

# FNSA News

The Newsletter of the First Nations Schools Association

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## Working Together to Build Stronger Communities: First Nations Schools Conference

The First Nations Schools Association is pleased to host its third annual First Nations Schools conference on April 28 & 29, 2000. The conference is being held at the Empire Landmark Hotel in Vancouver, BC.

The theme for this year's conference is "Working Together to Build Stronger Communities" and the keynote speaker will be Satsan (Herb George), the BC Regional Vice Chief for the Assembly of First Nations. Satsan believes that quality education for First Nations learners is a critical component of self government. Without the capacity to run our own governments, with our own people, self government will not be fully realized.

The Conference will also include many workshops dealing with issues ranging from school board development to creating a mission statement and vision for your school. Most of the workshops are being presented by representatives of BC First Nations schools who wish to share their successes. We hope everyone will enjoy the event.

### FNSA AGM discussions

The fourth First Nations Schools Association Annual General Meeting (AGM) is also being held April 28 & 29, 2000 at the Empire Landmark Hotel. This year, several issues require discussion and a decision from the membership including:

- ✓ a new fee schedule
- ✓ new by-election procedures to replace Directors that resign mid-term
- ✓ consideration of Head Start programs becoming FNSA members
- ✓ school assessment (including a discussion of two possible assessment models and training for external evaluators)

There are also several Board of Directors vacancies this year, and elections of new representatives will take place at the AGM. It is truly exciting to see the membership grow each year, and we look forward to an exciting 2000-2001!

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## The Auditor General's Report and Aboriginal Education

On April 11, 2000 the Auditor General released his report, which included a section dealing with Aboriginal Education. While the report started positively, by recognizing that quality First Nations education must include language and culture, it goes on to imply that First Nations are not spending their education funding appropriately. The report generally suggests that Indian Affairs should be more rigorous in its accountability processes with First Nations to ensure that education dollars are actually spent on education activities.

The tone of the report seems to put more responsibility on First Nations to do more with less. This is not the message we were hoping for.

The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) formally responded to the media with a press release, and Chief Nathan Matthew was available to provide comment upon request. The main response from FNESC and Chief Matthew was that First Nations schools are *already* doing more with less, and they require sufficient resources to provide a quality education that is at par with the provincial education system (recognizing that the provincial system is not believed to be the most appropriate measuring stick).

The FNSA will continue to update its membership about further reaction to the Auditor General's report, and will continue its efforts to raise awareness about the critical function of First Nations schools and the considerable constraints under which they currently operate.

## The FNSA Continues Its Work Related to School Assessment

One of the more challenging tasks that the FNSA has undertaken this year is the production of two possible models of school assessment.

The issue of school assessment is very important. The Department of Indian Affairs (DIA) has asserted its intention to require that at least 15-20 First Nations schools conduct evaluations in the upcoming year. DIA has already eliminated the \$27 per FTE that was included in the First Nations school funding formula for school evaluations, arguing that it will instead provide additional funding to those schools that will be required to submit evaluations in 2000/2001. The process and exact funding figures that will be implemented are not known at this time.

Building upon the work begun by Chief Nathan Matthew in 1998/1999, and using information regarding the provincial accreditation process and the Independent Schools assessment process, the FNSA has created two possible options for undertaking First Nations school assessments.

Working with a volunteer committee of First Nations school administrators and principals, the FNSA has attempted to prepare information that will assist schools in looking critically at their operations and prepare school growth plans. Two possible assessment models have been developed, both of which include a consideration of issues that make First Nations schools unique, including language and culture programs, mission and vision statements, community involvement activities, as well as several other relevant topics.

The two assessment model options will be considered at the FNSA Annual General Meeting, and the membership will be asked to provide direction regarding next steps to be taken in this regard.

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## Speakers Series A Great Success and Returning Again Next Year

The Speakers Series that was initiated for the first time during the past year was a great success. Responses from the workshop participants were extremely positive, and the people who attended included teachers, school board members, parents, community workers, and students.

Evaluation forms were distributed at each of the sessions, and the participants consistently indicated that the workshops were informative, well organized, and extremely useful.

Dr. Larry Thomas facilitated three school board training workshops in 1999/2000. The sessions took place in Vancouver, Prince Rupert and Prince George. Some of the comments made about the school board training workshops include: excellent organization, simple to understand, interesting, effective, very enjoyable, and informative. The participants also said that the workshop would be a "great one for all boards."

David Rattray, Gwen Phillips and Karen Bailey Romanko, and Gwen Point each presented two workshops on supporting children. Those workshops, which were intended to provide information about how community members can collectively support First Nations young people and encourage them to achieve educational success, were very well received. The participants found the workshops very useful, noting in their evaluation forms that the information was good for schools, clear, very relevant for First Nations communities, and "helpful in dealing with children put in our care."

Seven workshops were also organized to provide training for parents and staff of First Nations schools in the area of special education. Those workshops were facilitated by Deb Evensen, Kim Marcum, BJ Wise, Art More, and Dawn Rheitaug. The special education sessions were extremely well received by all of the participants. Again, the workshop participants expressed great interest in the materials presented, and commented that the ideas were very

useful, positive, and helpful. One participant even noted that "this has been one of the most interesting, motivating, enjoyable workshops I've ever attended."

Given the overwhelmingly positive response to the presentations in 1999/2000, the FNSEA will again be implementing a speakers series in 2000/2001. Many of the same facilitators have been asked to present again in the upcoming year, but in a variety of new locations. The intention of this change is to allow new people to hear from the people who were so well received by other First Nations school representatives in 1999/2000.

A tentative schedule for the 2000/2001 workshops will be finalized within the next month, and confirmed details will be distributed to First Nations schools as soon as possible. If you would like more information about this initiative, please feel free to contact Natasha Nahanee at the FNSEA office, at phone number (604) 925 - 6087.

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## Seventh Generation Club Continues to Grow

The Seventh Generation club is booming!! We now have upwards of 4600 members, and more membership forms are received daily. Letters from children indicate that they like and support the club, and we have secured funding for two more years!!

On April 4, 2000, over 60 students travelled with 20 chaperones to Vancouver to meet Cherokee Parks (the Club co-captain representing the Grizzlies), visit Science World and the Museum of Anthropology, and attend the Grizzlies game that ended with a buzzer beater shot by Michael Bibby. The students who attended all had attendance records of 95-100%! The children should be congratulated for their hard work, and we wish them continued success!!!

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## Welcome to Sheila Resels

Sheila Resels has been hired by the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) on a six month contract to provide support to First Nations schools, and to carry out activities to support the FNESA work plan and mandate. Sheila's previous work experience is in the field of early childhood education and with various non-profit organizations. Sheila has also had considerable experience tackling the difficult issue of parental involvement, and we look forward to her knowledge and suggestions in this and other areas. Welcome Sheila!

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## Toll-Free Support Line to Continue: Introducing Karen Horner

In preparation for the next school year FNESC has hired Karen Horner to act as the coordinator for the FNESA Special Needs Support line. Karen is a special needs education teacher and a former coordinator with the BC Teacher's Federation special needs information support line.

The toll free number will be in service again as of September 2000, and additional information will be distributed prior to that time. In the meantime, we would like to welcome Karen Horner to the FNESA team.

## A Parent's Club Starting Next Year

One of the new initiatives to be implemented in 2000-2001, under the Gathering Strength program, is a club for First Nation's parents. The club will be similar to the Seventh Generation Club, involving prizes and incentives being provided to schools to distribute to deserving parents in their communities. First Nations schools will determine themselves how to encourage parental involvement and distribute the collateral pieces. The club management will ask only that success stories be submitted for inclusion in a club newsletter that will be made available to First Nations schools and parents twice a year. We look forward to providing more details regarding this initiative at the end of August 2000.

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## A New Pamphlet on Special Education Now Available

Last year, the FNESA produced a three volume pamphlet series titled *Talking About Special Education*. Those pamphlets covered a range of issues including terms to know, individual education plans, fetal alcohol syndrome/effect, and attention deficit disorder/hyperactivity disorder. A fourth pamphlet is now available -- *A Handbook for Parents*. Copies of the pamphlet series are available through the FNESA office.

## First Nations Schools Association Board of Directors

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Nt'akmenlhkalha School

Sandra Small, Vice President  
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Corrine Cahoose  
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