of research in 1998/1999, and were explored through literature reviews and interviews with representatives of First Nations schools.

Research: School Governance, Parental and Community Involvement, and School Calendar

School assessment and evaluation was also highlighted as a significant issue for First Nations schools. The FNSA therefore facilitated a series of regional workshops to present information about school assessment processes, and to begin considering a framework for the assessment and evaluation of First Nations schools. A summary of those workshops is available.

School Assessment/ Evaluation

In response to indications of a need for relevant and appropriate curriculum for First Nations education, the FNSA is sponsoring the development of a handbook on curriculum development for First Nations schools, with information related to the process of curriculum development, as well as an overview of existing curriculum and relevant resources. This project will be complete by May, 1999.

Curriculum Development

In 1998/1999, the FNSA also accessed funding for distribution to First Nations schools for the implementation of local initiatives aimed at capacity building. The results of those 130 local initiatives were shared through the publication of a summary report, as well as at a Capacity Building Conference in March, 1999.

Local Initiatives

Special Education

Recognizing that the funding provided to First Nations schools for the provision of special education services is currently inadequate, in 1997 the FNSA, in cooperation with FNEESC and the BC Aboriginal Network on Disabilities Society prepared *None Left Behind. Addressing Special Needs Education in First Nations Schools: A Proposal for Action*. That proposal outlines a variety of initiatives to support First Nations schools in their efforts to provide a quality education to **all** students, regardless of their needs. Discussions with the Department of Indian Affairs about the *None Left Behind* proposal are continuing. In the meantime, an interim proposal has been accepted, resulting in the following activities in preparation for more long-term initiatives in this area.

Special Needs Planning Workshops

Throughout the fall of 1998, the FNSA and FNEESC held planning workshops throughout the province. The discussions that took place at those workshops included possible mechanisms for collective actions, such as information sharing and collective research projects, an example of which is the series of four informational pamphlets prepared by the FNSA in 1998/1999, *Talking About ... Special Education*. The workshops also included a consideration of long-term efforts in the area of special education, and the possible implementation of the *None Left Behind* initiative. The *None Left Behind* proposal includes as a key component direct services to First Nations schools. The planning workshops allowed for a detailed discussion of how to allocate effectively and fairly any funding that becomes available for special needs education resulting in a list of options which will be considered by the FNSA membership at its 1999 AGM.

Special Education Video

In 1998/1999, the FNSA produced a video to highlight key issues and challenges for First Nations schools related to special education. The video is available for presentation at meetings, workshops, and conferences, to be used as an introduction to discussions and to raise awareness and support for efforts to address this key concern.

Special Education Research

Finally, the FNSA, working with FNEESC, also began implementation of a major research project to support the eventual design and delivery of services and programs for special needs students in First Nations schools. Researchers associated with the University of British Columbia are working with the FNSA and FNEESC to determine the extent and types of special needs in First Nations schools. Assessment results are being collected from a representative sample of First Nations schools, and the work is expected to be complete by June, 1999.

Building for Long-Term Efforts

The FNEESC and the FNSA have also begun discussions with researchers at Simon Fraser University to establish a foundation for future initiatives in the area of special education. The development of a relationship with University faculty will facilitate the implementation of initiatives like those outlined in the *None Left Behind* proposal, by enhancing access to much needed expertise and support.

Other Activities

In addition to those in the two areas of capacity building and special education, the FNSA has continued a number of other ongoing initiatives in its efforts to provide support for First Nations schools.

The FNSA, in partnership with DIA, Health Canada, B.C. Hydro, and Orca Bay Sports and Entertainment, has and will continue to support the *Seventh Generation Club*, which is intended to encourage First Nations youth to stay-in-school and make healthy lifestyle choices. This club has been tremendously successful, and over 3,000 First Nations youth have joined since it began in 1997. The club includes a newsletter, daytimers, contests and prizes for First Nations students, all aimed at encouraging good attendance and participation in school and community activities.

*Seventh
Generation
Club for
First
Nations
Students*

After considerable discussion and deliberation, the FNSA has and will continue to support FNEC in the administration of funding for four youth initiatives – the Youth Work Experience, Cooperative Education, Summer Science and Technology Camp, and Summer Student Career Placement Programs. These programs are intended to encourage youth to pursue a range of educational and work experience opportunities.

*DIA
Funded
Youth
Programs*

In order to continue to stay in touch with First Nations schools and share information, a quarterly newsletter has been and will continue to be distributed. In addition, an FNSA Web site was developed in 1997/1998, and currently contains information about the FNSA and its publications, a “chat site” to allow people to post and respond to messages, and links to other related sites. The FNSA will also continue to distribute information as requested by representatives of First Nations schools and other people with an interest in education. The Association has collected sample forms, handbooks, policy guides, and other education tools, as well as relevant documents and publications, and these and additional materials are available upon request.

*Networking
and
Sharing
Information*

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