

FNSA News

The Newsletter of the First Nations Schools Association

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First Nations Schools Now Receiving New Funding from Indian and Northern Affairs

2003 started off with some very exciting developments in Indian and Northern Affairs Canada's (INAC) funding for First Nations schools.

In January, the federal government finally released the new funding for special education services in First Nations schools. Following the December 2001 announcement of \$30 million for First Nations schools special education programming, INAC and First Nations representatives worked for almost a year to finalize the relevant accountability measures required by the federal government.

At long last, the first portion of the new special education funding was released to First Nations schools in January, 2003. INAC also suggested that the long delay in funding release will likely result in an extension of the initial two year funding commitment. We'll keep everyone up-to-date with the latest information about that commitment.

In addition to the special education funding, INAC recently released \$500,000 to assist First Nations schools in enhancing their library and

learning resources. That funding was administered by FNECS and the FNSA, and it was used to bulk purchase magazine subscriptions, children's books, and parent resources. The collective purchase of those materials allowed First Nations schools to obtain the much needed materials at substantially lower costs.

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Announcing the 2003 First Nations Schools Conference and FNSA Annual General Meeting

It is once again time for the 2003 First Nations Schools Conference and Annual General Meeting (AGM), and this year's event will almost certainly be another exciting opportunity to celebrate the wonderful work being done by First Nations schools.

This year's conference, which will take place on April 25 and 26, 2003 will focus on sharing practical strategies for improving classroom success.

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In March 2003, INAC also announced that an additional \$3 million will be provided to First Nations schools in BC. That funding increase reflects the comprehensive research that was sponsored by First Nations Education Steering Committee throughout the past two years. That research clearly demonstrates that significantly less funding is provided by INAC for First Nations schools than is provided for public schools through the BC MoE.

The FNSA Board of Directors have expressed great satisfaction that INAC has begun to address the funding discrepancy for First Nations schools, and they look forward to continued cooperative efforts to ensure that First Nations schools are provided adequate resources in future years.

The First Nations SchoolNet Program is Well Underway

For anyone who has not yet heard, the FNSA is very pleased to be working with the First Nations Education Steering Committee on the implementation of the First Nations SchoolNet Program. Based upon a successful application to Industry Canada, FNEESC and the FNSA recently became the Regional Management Organization for the BC component of that program, which is focused on increasing the technological capacity of First Nations schools through additional hardware, software, and internet connections.

Phillip Djwa, the SchoolNet Coordinator, has been very busy contacting First Nations schools to determine their technological needs. Phillip is also working with an advisory committee of First Nations school representatives to set priorities for the use of the resources available. The SchoolNet workplan will be reviewed at the upcoming FNSA AGM, and all comments will be welcome at that time. For anyone unable to attend that event, please feel free to contact Phillip for further information about this initiative.

First Nations Schools Continue to Review Their Successes

In January of this year, the FNSA distributed information to all First Nations schools explaining a new development in the evaluation requirements for First Nations schools. First Nations schools will now be required by INAC to clearly demonstrate that they have completed a school evaluation once every five years. That requirement includes adult programs that are funded through the INAC nominal roll.

INAC and the FNSA Board agreed that First Nations schools should be supported in their efforts to fulfill that evaluation requirement through an arrangement that is as flexible as possible. First Nations schools will be able to fulfill the evaluation requirement in any one of three ways: 1. by completing the FNSA School Assessment Project; 2. by submitting a completed Independent Schools Branch evaluation report; or 3. by determining an alternative approach as agreed to through direct discussion with INAC.

The five year timeline for the completion of evaluations will begin next year. That means that all First Nations schools must complete an evaluation sometime between the beginning of the 2003/2004 school year and the end of the 2007/2008 school year.

For anyone interested in using the first option for fulfilling INAC's evaluation requirements, the FNSA distributed to all First Nations schools in BC a Request for Letters of Interest from anyone interested in participating in the First Nations school assessment project. That request will provide all schools an opportunity to complete an FNSA assessment project sometime within the next five years.

Space is still available for those wanting to participate in the FNSA sponsored project, and further information is available by contacting Barb Kavanagh at barbk@fnesec.ca

FNSA Conference and AGM

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The FNSA is very honoured that Roy Henry Vickers has agreed to present the Conference keynote address, which is certain to be very motivational for school staff. Among the numerous workshop topics are teaching in multi-age classrooms, successful parental involvement activities, effective programming for adult First Nations students, early language development, and special education planning.

This year's AGM will include a discussion of several very important topics, including the ongoing special education support activities, the school assessment project, and the SchoolNet initiative. In addition, the FNSA membership will be asked to consider a proposed project to explore the data needs of First Nations schools, including their efforts to use specific information to measure school, program, and student success. Background information about all of those topics has been sent to all First Nations schools. Anyone who did not receive the AGM package is welcome to contact the FNSA office to request a copy.

The FNSA conference and AGM also will again incorporate a Job Fair, which this year will occur from 2:30 to 6:00 p.m. on April 26, 2003. New and experienced teachers and administrators are invited to attend the event and learn about potential job opportunities in First Nations schools. All interested schools are welcome to participate in that event.

Finally, the elections of the 2003/2004 Board of Directors will take place at the FNSA AGM. Please remember that only authorized representatives of FNSA member schools are eligible to vote or to be elected to the Board of Directors. Questions regarding membership status can be directed to either Barb Kavanagh at barbk@fnesc.bc.ca, or to Derek Payne at (604) 925 - 6087.

First Nations School Principals Working Together for Success

One of the new priorities of the FNSA Board of Directors has been increased support for First Nations school principals.

Last Fall, the FNSA launched its efforts in this area with three workshops for school principals. The people who attended those gatherings responded with great enthusiasm to the chance to get together and share their challenges and successes. The principals also recommended that the FNSA continue to facilitate opportunities for First Nations school principals to support one another.

Following that direction, the FNSA has organized several immediate initiatives for school principals. An e-mail listserve now exists, through which principals can contact their colleagues with questions and suggestions for successful programs and activities. In addition, the FNSA has matched up interested people with a "principal buddy" -- someone who they can contact when necessary for moral support or ideas. Any principals or school administrators who would like to join the listserve or be matched with a buddy should send an e-mail to Barb Kavanagh at barbk@fnesc.bc.ca indicating which initiatives are of interest.

Please also look for workshops specifically organized for Principals at the upcoming FNSA Conference. In addition to workshops on teacher evaluation and supervision and the evolving role of the First Nations school principal, the conference will include a think tank for people interested in discussing additional ways in which First Nations school principals can be assisted in their important work.

Finally, a new Handbook for First Nations school principals is currently being printed, and copies of that resource will be sent to all First Nations schools by the end of April. Additional copies are available by calling Patti at the FNSA office.

Celebrating the Seventh Generation Club Through a Third Gala

On the evening of April 24, 2003, the third annual Seventh Generation Club Gala will be celebrating the ongoing success of that initiative for First Nations learners. The Seventh Generation Club, which now includes over 5000 students from throughout BC, encourages First Nations students to stay-in-school and make healthy life choices.

The Seventh Generation Club Gala will provide an opportunity to enjoy a wonderful meal and great entertainment, and help raise funds for a very important initiative. A silent auction will take place at the event, and donations of auction items will be gratefully accepted.

This year the FNSA is expanding its efforts to solicit financial support for the Seventh Generation Club by submitting numerous proposals to foundations and corporations. However, the Gala remains one of its key fundraising events.

Gala tickets are now on sale through the FNSA office. For more information, please contact Jenny or Roz at (604) 925 - 6087.

A New Resource Available for First Nations Boards

Is your School Board interested in accessing more information to help them fulfill their important role successfully? If so, you may be interested in the Handbook for First Nations Boards.

That Handbook, which was written by Dr. Larry Thomas in cooperation with an advisory committee of First Nations service providers, includes suggestions about the appropriate focus for Board efforts, which is governance, vision building, and strategic planning.

The Handbook for First Nations Boards also shares information about indicators of non-profit Board effectiveness, policy development, budgeting, advocacy responsibilities, the organization of effective meetings, and relations between the Board and the Executive Director.

Dr. Thomas presented the First Nations Board Handbook in three Speakers Series Workshops this spring. Copies of the Handbook were also sent to all First Nations schools and communities, and to other First Nations service agencies.

Additional copies are available through the FNESC office for anyone interested. Please contact Patti for more details.

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