



# Capacity Building Handbook

## LEADING FIRST NATIONS SCHOOLS IN BC

*prepared by* Barbara Kavanagh *for* the First Nations Schools Association

AUGUST 2013



QUICK TIPS FOR NEW BOARD MEMBERS

UNDERSTANDING THE BOARD'S ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

DEFINING THE SCHOOL'S MISSION & SETTING STRATEGIC DIRECTION

ADVOCATING FOR CONSTITUENTS & COMMUNICATING EFFECTIVELY

ADDITIONAL ISSUES TO ADDRESS



**Capacity Building Handbook:  
Leading First Nations Schools in BC**

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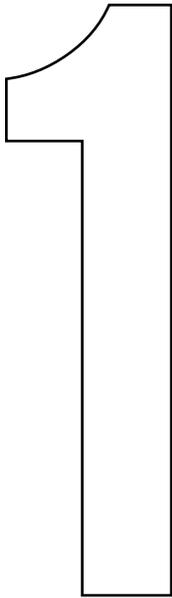
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# Introduction

As described in a package of Board Governance Training materials published in 2010, in the face of over 100 years of government policy and practice aimed at controlling how and what their children were taught, First Nations people have long held that they themselves can and should be able to exercise control over their children's education. This position is grounded in the knowledge that First Nations children, like children everywhere, need a clear connection to their cultures and traditions, a strong sense of self, as well as a diverse set of skills and knowledge in order to prosper in the contemporary world. Further, within the past generation, there has been growing recognition of the validity of this assertion by both the federal and provincial governments.

At the same time, building upon extensive research, dialogue, and experience, First Nations in BC have been working together for over two decades to design and implement programs and services to support greater success for First Nations students in this province. Those efforts have resulted in the strong foundation that now exists for a comprehensive BC First Nations K-12 Education System.

Of course, a key component of any education system is strong school leadership – including effective governance of schools by local governing agencies.

Recognizing this factor, the BC First Nations Schools Association (FNSEA) is committed to assisting communities in developing the capacity of their governing agencies. This work is expected to advance the efforts of First Nations to take fuller control over their schools and increase student achievement. The creation of this handbook reflects that perspective.



School board leadership can be a challenge if the board's autonomy from the Chief and Council is not clear. One model may not work for every community, but it is always critical that each school board understand its authority, accountability, and responsibilities to Chief and Council.

**Capacity Building Focus Group Participant**

It is expected that the people who use this handbook will have a variety of backgrounds and governing experience. This handbook therefore, is intended to share information about the breadth of various responsibilities of First Nations school boards, considering these issues within the context of the unique opportunities and challenges that come with governing a First Nations school.

By necessity, the information presented is quite general. It is meant to apply to a wide range of circumstances, as First Nations schools in BC vary tremendously.

Not only are the languages, cultures, values, and perspectives of the school communities different; the school sizes range from only three or four to nearly 300 students, they have anywhere between one and dozens of staff people, and the grades offered range from K4 and K5 only to every grade from K4 – 12. In addition, some of the schools are only a year old, while others have been operating for more than three decades. Some of the schools are located in or near urban centers, while others are extremely remote, sometimes hundreds of kilometers from the nearest center, many accessible only by plane or boat.

In spite of their differences, however, First Nations schools share many similarities. The schools are committed to providing quality instruction as well as nurturing, caring environments for children. The schools emphasize and promote First Nations cultures and languages, and they strive to reflect the values and traditions of the communities they serve.

The schools also share many common constraints. Historically, funding for First Nations schools was entirely inadequate and significantly below the level of funding provided to public schools in BC. Associated with that issue, principal and teacher turnover rates have been quite high, which has caused disturbances for schools, students, and communities. Second-level service support only became available to First Nations schools less than two decades ago, with the development of the BC First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) in the early 1990s and the creation of the FNSEA in 1996. While the funding inequities have been addressed to some extent and the discrepancies are not as great as they once were, the legacy of past problems has yet to be fully addressed.

In spite of those challenges, First Nations schools in BC are making tremendous efforts to support their learners, and the work of First Nations school governing agencies is critical to the success of those efforts.

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**Quick Tips for New Board Members (adapted from Thomas, 2002)**

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- It is unrealistic to expect that you will immediately know all you need to know as a new board member. It will take time for you to develop your knowledge base, to learn what questions to ask, and where and how to get the information you will need. Your goal should be to learn those things as quickly as possible, but don't expect more of yourself than is reasonably achievable.
- There are many reasons why people choose to serve on a school board. Three common reasons are to contribute to the betterment of the school, to help effect positive change for the community's children and youth, and to make a meaningful difference to the community – including contributing to efforts to teach and revitalize the community's language and culture. Staying focused on those priorities can help you to maintain a positive attitude and overcome potential challenges and conflicts, should they arise.
- It is important to learn from past practice and the board members who preceded you. However, do not assume that prior board members were effective simply because they served on the board, and don't automatically pattern your behaviours based on theirs. Think for yourself.
- Becoming informed is critical for your confidence, your effectiveness, the value of your contributions, and ultimately your satisfaction as a board member. Do not hesitate to ask questions. And if the answers you originally receive are confusing or do not seem to make sense, ask for other opinions in order to help you reach a reasonable conclusion.
- Do not worry if you initially feel overwhelmed by the challenges ahead. It is unrealistic to expect that, as a new board member, you will immediately understand the complexities of the board and the school, or the background for previous decisions that have led to the board's current situation. Remember that other people have faced the same situation and succeeded. So will you.
- Find out whether an orientation will be provided and what other kinds of support might exist. Take advantage of any available opportunities to help you prepare for your role as a board member.



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## A Note About the Terms Used in this Handbook

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First Nations schools differ greatly in terms of their governance structures. In some cases, the schools are under the direct authority of Chief and Council, with no school board or committee in existence. In other cases, communities have decided to establish a formal, independent school board, with members elected through a community voting procedure. Other schools are guided by some kind of education or school committee. Membership on those committees can include elected members or volunteers, sometimes involving only parents, or some mix of parents, community members and Elders.

In a 2010/11 survey implemented by the FNSA, twenty-six percent of responding First Nations schools indicated that they directly report to their Chief and Council. Another twenty-six percent indicated that they report to a Band Education Director, and thirty-two percent indicated that they report to either an appointed (eight percent) or elected (twenty-four percent) school board or education committee. Those responses highlight the range of different arrangements that exist in BC.

When they exist, the relationship of the school board or committee and the Chief and Council can be relatively separate, with the board providing regular updates to the Chief and Council but functioning with significant autonomy. In other cases, the relationship could be one in which the board or committee reports to and is under the authority of the Chief and Council.

The choice of how to operate the school is entirely dependent upon what works best given the circumstances of each school and community. The structure and membership of a school governing authority may reflect, among other factors, the political realities of the community, the specific goals and priorities that existed when the school was created, the number and personalities of the people with an interest in education and school operations, the desires and interests of school staff and parents, the level and types of resources available to support the authority, and the stage of development of the school and its governance structures.

***For simplicity, this Handbook refers to school boards. However, much of the information included would have relevance for any community agency that has authority for a First Nations school.***

The handbook has not been created to have relevance for public school boards, which operate within different legislation and environments, with their own support structures.



## PROJECT SPONSOR

### The BC First Nations Schools Association (FNSA)

The BC First Nations Schools Association (FNSA) collaborates with First Nations schools to create nurturing environments that develop learners' pride and competence in their First Nations language and heritage and equips them to realize their full potential within self-governing First Nations communities. The FNSA is a registered society and charity that is directed by First Nations schools in BC. More information is available at [www.fnsa.ca](http://www.fnsa.ca).

### Contact

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## 1.1 RESOURCES PRODUCED PREVIOUSLY

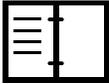
A number of resources that were previously published have been used extensively in the creation of the handbook.

In 2002, the FNSA published *Effective Board Governance: A Handbook for Board Members and Administrators of First Nations' Boards* by Dr. Larry Thomas, which outlines the governance role and responsibilities for members of First Nations non-profit boards. Much of the information included in that Handbook was adapted for this resource.

Subsequently, *Creating the Future – A Planning Handbook for Board Members and Administrators of First Nations' Boards*, also by Dr. Larry Thomas, was published in 2004. That Handbook introduces a strategic planning process that links directly to the governance role and responsibilities of a board.

In 2009, FNEC produced a training package to provide information related to the 2006 Education Jurisdiction Framework Agreement and the practices of effective educational governance within that context.

Finally, in 2012 the FNSA revised the *Handbook for Principals in First Nations Schools* – a document with significant overlap with this resource, as the roles of the school governing agency and principal are so interrelated.



The information outlined herein is intended to complement and build upon those earlier publications.

An original draft of this Handbook was shared in two focus group sessions involving approximately 30 First Nations representatives, which were held in Prince George and Vancouver in April 2013. The FNSA appreciates the invaluable feedback that was shared, which contributed greatly to this document.

At the focus group sessions, the participants suggested the creation of Standards for First Nations School Boards. The FNSA accordingly drafted such a document, which is attached as Appendix One. **These DRAFT Standards are intended to promote discussion and feedback. The Standards have not been finalized and are not to be considered an approved document.**

## 1.2 NEW INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT FIRST NATIONS SCHOOL BOARDS

Beginning in 2012, FNEsc<sup>1</sup> and the FNSA are now offering a new service to school governing agencies – direct coaching support within communities. A Capacity Building Coach is working under contract with FNEsc and the FNSA, and is available to work with local governing agencies to review their efforts and provide feedback to assist the agencies in working even more effectively.

The Capacity Building Coach can discuss with First Nations school governing agencies the specific kinds of information and training they require, ensuring that the coaching is designed to reflect the unique needs of individual communities.

This support is available to First Nations school governing agencies upon request and at no charge.

Anyone interested in information about this service can contact the FNSA office at (604) 925-6087, toll-free 1 (877) 422-3672.

<sup>1</sup> The BC First Nations Education Steering Committee Society (FNEsc) is a non-profit organization that represents First Nations in BC in all areas of education. FNEsc has been in operation for over two decades. FNEsc is directed by and accountable to First Nations communities. Each First Nation in BC is eligible to appoint a member to the FNEsc board. See [www.fnesc.ca](http://www.fnesc.ca). Many of the activities undertaken by the FNSA are done so in cooperation with FNEsc, as demonstrated throughout this Handbook.

## **THE CONTEXT FOR FIRST NATIONS SCHOOL GOVERNANCE: FIRST NATIONS EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS**

Education is a fundamental human right, and for First Nations people this right is uniquely situated within a framework of inherent rights of Indigenous people. Further, those rights are constitutionally protected and articulated in international mechanisms and instruments.

### **NATIONAL OBLIGATIONS, AGREEMENTS, AND COMMITMENTS**

**The Canadian Constitution:** Section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982 recognizes and affirms existing Aboriginal and treaty rights of the Aboriginal peoples of Canada. These rights include First Nations' inherent right of self-government, including inherent authority over matters related to the education of their children.

**BC First Nations Education Jurisdiction Agreement:** On July 5, 2006, an Education Jurisdiction Framework Agreement was signed by Canada, BC, and FNEC on behalf of First Nations. This comprehensive package of agreements and supporting legislation are intended to advance First Nations control over education. Unfortunately, an inability to conclude the financial component of the jurisdiction agreement with the federal government is hindering its implementation, and First Nations continue to strive to resolve this problem.

**Transformative Change Accord:** In the 2005 Transformative Change Accord, Canada, BC First Nations, and the Province agreed to work together on a government-to-government basis to close the gap in education in 10 years.

**Residential Schools Apology:** In June 2008, the Government of Canada delivered a Statement of Apology to the former students of the federal Indian residential school program. The Government of Canada made a commitment in its Apology to “forge a new relationship... based on the knowledge of our shared history, a respect for each other and a desire to move forward together with a renewed understanding that strong families, strong communities and vibrant cultures and traditions will contribute to a stronger Canada for all of us.”

**BC Tripartite Education Framework Agreement:** The new 2012 Tripartite Education Framework Agreement (TEFA) provides: a) a new flexible funding arrangement for First Nations schools, and b) more comprehensive and sustainable funding for the provision of second level services for First Nations education, building upon and supporting the research-based and appropriate BC First Nations school system.

**Crown-First Nations Gathering:** In the 2012 Crown-First Nations Gathering, the parties agreed in the Outcome Statement that “We cannot undo the mistakes of the past, but we can learn from them and affirm that they will not be repeated.”

## INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS AND COMMITMENTS

A number of international mechanisms and instruments exist to protect basic human rights around the world, including unique Indigenous rights.

**Rights of the Child:** In 1959, the United Nations (UN) adopted the Declaration on the Rights of the Child, which states the right of the child to receive an education that will promote his general culture and enable him, on a basis of equal opportunity, to develop his abilities, individual judgment, and sense of moral and social responsibility, and to become a useful member of society.

In 1989, the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), a legally binding treaty that is intended to protect the rights of children around the world. It provides that the education of the child shall be directed to:

- the development of the child’s abilities to their fullest potential;
- the development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms;
- the development of respect for the child’s parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values;
- the preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;
- the development of respect for the natural environment; and
- in those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own religion, or to use his or her own language.

Implementation of the Convention is overseen by the Committee on the Rights of the Child, which Canada ratified on December 13, 1991.

**Indigenous Human Rights:** Indigenous peoples have unique rights arising from their status as the original inhabitants of their territories, with their own languages, cultures, traditions and systems. In 2007, the UN General Assembly adopted the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which elaborates on the economic, social, cultural, political, spiritual and environmental rights of Indigenous peoples. The Declaration recognizes the right of Indigenous families and communities to retain shared responsibility for the upbringing, training, education and well-being of their children, consistent with the rights of the child. It affirms that Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning, and have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination. Canada finally endorsed the Declaration on November 12, 2010.

### **BC FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION EFFORTS**

Building upon the commitments outlined above, BC First Nations have worked steadfastly toward the resumption of First Nations control over First Nations education, building from the pivotal National Indian Brotherhood's 1972 policy paper, *Indian Control of Indian Education (ICIE)*, which was presented to and accepted by the Government of Canada. With assistance from the FNSA and FNEESC, First Nations in BC have made significant progress over the past decades in establishing the foundation for a comprehensive, integrated and responsive BC First Nations Education System that will contribute to First Nations' efforts to create healthy, self-determining, and thriving communities. Therefore, First Nations in BC are on a path toward full control over the education of their children, as envisioned by the National Indian Brotherhood in 1972 and reiterated by the Assembly of First Nations in 2010.

All peoples have the right to maintain their cultural and linguistic identities, and education is essential to actualizing this right. First Nations control over education will provide the means to acquire the necessary skills to be self-empowered and self-sufficient and to maintain First Nations cultural values and languages. This is essential to actualizing an individual's success in society. It will also provide a strong foundation for empowering proud First Nations peoples who are fully able to contribute to the development of their families, clans, communities and nations.

Elders and leaders in the 1970s recognized the importance of local control over education. As a result, the ICIE 1972 policy was anchored in the philosophy that the Government of Canada, working in partnership with First Nations, would secure and provide the necessary financial resources to responsibly support First Nations learning and develop the types of comprehensive learning systems that would truly enhance student outcomes. Today, the necessity for Canadian-First Nations partnerships to support collective action to bridge the First Nations education gap is as critical as it was in 1972.

*(First Nations Control of First Nations Education.  
It's Our Vision, It's Our Time. Assembly of First Nations. 2010)*

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**A Guiding Set of Beliefs (adapted from Thomas, 2002)**

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This handbook is based on the perspective that that effective First Nations school boards ...

... maintain their attention on the purpose for which the school was created.

... focus primarily on student results and outcomes, not only on the activities and efforts of the board and staff.

... define their school's mission and a vision of its desired future.

... embrace the role of their school in promoting the Nation's language and culture and students' positive self-identity.

... commit to the governance role of the board.

... strive for effectiveness – that is, doing the right things – rather than only on efficiency – which is doing things right.

... provide a comprehensive orientation for new board members and encourage all board members to participate in board governance training programs.

... have board members who desire to make a personal contribution and make a difference to the success of their school.

... demonstrate attitudes of mutual respect and cooperation, and a willingness to listen to and understand the viewpoints of others.

... build a synergistic board team, where members understand that they can achieve more by working together as a group than by working individually.

... appreciate that disagreement is healthy and that board debate is a prerequisite for good decision-making.

... strive to achieve consensus in their decision-making.

... attempt to bring out the best in themselves and others.

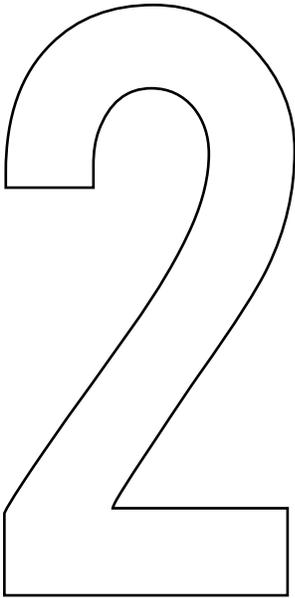
... approve policies that are clear, direct and enabling.

... welcome their accountability to students, parents, the community, and Chief and Council, and acknowledge their position as role models for appropriate conduct and fair decision-making.

... support school and program assessment and evaluation, and set an example through their willingness to assess their own performance.







In some ways, First Nations communities need effective school boards more than other communities. We face unique issues and a number of significant challenges. We need to be especially strategic, planning-focused, and diligent in focusing on evidence that our students are achieving the progress we want for them.

**Capacity Building  
Focus Group Participant**

# Understanding the Board's Roles and Responsibilities

## 2.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL BOARD LEADERSHIP

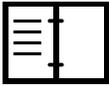
Although the research in this area is not complete and has been conducted primarily in mainstream education settings, evidence does exist that supports the critical role of school boards in school success.

A widely respected, independent research organization, the Wallace Foundation, supported a very large study of school leadership, and found “the vision and actions of system leaders and school board members frequently determine whether principals can be effective in leading school improvement” (SREB, 2010).

According to that study, in highly supportive school districts, school board leaders exhibited a clear vision of what constitutes a good school. They then created a framework that gave the principal the autonomy to work with school staff on an improvement agenda, with collaborative support from the board. With those processes in place, boards had a meaningful impact on student success.

Additionally, a large 2004 study by Leithwood, Seashore, Louis, Anderson and Wahlstrom (2004) found that successful leadership can play a highly significant – and frequently underestimated – role in improving student learning. Specifically, those researchers assert that available evidence justifies two important claims:

1. Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school.
2. Leadership effects are usually largest where and when they are needed most.




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### Another Note About Terms Used in the Handbook

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First Nations schools use a variety of terms to describe the person who is responsible for leadership within the school, including principal, education director, and school administrator.

For reasons of simplicity and consistency, this handbook uses the term principal.

The concepts described in regard to the principal, and the relationship between the principal and the school board, are meant to have relevance for the individual who is responsible for the overall operations, day-to-day leadership, and daily direction of First Nations schools – regardless of what title is assigned to that position. However, when the term principal is used, it is assumed that the individual in that role has a strong background in the education field, including the relevant educational background, experience, and skill set.

If the staff person who has been assigned responsibility for leading the ongoing work of the school does not have a background in education, some of the ideas outlined in this handbook will have to be carefully considered within that context. In particular, the absence of a conventionally conceived principal will create particular questions regarding the respective responsibilities of the school leader and school board, as well as how the need for instructional leadership will be addressed.

The FNSA Capacity Building Coach is available to meet with school boards and the school administrator to help explore this issue.

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Effective First Nations school boards have a commitment to and strategy for advancing the First Nations culture and its vision for its people. Those boards understand that they are one part of something bigger – one component of a larger community. They believe in lifelong learning, paying attention to the needs of all learners within the Nation.

**Capacity Building  
Focus Group Participant**

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## 2.2 ESTABLISHING THE SCHOOL'S PURPOSE

One of the most important priorities for a school board is knowing what the community and families expect for students, and identifying the school's purpose. This includes having a clear understanding of why the school exists.

Each First Nations community established its school for a variety of unique and legitimate reasons. Generally, First Nations schools were created in an effort to provide educational programs in an environment that is particularly supportive and nurturing for First Nations students. Most communities also hope that the

operation of their own school will promote the preservation of their languages and cultures, and as a result those program areas are of primary importance in First Nations schools.

School boards can fulfill an important role by ensuring that school staff understand the reasons why their school was created, and new principals in particular should be informed about the community's values. It also is the role of the school board to ensure that all school staff, especially the principal, maintain a clear focus on the school's meaning and expectations that reflect the vision of parents, families, and the wider community. It is then the principal's responsibility to ensure that the collectively defined purpose is incorporated into the school's culture, curriculum, and programs.

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### **Principles for First Nations Education**

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Summarizing the vision First Nations have identified for the education of their learners is not an insurmountable task. While recognizing the important differences between First Nations communities throughout BC, and indeed Canada, and fully acknowledging that critical details of the goals for their communities and learners undoubtedly will vary, it is still possible to describe central elements of a vision for education that First Nations have asserted with amazing clarity and consistency.

- First Nations learners must be provided an education that ensures that they are confident in their self-identity, in their knowledge of themselves, their families, their communities, and their traditional values, languages and cultures.
  - First Nations learners must learn the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in contemporary society, including the technological capacity required in the 21st century.
  - First Nations learners must receive an education that will allow them to access any opportunities they choose, including a range of higher learning, employment, and life choices.
-

### 2.2.1 Language and Culture Programming

One common priority for many First Nations schools is effective language and culture programming. This is not surprising, as it is widely recognized that First Nations languages and cultures are now in a state of crisis.

In fact, Canada's First Nations languages are among the most endangered in the world and all First Nations languages in BC are critically endangered. Reflecting this situation, First Nations across Canada, including in BC, have been striving to promote awareness of the devastating effect of language loss, as First Nations languages have a fundamental place in the collective sense of identity and nationhood of First Nations, and they also represent a critical component of Canada's heritage.

In addition, evidence shows that language learning is a strong contributor to the educational achievement of all learners. For First Nations students, in fact, the academic benefits of learning their languages are enhanced because of its role in building self-esteem and positive self-identity and in contributing to personal development. These factors are all important components of student success.

An understanding of these issues is clearly reflected in the work of First Nations schools, which generally have a mandate to emphasize and promote First Nations cultures and languages. Most First Nations schools in BC offer some type of distinct language and culture classes. The majority of the schools also are making efforts to integrate language and culture learning throughout the curriculum. Some First Nations schools have reached the level of immersion settings, although this goal has not been identified by all First Nations in BC.

Overall, First Nations school boards in BC fully recognize the critical importance of language learning opportunities, as well as the important role of schools in supporting language revitalization efforts. They therefore continually support their school's initiatives in this regard, including helping to connect the school's language and culture efforts with those of other community agencies working on these issues.

In particular, school boards can help immensely by ensuring that the principal, and thereby other staff members, are fully aware of and maintain the First Nations' protocols for using language and cultural materials, songs, and dances appropriately. Respectfully following all protocols is critical to reinforcing to students the importance of recognizing the community's traditions and values.

Of course, the relevant protocols are specific to each First Nation and therefore must be learned through direct communication between the school and

community governing agencies, as well as the Language Authority, where one exists. Once they have been clearly shared, principals can be expected to take the lead in ensuring that protocols are followed, consulting with the appropriate community authority for appropriate direction and help when needed.

Anyone interested in reading more about this important issue is invited to contact the FNSA office and request a copy of the publication: *A Literature Review to Accompany a Business Case for the Funding of Language and Culture in First Nations Schools*.

### 2.2.2 Expecting High Levels of Learning for All Students

Another common priority for First Nations in BC is ensuring that all students are learning at high levels. In 1996, the FNSA undertook widespread consultations in order to identify relevant standards for First Nations schools. The input received through those consultations, published in *Reaching for Success: Considering the Achievements and Effectiveness of First Nations Schools*, included the assertion that First Nations schools are committed to standards that reflect the need for all students to fulfill their individual potentials, regardless of differing needs.

Building upon that perspective, the FNSA is currently undertaking a number of initiatives to promote a widespread understanding of the importance of a continual and concerted focus on high levels of learning for all. Those initiatives are built upon extensive research, which indicates that high-performing schools invariably embrace a culture of high expectations. When all members of the school community are committed to ensuring the success of each student, profound changes begin to take place.

To support the integration of this perspective into all school activities, the school board can join the principal in considering critical questions, such as the following.

- What school characteristics and educational practices have been identified as most successful in helping all students achieve at high levels?
- How can we adopt those characteristics and practices in our own school?
- What commitments would we have to make to create such a school?
- What indicators could we monitor to assess our progress?



As First Nations school boards, we need to stop accepting satisfactory; we need to strive for excellence. We have to overcome our complacency and challenge the status quo.

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These issues are discussed further in the following handbook section.

## 2.3 THE LEADERSHIP ROLE OF SCHOOL BOARDS

The school's purpose and priorities provide the context for all of the work a school board undertakes, and provides the foundation for the board's efforts to fulfill its leadership role.

As highlighted in the previous FNSA handbook prepared by Larry Thomas (2002), people have a range of perspectives about the roles and responsibilities of school boards, and they become members of a board for a number of reasons. Generally, people join a school board because they are sincerely committed to supporting their community's school and helping to ensure the success of their community's children and youth. For First Nations school boards in particular, many board members are passionate about the opportunity to support the school's provision of nurturing environments that promote students' sense of identity and understanding of their language and culture.

However, without fully understanding what effective school boards do, it is sometimes difficult for board members to have the impact they hope to achieve.

Overall, there is a specific role and a number of specific responsibilities that effective school boards undertake.

- They clarify their expectations and point the school in an explicit direction – that is, towards the results they know will benefit their students.
- Having set this clear direction, effective school boards work with the principal and school staff as a team to achieve the established mission, vision, goals, plans, and policies.
- The board stays focused on its governance responsibilities by approving plans and policies, and then relying on the expertise and skills of the principal and other staff to get the job done (Thomas, 2002).

Overall, school boards are responsible for monitoring the performance of the principal in carrying out their direction, but they do not become directly involved in the day-to-day management of the school.



Effective First Nations school boards are results-oriented. They have a plan and a strategy for making change, and they are committed to measuring their progress in getting there.

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Unfortunately, this is easy to say but difficult to practice.

Most board members naturally are interested in becoming directly involved in arising issues and problems because they care about the school and the students. Some board members even think they are responsible for personally helping to solve difficulties and responding to concerns of parents and community members. Many board members find it difficult to pull back from the pressures of the present and emphasize planning for the future. As a result, boards often become mired in staff-level activities, which means that the important tasks of board governance may not get done.

Effective boards see beyond the present. They remain focused on the school's vision. They remember that achieving the school's purpose means more than being efficient in undertaking their work. School boards are effective when they focus on doing the right things, and particularly those few key governance tasks which, when done well, contribute significantly to the success of the school.

**The key governance tasks attended to by effective boards are described more fully throughout this handbook.**



Conflict of interest can be a particularly significant challenge in First Nations communities, which tend to be small and where people are so closely related. This can make conflict-free decision-making difficult – but not impossible. School boards just need to be especially attentive to this issue and have clear guidelines for how decisions are made.

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## Effective Boards: What the Research Says

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According to a report by the Center for Public Education (2011), the research is clear: boards in areas with high levels of student achievement exhibit habits and characteristics that are markedly different from boards in areas with low levels of achievement. That report identifies the following eight characteristics of effectiveness.

1. **Effective school boards commit to a vision of high expectations for student achievement and quality instruction, and define clear goals toward that vision.** Effective boards make sure these goals remain the top priorities and that nothing else detracts from them.
2. **Effective school boards have strong shared beliefs and values about what is possible for students and their ability to learn, and for the system and its ability to teach all children at high levels.** Successful school boards recognize poverty, issues associated with parental involvement, and other difficult factors as challenges to be overcome, not as excuses for mediocre results. Board members expect to see timely improvements in student achievement as a result of the school's initiatives.
3. **Effective school boards spend less time on operational issues and more time focused on policies to improve student achievement.** High-performing school boards focus on establishing a vision supported by policies that target student achievement. Poor governance is generally characterized by micro-management.
4. **Effective school boards establish collaborative relationships with staff** and the community, and establish a strong communications structure to inform and engage both internal and external stakeholders in setting and achieving relevant goals.
5. **Effective school boards are data savvy:** they embrace and monitor data, even when the information is negative, and they use objective information to drive continuous improvement. Effective boards identify specific student needs and justify decisions based on data. Less effective boards rely on subjective opinions of what works.
6. **Effective school boards align and sustain resources, such as professional development, to meet established goals.** All decisions about the use of resources are aimed at a clear purpose.
7. **Effective school boards lead as a united team with other educational leaders,** each from their respective roles, with strong collaboration and mutual trust. Successful boards define an initial vision and seek senior staff who match that vision.
8. **Effective school boards take part in capacity development and training to build shared knowledge, values and commitments for their improvement efforts.** High-achieving boards implement formal, deliberate training for new and existing members.

For First Nations schools, effective school boards also model a commitment to and understanding of the benefits of integrating First Nations languages and cultures into the school's programming and overall culture – benefits for both students, and for the community's efforts to promote positive self-identity among the Nation's younger members and to advance its language revitalization goals.



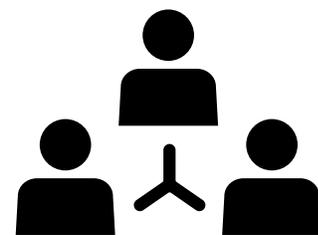
### 2.3.1 The Primary Responsibilities of the School Board

Numerous researchers maintain that the role of the school board, in a single word, is governance.

To govern is to set the direction for the school's future, and governance focuses on a clear definition by the board regarding the purpose (mission), desired future (vision), values, goals, and policies for the school.

It is important for school boards to be highly disciplined in building and maintaining this governance focus. New board members do not always join the board with training or experience related to the governance model, and the natural tendency for most people is to be concerned with the operation of the school and how it functions.

Many people may have a greater interest in learning about the jobs of the principal and staff than they do in learning about the governance aspects of the board. In fact, this situation can be particularly true in smaller communities, where board members inevitably have a much more intimate knowledge of the school, its staff, and the parents and students who are being served. But while it is natural to want to discuss the detailed day-to-day work of the school, evidence shows that effective boards focus their attention primarily on the following seven governance responsibilities.



#### 9 CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE BOARDS

- 1.** Expect student achievement and quality instruction

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- 2.** Believe in student's ability to learn and in the system

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- 3.** Focus on achievement

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- 4.** Build collaborative relationships with staff

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- 5.** Embrace and monitor data

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- 6.** Align resources to meet goals

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- 7.** Unite with other educational leaders

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- 8.** Focus on building their own capacity

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- 9.** Model a commitment to First Nations languages and cultures

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## Seven Governance Responsibilities of School Boards (Thomas, 2002)

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1. **Defining the purpose:** It is the board's responsibility to ensure that a clear purpose is defined for the school.
2. **Focusing on learning and results:** A board's focus should always be directed toward its mission and vision, and the results it desires to achieve. Only when the school's purpose is clear, its vision and values well defined, and its goals specific, can the board be expected to maintain a focus on desired results. Without this focus on results, the board's attention often shifts to management, and specifically an interest in the activities and efforts of staff. Unfortunately, such a shift rarely leads schools toward improved student achievement.
3. **Advocating for constituents:** The board has a political role as an advocate for its constituents – parents, students, and the community as a whole. Constituents place their trust in the board and expect the board to provide strong leadership and to always support the school's visions and goals.
4. **Setting strategic direction:** Planning is “strategic” to the extent that it leads the school from its current reality toward its desired future – that is, its vision. The board sets this strategic direction by clarifying the school's mission, vision, values, goals and policies. Once the expectations for the school's future have been clarified, the board must set a schedule for the completion of both short and long-term goals.
5. **Hiring and monitoring the performance of the principal:** The principal provides expert advice to the board, makes recommendations for board action, and implements the direction and decisions set by the board. The principal, not the board, provides staff leadership and staff direction, according to policies approved by the board. This position is therefore critical and requires considerable attention.
6. **Approving the budget:** The purpose of the budget is to support those specific goals that will help the board achieve the school's mission and vision. The budget is not solely to maintain the school's annual operation. It is an integral part of the change process as the board works towards the achievement of specific goals.
7. **Communicating:** The board has a responsibility to ensure that the relevant people are informed about the school's mission, vision, values, goals, policies and achievements. It also has the responsibility to listen, seek input and hear feedback from its constituents.

**The board's continued emphasis on these seven governance tasks enhances its effectiveness and helps it to achieve its purpose.**



### 2.3.2 The Role of Board Members Themselves

Members of school boards have both a leadership and a political role.

- As leaders, school board members help shape the school's future direction.
- As politicians, school board members have a responsibility to represent and advocate for the entire school community.

Interestingly, not all board members perceive themselves as leaders. Many board members see themselves simply as community volunteers and as willing helpers. In fact, their role is much more important than that.

Also, it is important for board members to think positively about the contributions and the perspectives they can bring to their school, and believe that their opinions and thoughts are as important and valuable as those of their fellow board members. Board members should be willing to express their ideas respectfully and clearly so that their views are included as decisions are being made. It is the combination of many voices that will make the school board successful.

#### What are the powers of individual board members?

Actually, none!

Board members are often surprised to learn that they have no individual powers. They personally may have observed board members giving direction to staff. They may have heard board members individually speaking to the media and making comments on behalf of the board, when no board permission was given for the individual to represent the board. The board chair may speak on behalf of the board without authorization from the board. But because certain practices are in place does not mean they are correct or appropriate.

The board exists as a corporate body. The board is the legal entity, not its members individually. The board exists only when it is in session at a duly constituted meeting. Anything that board members do, individually or collectively, must either be with permission of the board from an earlier meeting, or must be ratified by the board at a subsequent meeting.



Given the importance of the role of board members, we need to pay attention to their membership. We need to involve our Elders and let their wisdom guide us. We need to involve our young people. They will lead our schools in the future and we need to help prepare them now. We need to embrace the impact of school board decisions and make sure we are involving our most committed people.

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Governing a First Nations school is not like governance in other education systems. In a First Nations community, board members know every student by name. We know their families. That's very positive. We also understand that people are aware of everything we do. That can be hard.

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Focus Group Participant**

With this understanding, it becomes clear that the board, and not its members individually, provides the direction for the school and the principal. Similarly, it becomes clear that the principal takes direction from the entire board, and not from board members individually.

It is also important to remember that board membership is not about focusing on those few aspects of the operation that are of most interest or concern to individual members. It is about governance for the entire school. It is about being an integral member of a group that speaks with only one voice. It is about serving the needs of the broader school community – students, parents, staff, and the First Nation itself.

### 2.3.3 The Board's Accountability

The board, as the governing body, is accountable for everything that happens within the school. As a result, some board members may feel that they have both the right and the responsibility to be informed of anything and everything about the school that interests them. Further, they may feel that board members have the right to involve themselves in any aspect of the school's operation.

In fact, although the board retains the ultimate accountability for the school, it cannot reasonably expect to be informed about and involved in everything related to the school's operations.

Some things the board should do; other things the staff should do. They can't both do the same things; neither can, nor should they "share" responsibilities. The board has to be willing to assign responsibilities to others – primarily the principal, who in turn assigns responsibilities to staff.

The question for the board becomes "What should the board do and assume direct responsibility for, and what responsibilities does it pass on to the principal?"

Most school boards regularly find themselves considering issues within the context of those questions. This handbook provides further guidance for answering those questions, as well.

## 2.4 THE COMPLEMENTARY ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL

As mentioned above, one of the most important roles of a school board is hiring and working effectively with the school principal. Differentiating the roles and responsibilities of both types of school leader – the board and its principal – is key.

The board is dependent on the principal for the school's success. While the board's role is to listen to, discuss, debate, and make decisions regarding governance issues, school board members are not expected to have expertise in education and running an effective school. Therefore, the board must rely on the principal to implement its direction and decisions.

A positive working relationship between the board and its principal is vital to the school's successful operation. The consequences of a poor relationship can be devastating for the school. To prevent misunderstandings and conflict that can damage the school's operations, the board should seek to define its relationship with the principal. This is achieved through discussions and clarification regarding which responsibilities will be those of the board and which will be those of the principal.

### 2.4.1 The Importance of the Principal Position

Effective school boards embrace the fact that the position of the principal is critical to school effectiveness – perhaps even more so in schools that operate within difficult circumstances. This fact is actually supported by a wealth of research evidence.

Studies of educational data have shown that principals have a clear affect on student achievement, and researchers have concluded that underperforming schools are unlikely to succeed without effective preparation and support for school leaders.

As Sparks and Hirsh (2000) note:

In their search for ways to improve school performance, educators and policy makers have addressed a broad array of challenges confronting schools. These approaches to improvement have included raising standards, strengthening teacher professional development, refocusing schools around the primary goal of student achievement, and holding schools accountable for results. But only one area of policy focus – strengthening school leadership – can exert control over all of these challenges simultaneously.

Researchers Branch, Hanushey, and Rivkin (2012) also analyzed educational data and found that principals demonstrably affected student achievement, and a similar perspective is shared by DeVita (2007), who notes:

The importance of having high-quality teaching in the classroom is a given. But we often fail to recognize that it is the principal alone who can ensure that the teaching and learning in every classroom are as good as they can be.

#### 2.4.2 Understanding the Complexity of the Principal's Role

While the job of the principal is central to the success of a school, it also is extremely demanding. Further, it is critical that First Nations school board members understand the complex and varied responsibilities of principals, so that they are able to identify the right individual to fulfill this role, and also effectively monitor and support the ongoing work of the principal who is working for them.

Principals are expected to make daily, often immediate decisions that affect the lives of their students, teachers, other staff members, parents, and community members. The principal is expected to lead the school, maintain discipline, manage the budget, assist staff, respond to parental inquiries, and report to the school board. It is also critical that principals are able to coach, teach, and develop the teachers in their schools. They must fully understand curriculum, instruction, and assessment in order to lead continuous progress in raising student performance.

In some ways, the various roles of school principals can be divided into management and instructional leadership responsibilities, although there is of course considerable overlap between the two categories. Simply put:

- Managers focus on “running a smooth ship.”
- Instructional leaders focus on learning.

Both roles are complementary and equally important. Yet unfortunately, management responsibilities can, if allowed, take up all of a principal's time. This is particularly true because management issues are often very pressing and require immediate action.

Given this reality, it is very important that school boards fully understand that, in order to be truly effective, principals must pay adequate attention to both

their management and leadership functions. Additionally, principals, with support from their school boards, must remain vigilant in being aware of how they spend their time.

Some of the leadership and management responsibilities of a principal are outlined on the following page.

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**The FNSA also has developed Standards for Principals in First Nations schools. Those are available in the appendix of this document.**

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## **Responsibilities of a Principal**

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### **The Principal's Instructional Leadership Responsibilities**

Effective schools research identifies instructional leadership as key to well-run schools. Instructional leadership includes setting high expectations for students and teachers, undertaking supervision of learning, ensuring quality curriculum, promoting quality professional development, using data to guide decision-making, and keeping the school community focused on its priorities – particularly the priority of high levels of learning for all. The principal is responsible for continually assessing the school's operations and programs to ensure that they are meeting community and school expectations. Principals are also the shapers of the school culture, which can become either a positive influence or a significant barrier to learning. Generally, principals must create a school culture that demands and celebrates growth and high achievement.

### **The Principal's Management Responsibilities**

Most people are fairly familiar with the management responsibilities of principals. Principals are concerned with the overall functioning of the school, including ensuring that it is operational for the beginning of each school term, with a full school staff in place. Principals manage the school budget, establish timetables, generally oversee discipline, ensure school safety, organize regular staff meetings, and maintain the school's record keeping, busing system, and instructional supplies.

### **The Principal's Responsibilities to the Community**

For all schools, but particularly for First Nations schools, another primary role of the principal is to maintain strong and positive connections with the community. First Nations schools operate completely within the context of their communities, and effective principals understand and embrace that fact. Principals, along with the school board, are responsible for ensuring beneficial public relations for the school, sharing the good things that are happening, and fostering a respectful, constructive relationship with the community.

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**Support to Know About: FNSA Professional Growth Process**

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The FNSA Professional Growth Process (PGP – previously called the FNSA Teacher Certification Process) – has been designed to help principals provide more effective support to their teachers through supervision for learning. Supervision for learning generally involves classroom observation by the principal, including a collection of evidence to support meaningful feedback to teachers to assist with their professional growth and effective instruction.

Specifically, the PGP is intended to address the following objectives.

- To ensure appropriate and consistent supervision for learning in First Nations schools in BC.
- To support First Nations school principals and teachers in effectively considering their strengths and areas for improvement.
- To assist principals and teachers in achieving professional growth in a way that is consistent with their unique needs and circumstances.
- To establish a respectful and relevant model for monitoring principal and teacher improvements, as well as sharing and celebrating their growth with First Nations communities.

In order to achieve those objectives, the PGP emphasizes a thorough, supportive process for identifying priorities for improvement and monitoring principals' and teachers' effectiveness and demonstrated progress. FNSC staff members, called Regional Principals, are available to visit participating schools to mentor principals in undertaking their instructional leadership role and facilitate ongoing teacher growth.

All PGP services are offered at no cost to First Nations schools.



## **2.5 WORKING EFFECTIVELY IN A COLLABORATIVE MANNER**

### **2.5.1 Working Effectively With the School Principal**

As mentioned above, a challenge for many school board members is distinguishing between the role and responsibilities of the board and those of the principal. Boards that do not have a clear understanding of governance and that are not committed to their governance responsibilities find that their attention quickly drifts towards management – that is, the activities and efforts of the principal and staff. When this occurs, confusion and conflict develops.

The relationship between the school governing agency and the school principal is in fact quite complex, as the distinct but complementary roles and responsibilities of each can sometimes become confused. Ideally, the school board will work with the school principal and staff as a team. As described above, the governing agency should focus on approving plans and policies, and then rely on the principal and staff to get the job done.

Ultimately, the principal works for and reports to the board. The principal provides advice, makes recommendations for board action, and implements the direction and decisions set by the governing agency. Generally, principals are responsible for the detailed, ongoing management of the school and for the direct leadership of the school staff, curriculum, and student learning. The principal, not the board, provides ongoing staff leadership and staff direction, but the principal fulfills this role according to policies approved by the board.

School governing authorities, on the other hand, are responsible for overseeing the overall direction of the school, including setting out its visions, values, and goals. The school board approves the school's annual budget and policies, and then allows the principal to operate the school within the parameters of the budget and policies. The school board can also play a key role in building a positive relationship with and helping to promote the school both within the community and with people and organizations outside of the community.

It is important that the school board and the principal mutually determine appropriate protocols for school staff and governing board relations. Usually, school staff and board members communicate through the principal.

Misunderstandings can occur if that protocol is by-passed and staff members take concerns directly to the board. Of course, in most First Nations communities it is common for school staff to regularly come into contact with people who are involved in school governance, especially if the staff

are making an effort to promote parental and community involvement. The principal and board members should therefore reach a clear agreement about the appropriate way in which potentially difficult issues and grievances will be addressed, and the principal should communicate those decisions clearly to all school staff. Then everyone should follow those procedures closely.

Finally, it is reasonable for the school board to expect regular reports from the principal on key school issues, including the following.

- The school board should approve the annual budget and should be provided regular updates on the budget.
- The board should receive classroom updates and information about how school programs are progressing.
- The board should be fully involved in the creation of all school policies and it should be central in any required policy review and/or changes.
- The board should have a chance to review and discuss data regarding student achievement.
- The board should be apprised of any personnel matters requiring attention, including discipline and possible termination actions.
- The board should be centrally involved in any school assessment activities undertaken, including decisions about when to commence on an assessment process and carefully reviewing and approving the results.

If a board is not being provided any of the information outlined above, that might be an important issue to address with the principal.

### **2.5.2 Effective Employment Practices**

The school board must provide its principal with a clear contract that specifies the compensation and benefits the board will provide to the principal, and defines the terms of employment. The contract might consider the following provisions:

- the term (length) of the contract;
- annual salary;
- provision for salary adjustments during the term of the contract;
- duties and responsibilities;

- medical, dental, extended health coverage;
- long-term disability coverage;
- vehicle or vehicle allowance, if travel is required;
- reimbursement of expenses;
- pension provisions or contributions to an RRSP;
- membership fees in professional organizations;
- legal protection in connection with the performance of duties;
- holidays and annual vacation entitlement;
- provisions for short- and long-term leave entitlements;
- dismissal and termination provisions;
- notice for renewal or non-renewal of the contract.

The contract may also include a provision for periodic performance reviews. Principals can be evaluated in a manner mutually determined by the board and principal. But while having clearly defined performance criteria and a predetermined evaluation process will enable the principal to receive useful feedback, it has little bearing on the principal's job security. Ultimately, it is the role of the board to continually monitor whether it is satisfied with the performance of its principal, which is the real determining factor in the principal's continued employment.

### **What if the board-principal relationship is not working?**

As much as it is desired, not all board-principal relationships are positive and effective.

To begin, it is unrealistic to expect that boards and principals will always work together without conflict. At times, the board will disagree with decisions made by the principal, just as the principal will not always agree with the decisions of the board. What is important is that each respect the other's right to make decisions that fall within its jurisdiction – governance decisions for the board; management decisions for the principal. Within this framework, some differences of opinion will still be normal and are not cause for drastic action.

But in some more serious cases, it may become clear that the principal does not have the skills, expertise and experience needed to effectively lead the school. In other cases, the board may not have been clear about its expectations in the hiring process and discover that its approaches to issues, its expectations, and its values are different from those of the principal. Some boards never do state their expectations and leave the principal to his or her own initiative, which can lead to problems.

Whatever the reasons for the concerns, board members must understand that monitoring the principal's performance is the board's responsibility. Eventually, if the board remains unsatisfied, it must either restate its expectations, clearly and in writing, and offer the opportunity for improvement, or dismiss the principal. What is most important is that concerns relating to the board-principal relationship do not remain unresolved. Allowing a dysfunctional situation to continue is unfair to the board, to the principal and, most importantly, to the school.

Again, an appropriate division of responsibilities is key. The principal, as the board's key staff person, works with the board as it develops the mission, vision, values, goals and policies for the school. The job of the principal is to then implement the board's direction and decisions. Decisions to be made at the administrative level should be left to the principal.

Ultimately, if the board is consistently unhappy with the principal's decisions, or with his or her overall performance, the board should communicate its displeasure directly to the principal, and provide the opportunity for improved performance. It is only fair that the principal be made aware directly of the board's concerns and have a chance to address them.

Actually, in the event of difficulties, arranging for a performance review for the principal is one way to consider the principal's performance in a thoughtful way and to provide meaningful feedback to both the board and the principal.

**School boards that are uncertain about how to initiate a performance review for its principal can contact the FNSA for assistance with this issue.**

If the performance review and feedback do not resolve the concerns that exist, the board may have to decide whether it wishes to keep its principal.

**If the board believes that termination is its only option, the board should seek legal advice at the earliest opportunity.**

### **2.5.3 Working With the Community**

In addition to working with the principal, one of the most important roles of a school board is helping to promote the excellent work being done by the school, including building a positive relationship with and reporting to the broader community.

Of course, First Nations schools are particularly connected to their communities. In fact, their communities made a deliberate decision to establish their own school under their own control, and they expend great effort and commitment in making those schools successful.

Also, in all communities, challenges faced inside the school are often connected to and compounded by things that are happening outside of the school. Good community relations are therefore critical to ensuring positive learning situations for all learners. In addition, the connections and expertise that come from interacting with people, organizations, and institutions throughout the community can be invaluable to the schools' efforts to develop the goals, staff, and productive work environment needed in order to successfully support students.

Working with the community involves clearly communicating the school's progress toward its goal, and making sure the community is aware and supportive of the school's programs and activities. Schools can also take proactive steps to bring community members into the building and encourage participation in school events. Community employers can be asked to donate money, supplies, or expertise, sponsor career exploration days for students, or become part of a cooperative education initiative or other school-to-work programs. In addition, communities and schools can work in partnership to support families in their efforts to strengthen their children's academic achievement. When families have difficulty doing what is needed, schools, organizations in the community, and other social service agencies can collaborate to help provide assistance and draw families into partnerships around common concerns.

Finally, one of the critical roles of First Nations schools is helping to promote and maintain the community's language and culture. That work cannot be done alone. The entire community, including the school, must be involved in complementary efforts if children are to learn and value their languages and cultures. (This issue is discussed more in Section 3.1.1).

The school board can help principals to address all of the issues listed above. However, it is important that the board and principal collaboratively discuss their related roles and activities in order to ensure that consistent and complementary approaches are in place.

#### 2.5.4 Working with Other Service Agencies

Research clearly shows that if children have unmet health and welfare needs, these issues can often limit their ability to learn. Recent studies have also shown that the successful coordination of community services can result in a sustained commitment to educational success from various specialized agencies.

Many First Nations are therefore making great efforts to coordinate and integrate community services and agencies, and schools should have a particular interest in this area. Schools commonly require service delivery assistance from health and social service agencies, especially for students who have special needs.

Particularly important is the link between the school and early childhood education agencies. The link between children's early childhood experience and their success in the formal schooling system has been studied intensively, and it is clear that community-wide efforts to assist parents in creating stimulating home environments early in their children's lives will have significant benefits for students' lifelong learning.

School boards can model an understanding of the important role of schools in making connections with other agencies. In fact, schools can promote integrated services and cooperative efforts by fully exposing students and parents to service agency personnel who may be involved with the school and children. For example, schools can invite people from different agencies to dinners, school gatherings, open houses, and workshops to talk about their work. Giving service agencies visibility in a positive context and providing opportunities for them to explain their roles means that when they are needed, parents will be more familiar with the people involved and they will be better aware of why the agencies do what they do. A consistent emphasis on the fact that everyone is working in the best interest of children will also help address potential misunderstandings and suspicion.

Of particular importance is a strong partnership between the school and child protection agencies. In cases of suspected child abuse, the school is required to report any potential challenges immediately. These situations can severely challenge the school and principal's relationship with parents and other community members. The involvement of the Ministry of Children and Families and the RCMP can create tremendous tensions, and it is imperative that schools have very clear guidelines in place to deal with any problematic situations that may arise.



Get your parents involved. They have a particularly strong interest in the school. They can contribute to the school in very important ways.

**Capacity Building  
Focus Group Participant**

School boards should assist principals in establishing positive relationships with other community agencies, and it is especially important that school board members and principals openly discuss these efforts so that everyone is committed to the same message when communicating outside of the school context.

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## Common Board Challenges – and Possible Solutions (Adapted from Thomas, 2002)

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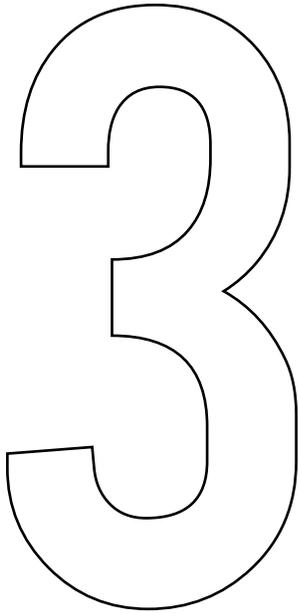
Common Challenges	Instead ...
<p><b>Entrenched thinking:</b> Boards can sometimes find that some or all of their members have become resistant to change, with individuals or groups of individuals having trouble letting go of their fixed ideas.</p>	<p>To address complex issues, board members must be willing to listen to the thoughts and diverse opinions of others, embrace new ideas, and seek innovation and creativity. The challenge for many is not in embracing new ideas, but rather in letting go of the fixed ideas they already have. Boards that get results are open to thinking in new and different ways.</p>
<p><b>Lack of board member orientation and training:</b> Sometimes, boards may not provide for board member orientation or ongoing board training – especially if funding is a challenge. But when boards and their members do not provide a “governance” orientation to their incoming members, and when they do not participate in or value ongoing board governance training, they are sharing a message that improvement is unimportant and unnecessary.</p>	<p>Effective boards understand that good governance is a learnable skill and that the development of the governance skills of board members requires ongoing training and practice. On an effective board, board member orientation, training and ongoing in-service are given high priority.</p>
<p><b>Confusing the roles and responsibilities of the board and the principal:</b> Those roles are of course closely related, but different. Board members may feel it is their responsibility to personally become involved in the daily affairs of the school, even to the point of directing staff on matters of personal concern or interest. Elders particularly may feel this pressure; they legitimately may feel that the community expects them personally to find resolution to issues brought to their attention, but such expectations can put board members in very difficult positions.</p>	<p>Everyone working together toward common goals creates the best climate for success – including respecting the appropriate roles of those involved in supporting the school. Effective boards expect and allow their principal to handle administrative matters and direct staff, and it is the board's responsibility to monitor itself in this regard. Boards build school success by focusing on the big picture and setting direction. Members should seek sufficient information to perform their governance role, without becoming involved in the daily operation of the school and without feeling the need to directly manage the staff.</p>



Common Challenges	Instead ...
<p><b>Lack of a vision and planning:</b> Not all boards give priority to defining a vision and undertaking the planning required to achieve it. Often boards are preoccupied with present issues and circumstances. Vision-setting may not seem like an urgent priority, and so it is often left to be undertaken when other more important tasks have been addressed. The problem with this approach is that there are always other important tasks and other immediate needs.</p>	<p>Proactive boards accept the present reality, but maintain a focus on the future. Proactive boards acknowledge that unanticipated circumstances may affect their progress toward their goals, and that many things will happen that are beyond their control. However, they believe that the school's future is not the result of circumstances, but rather is the sum of all the choices and decisions that the board makes given those circumstances.</p>
<p><b>Absence of policy direction:</b> Too many boards pay insufficient attention to policy. They become consumed with pressing issues, urgent demands, and their current situations, and they quickly find themselves deeply involved in the management of the school. If they do have a policy manual, it is outdated, or only occasionally referenced by board members.</p>	<p>Policy is the process by which a board gives guidance for the daily operation of the school. Policy guides the actions of both the board and staff. It states clear expectations so that the principal and staff feel comfortable that they are working within a framework for decision-making that will be supported by the board.</p>
<p><b>Misunderstanding the budget's purpose:</b> First Nations schools share common financial challenges, and many school boards can become caught up with what they can't do because of the funding they don't have. Board members can become focused on supporting existing programs and services that have been funded for many years, which can lead to resistance to new ideas that do not readily fit within the existing budget.</p>	<p>The purpose of the budget is to support the direction and goals of the board, not just to carry the system through yet another year of operation. The school's goals should drive the budget, and changing priorities can mean changes in the way the school's funding is spent.</p>
<p><b>Not focusing on results:</b> Some boards can be preoccupied with peoples' activities and efforts, and particularly the activities of staff. This is understandable. Schools are people-focused, and board members want to improve the lives of their constituents. Also, some boards do not commit to measurable results because they have failed to develop a clear vision and specific goals. If there is no clear mission, no clear vision, and no goals, then it makes sense that the board will not be concerned with results.</p>	<p>It is the responsibility of the board to ensure a focus on results and to expect the principal to present strategies for assessing the effectiveness of the school's programs and services.</p>

Common Challenges	Instead ...
<p><b><i>Lack of understanding of the political role of the board:</i></b> Many First Nations board members are surprised to learn that they are “politicians.”</p>	<p>It is important to understand that the board has a political function, and its members are the primary advocates for the clients the school serves.</p>
<p><b><i>Absence of effective communication strategies:</i></b> Almost all school boards find communications a challenge at some time, as they have to continually monitor how they are sharing information about complex and sometimes very difficult issues with parents, community members, Chief and Council, and the broader public.</p>	<p>Effective boards create a plan detailing their strategies for communicating and for seeking feedback on their decisions and actions.</p>
<p><b><i>Ineffective meeting strategies:</i></b> Signs of meeting ineffectiveness include: no agendas, or poorly planned agendas; lack of background information prepared or circulated prior to meetings; unfocused discussion; discussing matters not on the agenda; arguing over procedural matters; getting mired in conflict; and lack of follow-up to board decisions and direction.</p>	<p>Board members and the principal spend many hours in meetings, and those meetings must be timely and purposeful. It is critical that all board members feel that the time spent in meetings is productive and aimed at the most important consideration – improving the success of the students enrolled in the school. When discussions and activities are focused on that priority, potential conflict can be addressed in a pro-active and positive way.</p>





# Defining Mission and Setting Strategic Direction

## 3.1 ESTABLISHING THE SCHOOL'S MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

As described in the FNSA Handbook for School Principals:

What does our school stand for? That question is really the key to building an effective, meaningful school, particularly in a First Nations community. In order for everyone to feel comfortable answering that question with clarity and certainty, a school must have a shared mission – common values and a purpose for education that can be seen in the daily activities of the school.

A shared sense of purpose can help governing board members, principals, school staff, and parents maintain a focus on what is deemed to be most important and avoid being distracted by the numerous programs and solutions being promoted in the field of education.

### 3.1.1 School Mission, Vision, Values and Goals

Establishing a purpose begins with identifying and articulating a mission and a vision and creating high expectations for student achievement.

A school **mission statement** answers the question “why do we exist?” It is a brief, succinct statement that explains the school’s purpose.

The **vision statement** then answers the question “what do we hope to become?” In other words, it is a shared image of what the school should look like in the future.

**Values** are even more specific than mission and vision statements. While a mission statement asks the school to consider why it exists, and a vision statement asks what it might become, core values clarify how the shared vision will become a reality.

Finally, **goals** describe what steps will be taken and when. Effective goals specify the following.

- Exactly what is to be accomplished
- The specific steps that will be taken to achieve the goal
- The individual or group responsible for initiating and/or sustaining each step toward achieving the goal
- The timeline for each phase of the activity
- The criteria to be used in evaluating progress toward the goal

Some schools may not have a clearly defined mission and vision for what the school can achieve. In those instances, the school board and the principal work with the community to identify their educational values and set out a mission and vision.

If a mission and vision have already been developed, it is the role of the school board, with the principal, to ensure that the principles are shared and understood, and that people commit to the mission so that it remains a real guide for the school's programs and activities.

In establishing a school mission and vision, it is important to remember that there is really no right or wrong statement, just as there is no right or wrong way to arrive at one. The mission and vision statements and process used for their development must fit within the school and community context, and reflect what is reasonable in specific circumstances.

Before beginning the work of establishing a school mission and vision, there are a few things to think about.

- Will the existing circumstances allow for positive discussions to take place? Schools may periodically experience tensions that affect the way in which some people interact with the school. If this is the case, it may be important to think about ways to include conflict resolution efforts into the process of developing a school vision. If the situation is particularly problematic, it

may be useful to have an individual from outside the community provide advice or help to resolve the challenges that exist. For example, contacting the FNEESC/FNSA Capacity Building Coach may help.

- While there are many different ways to approach the development of a mission and vision statement, the process for their development must be collaborative. No mission or vision can guide the work of a school unless it is shared – and that sharing must begin with their creation. Being involved in the process of development brings both ownership and commitment to the mission and vision, and involving a wide range of people demonstrates to the community that their input is truly valued.
- While widespread input is key, it is also important to remember that informed decisions require informed individuals. For example, it is critical that everyone participating in determining a school's mission and vision understand the evidence that school's **can** make a critical difference in the lives of children. All children *can* learn, and all schools must ensure that all children *do* learn as a result of what the school community does.

The 2012 Handbook for Principals of First Nations Schools outlines a variety of possible ways to develop a school mission and vision statement, any of which can be altered as required to suit the unique needs of each school and community. Undoubtedly there are also a countless number of other possible approaches that could work equally well. The FNEESC/FNSA Capacity Building Coach can discuss with school boards a range of options for consideration.

Overall, it is the role of the school governing agency and the principal to select a relevant process and to make it work in their community.

### **The Role of the Board in Defining the School's Vision**

It is not expected that school boards will have the experience and skills needed to independently undertake a comprehensive vision-setting process. The task of the board is not to do the job itself, but rather to see that the job gets done and to approve the statements once they have been created.

In establishing a vision setting process, the board should discuss the matter with the principal. If the principal has the confidence of the board and the appropriate training and skills required, the board can consider having the principal lead the vision-setting process. However, if the board wants the principal to be an active participant in the process, it should consider bringing

Effective First Nations school boards have a commitment to and strategy for advancing the First Nations culture and its vision for its people. Those boards understand that they are one part of something bigger – one component of a larger community. They believe in lifelong learning, paying attention to the needs of all learners within the Nation.

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in an outside, independent person as a facilitator, as it is difficult for someone to concurrently lead the process and be an active participant. The FNESC/FNSA Capacity Building Coach can of course assist communities in fulfilling this role.

Otherwise, the principal can recommend a facilitator and a process for approval by the board. It is entirely appropriate for the board to let the principal do all the background work; the board retains control of the process and the results by approving all of the principal's recommendations.

### **3.2 MONITORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE VISION – FOCUSING ON RESULTS**

Regardless of how the mission and vision statements are created, it is crucial that the results are shared widely and are reflected in the school's priorities and programs. Generally, the mission and vision will usually emphasize an undeviating commitment to high learning for all and valuing and promoting students' pride in their First Nations identities – a commitment that should be demonstrated in both talk and actions.

Working to achieve the vision begins immediately after it has been developed, and it involves the school identifying its goals and setting out strategies for achieving those goals.

- **Manageable goals.** Develop short-term goals that are actionable by breaking down the big work of achieving the mission and vision into smaller, more manageable chunks of work.
- **Action plans.** Define action plans that are as specific as possible, possibly with one action plan for each short-term goal.

Working toward the school mission also includes building in mechanisms to evaluate and document progress made toward its achievement. School assessment processes are one way to measure progress being made.

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### **Support to Know About: The FNSA School Assessment and Certification Process**

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Over a decade ago, First Nations schools in BC began creating a collectively managed, community-based First Nations Schools Assessment and Certification Process. That process involves the identification of opportunities provided and performance indicators in all school programming areas. The process also involves surveying students, staff, and parents to determine their levels of satisfaction with the school and its programs. Schools then analyze the information collected to develop a Growth Plan, which outlines activities for maintaining successful programs and addressing areas for improvement. Participating schools ultimately are visited by an FNSA-appointed External Review Team, which offers feedback on the assessment findings and Growth Plan. Interested schools also may request that they be “certified” by the FNSA, requiring that the schools meet a set of standards that were established collectively by First Nations schools in BC.

Since its establishment, the assessment project has been extremely successful. Almost all schools in BC have participated in the project at least once, and have indicated that the process helped them to identify strengths and challenges, plan for growth, and maintain accountability. The assessment process has been accepted for fulfillment of AANDC BC Region’s evaluation requirements and the BC Teacher Regulation Branch teaching experience requirement. The process also was central to the negotiation of the new reciprocal tuition agreement, according to which the Government of BC will pay tuition for off-reserve students attending First Nations schools.

\*\* Schools that want to access reciprocal tuition through the provincial government must be certified by the FNSA.

In addition, the FNSA and FNEC support schools that complete the School Assessment Project by providing them a School Growth Plan Grant in the year following their Assessment Project completion. Schools use that funding to support activities that are directly identified in the School Growth Plans from the previous year. Further, a team of coaches hired and trained by FNEC/the FNSA is available to assist schools in ensuring that the Growth Plan Grants are used as effectively as possible.

Interested school boards are encouraged to discuss this process with their principal.



### 3.2.1 The Importance of Evidence-Based Decision-Making

Collecting data underlies all efforts to measure progress. In fact, today there is a growing recognition of the need to use data to inform decision-making and provide clear evidence of what is happening in schools, including monitoring instructional and program effectiveness, meeting school planning needs, and maintaining accountability to parents, communities, and funding agencies.

Numerous researchers have highlighted the range of benefits that can result from thoughtful efforts to measure educational success, as effective educators make effective decisions – decisions that are based on accurate information. Information, whether quantitative or qualitative, can help the entire school community to decide what actions to take to improve instruction, change practice, or reform schools. Data provides quantifiable proof of what is happening in schools, taking the emotion out of difficult decisions and providing substance for meaningful, ongoing dialogue. As stated by DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Karhanek (2010):

We will not know whether or not all students are learning unless we are hungry for evidence that students are acquiring the knowledge, skills, and dispositions most essential to their success. We must systematically monitor each student's learning on an ongoing basis and use evidence of that learning to respond immediately to students who experience difficulty, to inform our individual and collective professional practice, and to fuel continuous improvement.

Data also can help schools to measure student progress, make sure students do not fall through the cracks, assess instructional effectiveness, allocate resources wisely, report to the community, and show trends.

For many reasons, including many of those cited above, McLean (cited in Johnson, 1997) has concluded that “implementation of a complete program of data collection and use can lead to the improvement of education as has no other educational innovation of the last century.” Similarly, Killian and Bellamy (2000) state:

Understanding and using data about school and student performance are fundamental to improving schools. Without analyzing and discussing data, schools are unlikely to identify and solve the problems that need attention, identify appropriate interventions to solve those problems, or know how they are progressing toward achievement of their goals. Data are the fuel of reform ... In short, using data separates good schools from mediocre schools. Schools that are increasing student achievement, staff productivity and collegiality, and customer satisfaction use data to inform and guide their decisions and actions. Data use essentially sets a course of action and keeps a staff on that course to school improvement and student success.

School boards can respond to this research consensus by working with their principals to develop a clear understanding of how the school will use evidence to support school growth. Generally ...

- The clearer the board is about its expectations for performance and results, the easier it is for the board, staff and constituents to assess progress.
- As soon as the mission, vision and value statements have been written, baseline data should be collected to assess the current reality.
- Schools and principals should collaboratively agree to a clear plan for continually monitoring data to ensure that the desired results are being achieved.

The FNSA is pro-actively supporting schools in thoughtfully using student assessment data and other clear sources of evidence for the purpose of program and achievement monitoring, informed decision-making, and instructional improvements.

All schools are welcome to contact the FNSA for more information about the services that are available.



It is our responsibility to focus on clear indicators and stay data-driven. How do we know what is working? How do we know what else is needed? These questions can best be answered with real evidence. We need to be reflective and thoughtful about what our school is doing, and we need solid indicators to inform our decisions.

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### **Support to Know About: Initiatives to Promote the Effective Use of Evidence**

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As described above, the FNSA and FNEESC organize in-school coaching for school staff, including direct mentoring and assistance with the implementation of student assessments, as well as coaching on how to effectively review and analyze student results in order to inform instructional choices. The coaches can also assist schools in effectively integrating relevant data into the school assessment project to ensure that school planning efforts are based on objective evidence of growth.

In addition, the FNSA has organized a number of in-service and training workshops and has provided financial assistance for the purchase of three recommended standardized assessment tools – Ages and Stages Questionnaire, Dynamic Indicator of Basic Early Literacy Skills, and Canadian Achievement Test 4. Schools are welcome to contact the FNSA to explore what ongoing support is available in this area.

Finally, since 2010, the FNSA and FNEESC have been developing the Data Records and User Management System (DRUMS) – a system for managing student information at the school level and for analyzing and reporting aggregate data at the provincial level. DRUMS was designed by First Nations schools in order to meet individual school needs, to inform programming at the local and collective level, and to facilitate easier and relevant reporting to the federal government.

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### **Support to Know About: Professional Learning Communities**

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The FNSA is currently promoting the integration of the Professional Learning Community (PLC) approach into First Nations schools in BC. As described by DuFour (2004), the PLC model flows from the assumption that the core mission of formal education is not simply to ensure that students are taught, but to ensure that they learn. This simple shift — from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning — has profound implications for schools.

The following three crucial questions drive the work of those within a PLC.

- What do we want each student to learn?
- How will we know when each student has learned it?
- How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning?

Educators who are building a PLC recognize that they must work together to achieve their collective purpose of learning for all. Therefore, they create structures to promote a collaborative culture.

The powerful collaboration that characterizes PLCs includes a formal process in which teachers work together to analyze results in order to improve their classroom practice. Teachers work in teams, developing relevant student assessment mechanisms, tracking student performance, and engaging in an ongoing cycle of questions that promote team learning. This process, in turn, leads to higher levels of student achievement.

Anyone interested is welcome to contact the FNSA for more information about PLCs.



### **The Role of the School Board in Encouraging Data Use**

Many people can feel threatened by new initiatives to collect and review detailed data in order to monitor the effectiveness of school programming. School boards can help to address any such concerns by modeling a perspective of data as a helpful tool for educators. School board members can assist principals by encouraging the use of different types of data and the careful and pro-active examination of the results.

In First Nations schools, staff may legitimately feel concern about releasing data that could be misinterpreted. School boards and principals can help to address these feelings by avoiding overly critical responses if student achievement results are problematic, and instead focusing on the importance of using data to enhance understandings of what needs to be done, and to ensure that the efforts of the entire school community are leading to the desired outcomes.

Overall, positive perspectives of data use on the part of the school board can help create positive perspectives from school staff and parents, ultimately contributing to greater support for all students in the school.

### **3.3 SUPPORTING THE SCHOOL'S PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS**

Research clearly shows that teachers matter. But research also shows that teachers differ significantly in their effectiveness. In fact, individual differences in teachers will never go away, but new and useful forms of professional development should reduce those differences significantly.

In addition, unless they are encouraged otherwise, even the most talented teaching staff can become complacent and entrenched in particular teaching approaches. Regardless of the adequacy of teachers' university preparation, no teacher will remain current for their entire career without meaningful professional development.

Teachers in First Nations schools, who often work in significant isolation, have particularly noted the importance of professional development opportunities, suggesting that it is easy for them to become "isolated and unaware of the latest educational trends." In those circumstances, providing access to high quality, appropriate support and opportunities for professional learning can actually help to retain teachers who might otherwise become frustrated and leave for other employment.

The professional development opportunities that are relevant for each school must be determined according to the unique needs of the school and its staff. Research shows that no single strategy will always work in every school, for every teacher, all of the time. Therefore, many professional development programs actually include several strategies in one theme, such as a workshop that provides formal learning combined with complementary teacher coaching and/or time with colleagues to discuss and plan for ongoing implementation.

Further, there is a growing consensus of researchers and educators that ongoing, school-based teacher professional development is more effective than conventional one-time workshops. For example, numerous studies suggest that one-time professional development workshops do not always lead to changes in classroom teaching. In other words (Martin, 2008):

We will have to go beyond the typical “sit and get” event that an educator attends in the hopes of gathering tidbits of information to take back to the classroom. While there is well-meaning intent on behalf of both those delivering the message and those receiving it, more often than not, traditional professional development only provides an inspiring and motivating moment.

In this regard, schools are increasingly looking to coaching and other relationship-based professional development strategies to improve the skills and performance of teachers and school leaders.

It is the role of the school board to openly discuss the school's professional development plans with the principal, jointly exploring a range of options and the various types of training and coaching that can be tried.

Regardless of what approaches are selected, school boards are encouraged to recognize the need for ongoing growth of their staff, as new ideas are critical for continually improving school and classroom practices, and ultimately enhancing student success.



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**To support teacher professional growth, the FNSA has created Standards for Teachers in First Nations Schools. See Appendix 2 for a copy of those standards.**

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### **Support to Know About: Professional Development Support**

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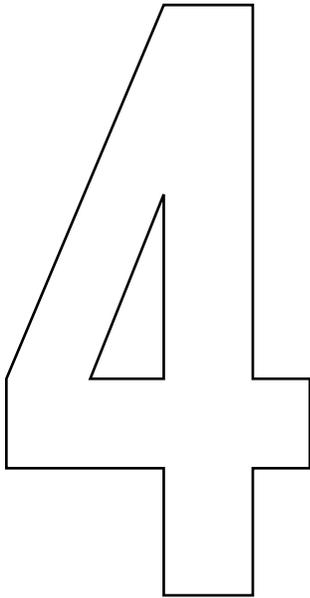
The FNSA provides a broad range of professional development events for principals and teachers that are designed specifically to reflect the realities of First Nations schools, including an annual Principals Short Course, annual provincial conferences, and workshops on a range of topics identified by First Nations schools as important. Those conventional forms of professional development are then complemented by in-school support.

For example, as described above, the FNSA is promoting the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) approach as a key element of school professional development efforts. Overall, PLCs involve teachers meeting regularly to identify essential and valued student learning, develop common formative assessments, analyze current levels of achievement, set goals, share strategies, and then create lessons to improve results. Such an approach represents truly embedded professional development. The FNSA supports this initiative through ongoing gatherings of schools that are using the model to facilitate a sharing of experiences and the provision of relevant information about PLCs and related instructional strategies. In addition, the FNSA uses webinars and in-school support to continually facilitate the PLC efforts.

The Professional Growth Process (PGP), described earlier in the document, also reflects the qualities of effective professional development described above, as it is based in a real-life context and directly tied to the experiences of First Nations school teachers and students. Principals can expose teachers to a variety of useful, relevant instructional ideas when principals are appropriately mentored and supported to do so – which is the goal of the PGP process.

The FNSA and FNEESC also are devoting significant resources to support a comprehensive in-school coaching initiative, including direct assistance from individuals with expertise not only in capacity building, but also in literacy development, student assessment, as well as special education programming.





Our responsibility is to be diligent about our connections to the community and our accountability to Chief and Council. The school's efforts must build on the community vision if we are to support the Nation's goals appropriately. Overall, the professional perspective needs to be linked to the community perspective. Balance is the key.

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## Advocating for Constituents and Communicating Effectively

School boards are the primary advocates for the school's constituents. For that reason, a board's focus must always be outward – towards the community it serves.

In fact, effective governance requires that boards keep their constituent's needs, and not staff needs, as their higher priority. Staff must be treated fairly and with respect, but the board's primary focus must always be towards how the school is pursuing its mission and vision and serving student and community needs.

But the board's advocacy role is not always easy. The board will hear a wide variety of ideas, opinions and suggestions on issues from many sources – opinions that often are expressed passionately. The board must filter, interpret, and make sense of the information and input it receives, and unfortunately, it is not always possible to keep everybody happy all of the time. If decision-making about the school was always simple and straightforward, there would be no need for the board. In the end, the board must take positions, make decisions, and give directions for the benefit of students, primarily, as well as parents, the community, and the school staff.

Many people may want to influence school board members. In responding to pressures, it is generally useful to keep the school's mission and vision front and centre, and make decisions based on those principles.



We need to be visible. We need to be out in the community, participating in activities. We need people to see that we understand the important connection between the school and community. We can be role models for others around us.

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### Who do you represent as a board member?

Answering that question can actually be confusing in some cases.

It is not uncommon for a board to appoint one of its members as its representative to yet another non-profit board. For example, the band council may appoint a counsellor as its representative to the school board. This raises the issue of who the member is representing when the school board meets. One strategy for dealing with this situation is to imagine that the board member is wearing a “hat” when he speaks on a matter. He may clarify that, as a board member, he wears two hats. At school board meetings, he is a school board member, and should speak and vote on matters in the interests of the school board’s constituents. It is important that a member in this situation be allowed to speak from different perspectives, clarifying which “hat” the member is wearing when making particular comments, especially if comments about different issues appear to be contradictory.

Finally, it is important that principals always strive to remain outside of the “politics” of the board. Principals provide advice and input as appropriate, and may, through artful presentation of information, influence the board’s decisions, but principals cannot specifically support an individual board member’s point of view. Principals must implement the decisions and direction as given by the board at a properly constituted meeting. Principals cannot change directions between meetings based on requests from individual board members, and they must never speak for the board in the community.

## 4.1 EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS

Effective boards build wider commitment to their school’s mission and vision through a strong, two-way communications program.

Who is to be the board’s spokesperson is a decision for the board. The board chair is often given responsibility for this task. If this is the case, if other board members choose to speak to the media or the community about board or school matters, they should make it clear that they are speaking as an individual board member, and not as a representative of the board.

The principal does not speak for the board, but the principal may be a spokesperson for the school and, with board approval, will often speak on matters related to the school’s operations.

#### 4.1.1 Communications Among Board Members

Communications among board members can often become an issue for consideration, particularly if information is not shared equally among all members. At the board table, each board member receives the same information and hears directly all of the comments made during the meeting. Away from the board table, communications and interactions among board member is more informal, and members may share and discuss information individually and in small groups. This informal sharing is natural, but it should not be interpreted as official discussion that can lead to directions to the principal or school actions.

Between meetings, the board should ensure that any communication from the board chair or principal is sent simultaneously to all board members. Problems and misunderstandings will occur when one or more board members are left out of the information loop, or when they do not receive information at the same time as their colleagues.

#### 4.1.2 Communications with the Principal

Technically, the board's communications and directions to the principal occur at board meetings. Between board meetings, it is expected that the principal will attend to the decisions and direction of the board, and to the daily management of the school.

However, it is unrealistic to expect that communication with the principal will occur only at board meetings. In First Nations communities, contact between board members and the principal occurs normally, often daily, through informal contact and discussion as people go about their everyday business.

There are advantages and disadvantages to having board members meet or directly contact the principal between board meetings. Some boards may encourage such informal communications, so that time is not wasted at board meetings discussing matters that are only of interest to one or two individuals. However, on boards where relationships are more fragile, such informal contact and communication can cause problems, and it may make some board members feel uncomfortable.

When board members contact and discuss matters individually with the principal, expect that confusion, misunderstandings, and miscommunications may occur. The principal cannot ensure that all board members will receive exactly the same information through individual discussions. The principal

certainly cannot control how any comments will be interpreted. What responses the principal gives to questions will depend on what questions are asked and how they are asked.

Therefore, as much as possible everyone involved in leading the school must strive to ensure that, as much as is reasonably possible, all board members get formal school-related information at the same time.

This being said, however, board members should expect that the board chair and the principal will have contact as necessary and appropriate between board meetings. Where the board chair has the confidence and support of the full board, such communication will not be a problem. If there is disagreement within the board, communication between the chair and the principal may not be well received and should be done only when necessary, and then carefully. Regardless, any communication or direction from the chair to the principal should be consistent with that given by the full board at its meetings.

#### **4.1.3 Communicating With Other School Employees**

##### **How should the board and individual board members communicate with employees?**

Very carefully!

Board members should approach direct communication with the school's employees with caution. The board speaks as a corporate body and the most appropriate communication with employees is through the principal. When this channel of communication is bypassed, confusion, misinformation, and misunderstandings can easily develop.

Yet it is not uncommon for board members to make direct contact with employees for a variety of reasons. They may have simple questions about the school's operation that do not require the principal's time personally to answer them. In the case of minor questions, direct communication is not usually problematic. Also, in First Nations communities, school board members regularly come into contact with school employees in day-to-day life, and will often engage in informal conversations.

However, it is important to try to avoid talking about school business in these situations. Employees who are experiencing a difficulty at work may try to communicate directly with board members, but if the principal is left out of the

information loop in communications between board members and employees, problems very often develop. Generally, the following recommendations are offered to avoid any potential misunderstandings.

- If employees contact you directly about matters that should more properly be discussed with the principal, recommend they communicate their concerns through proper channels.
- If you do hear out the employee, be sure to contact the principal immediately and share the information you received.

#### **4.1.4 Communicating With and Engaging Parents**

In a similar way, parents often contact board members directly. Generally, board members who are contacted directly by a parent with a complaint or question should always listen to the concerns. If the matter is a simple request for information or clarification, the board member may find the communication easy. However, if the parent's comments relate to a complaint or concern with an employee, caution is needed.

- If possible, one reasonable approach is to listen to the complaint, make sure you understand the concern, then refer the parent to the principal. Then call the principal to communicate that the parent will be calling to discuss a specific issue.
- Otherwise, you may wish to call the principal yourself and pass along the information, and ask that the principal handle the situation directly.

What is most important is that the parent feels heard, and that the principal has an opportunity to respond to any concerns parents may have. Often, misunderstandings can be addressed simply through a conversation with the parent. If necessary, serious concerns can be discussed at a school board meeting for a formal response from the board.

In addition, communication is not just the transmission of information to others; it is also the process of listening and receiving input, information and feedback from others. A communications problem for board members is assuming that a message sent is a message understood. Boards must develop multiple communications strategies to expose people to ideas many times and in many different ways before they can assume their messages are

being heard and understood, and a board should only make the assumption that its message was received if it has feedback mechanisms that serve as a communications check.

It is also critical for school boards to encourage all school staff to remember that their relationship with parents should extend beyond simple communications alone. Board members can help principals and support all school efforts to truly engage parents in the education process. School leaders, especially principals, must recognize and maintain a meaningful focus on the school's crucial link with parents and families, as well as the school's primary accountability to students and families.

Of course, for First Nations schools the relationship with and accountability to parents is particularly acute. An emphasis on the crucial role of First Nations families and communities in their children's development and learning is entirely consistent with First Nations education traditions. This understanding led the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) to comment:

Many Aboriginal leaders speak of resuming control of education, since First Nations and Inuit exercised complete control of education for countless generations. Rather than being a new responsibility, self-determination in education was practised by families and communities in earlier times.

Further, the fundamental right of First Nations parents to have a strong and meaningful voice in the education and learning of their children continues to be at the core of contemporary First Nations perspectives of education. The landmark 1972 document, *Indian Control of Education*, and almost all subsequent First Nations assertions of their education rights, have focused on the primary goal of parental control of education and the ultimate responsibility of parents for setting appropriate education goals.

Research also is very clear about the critical importance of engaging parents in student achievement, and extensive educational literature shows that home environments do matter. Study after study has shown that families can make a valuable difference to their children's learning, and that when families are involved in education, children do better in school and schools improve.

Accordingly, all schools must make every effort to foster the right kinds of school-family connections – those built on relationships, listening, welcoming, and shared decision-making.

Students whose parents are visible in the school and actively engaged in home learning activities understand that their parents value learning, which will encourage students to take school seriously and strive for success. Parents

also have invaluable insights and experiences to contribute to the learning process. In addition to their contributions at home, parents can greatly enhance a school's efforts, providing meaningful input into school decision-making and improving school programs by donating significant time and effort. Parents who are involved are more aware of what is happening in the school, and when given information about the school's goals and student achievement, they will better understand the school's efforts and challenges and help the school to progress.

Just as schools must maintain high expectations and embrace their role of supporting all students in reaching their full potential, it is critical that schools understand their power to address parental involvement and schools must (maintain high expectations) for their efforts to work with parents as valued partners in the education process. Schools should empathize with the challenges that exist for families and communities, but should focus on the school's beliefs and the assumptions that shape its practices with parents, adapting things that the school can control. Generally, schools should offer families information and any assistance they request to help them be constructively engaged in the education of their children

Overall, it is primarily the principal's responsibility to ensure that their schools are places where parents feel welcome and recognized for their strengths and contributions. But school boards can play a critical role in supporting all school efforts to engage parents for the benefit of schools, students, and the community.



Board members must strive to present issues clearly and effectively for the benefit of the school. It is important that we are able to answer questions and explain change. We can be a strong voice for our schools and students.

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## Support to Know About: The First Nations Parents Club

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The First Nations Parents Club, an initiative of the FNSA, began in 2000 with the intention of encouraging greater involvement of First Nations parents in schools and home learning efforts. The initiative involves the establishment of locally-based Parents Clubs in First Nations communities, which are organized and operated according to the needs of parents. Each Club can register with the FNSA, and in return will receive parenting materials, newsletters, Parents Club calendars, books for home reading, as well as a variety of gifts to recognize the significant contributions being made by First Nations parents throughout the province.

FNESC and the FNSA also have produced an updated Parents Handbook, which is available to anyone interested at no charge.

School boards can encourage their principals to find out whether a club is operating and, if not, facilitate the organization of a Parents Club in their community. All Parents Club materials, including the newly revised Handbook, are offered at no charge, and each community is eligible to enroll a club with the FNSA by contacting the office.

#### 4.1.5 Communicating With the Media

From time-to-time, people involved with the school may be called upon to deal with the media, as situations can arise that attract attention. Effective boards are prepared for such an occurrence.

If the media determines there is a story, reporters can be very aggressive in pursuing information. They may directly contact board members, the principal, employees, parents, and community members. If the media can get comments from individual board members that are contradictory, they may develop a story that takes on a life of its own. And if policies or procedures have not been developed to help channel the flow of communications, confusion and embarrassment may occur.

School policy should be clear about who can speak on behalf of the school, and the school board should clearly discuss this issue with the principal. It is very important that a consistent message be delivered to the media to avoid misunderstandings and conflict.

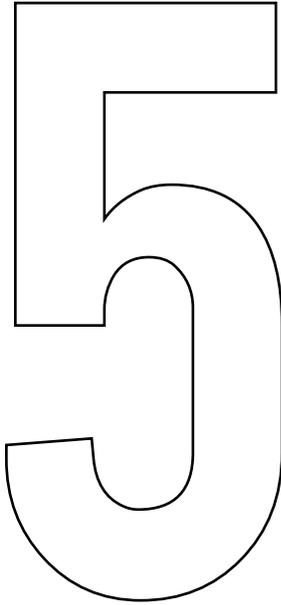
There are several strategies a board can pursue if the media desires information about the school. First, if the interest is simply informational, the principal may be authorized to speak for the organization. If the matter is political or controversial in nature, the board chair or some other designated spokesperson may speak for the board. If the matter is particularly sensitive, the board may wish to quickly meet, agree on a course of action, and issue its own media release.

Regardless of how the school board approaches this issue, it should be cautious. Reporters will be selective about which comments to use in their story. On controversial matters, a board is wise to issue its own media release, giving its side of a story, with relevant information and facts included as the board decides.

Further, communications with the media can go two-ways. Schools can be proactive in using the media as a way to promote their schools' excellent work. In fact, school issues reported by the media can have a strong impact on public attitudes. Schools should be persistent in sharing good news stories and in inviting journalists to positive school events. Doing so will help to promote the school's activities in the community and will help staff, students, and parents feel more proud of their school.

Again, what is most important is that the school board and principal openly communicate about how media relations will be handled. Also, if the principal and school board members have limited experience in media relations, it may be useful to consider training on how to make the most effective use possible of this important public relations mechanism





We cannot overstate the importance of developing the skills and confidence level of those who are making decisions for our students – especially board chairs. We need thorough orientations to ensure we have a shared understanding, a shared vision, and an informed awareness of our role and responsibilities.

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# Additional Issues to Address

## 5.1 BOARD DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

As highlighted in the handbook prepared by Thomas (2002), separate from any welcoming events and social activities that are planned, it is critical that school boards provide effective orientations for new members. Doing so will clearly demonstrate that the board is committed to ensuring that incoming members are knowledgeable, prepared and skilled.

In fact, effective boards usually have a policy confirming an orientation program for new board members. Such a policy is a statement from the board declaring the need for new members to be properly prepared for their role. The specific topics to be covered in the orientation may be listed in the policy.

Who plans and conducts the orientation is important. Having the board chair and / or other board members actively involved in the orientation planning and presentations can be very beneficial. Doing so will reflect the importance placed on the orientation. However, having board members lead the orientation program is not always possible or practical. The board may be new, with all of its members inexperienced or new to their role. Sometimes, board members may be uncomfortable in presenting information and leading the orientation.

In those cases, boards sometimes ask the principal to help provide an orientation to new members. While it may be seen as very positive that the board has adequate trust and confidence to let its principal undertake this important task, unfortunately having the principal present the orientation in isolation may confuse new board members regarding roles and reporting structures. It may be fine to have the principal present information and explain the school's operations, but



We need to stop being reactive, and start being pro-active. That includes being pro-active about our own training and board professional development.

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it is generally not appropriate for the principal to tell board members how to do their job. It would be better for any existing board members to lead the orientation, with the principal assisting as much as possible.

Otherwise, an independent person with expertise in board governance may be brought in to explain the board's governance role and responsibilities. In fact, experienced board members may even participate in such training as a refresher, or to enhance their skills in governance.

### **5.1.1 The Focus of the Orientation**

Many board orientations provide information about the school and about the staff and their jobs. This management information is important, but ideally the orientation will also share information regarding the governance role and responsibilities of the board. A useful approach may include providing appropriate information and documents, reviewing and explaining this information, and giving each new board member the opportunity to ask questions for clarification.

At a minimum, a board orientation should include the following.

- An introduction to the board and the principal, and other staff as time permits.
- A thorough explanation of the respective roles and responsibilities of the board and the principal.
- A presentation of planning documents approved by the board that focus on the board's mission, vision, values and goals for the school.
- A review of the policy manual and an explanation of policy processes and key policies.
- An overview of the budget and current financial documents explaining the financial operation of the school.
- An introduction to reports and evaluations that relate to matters before the board.

Several documents also will be of interest to new board members. Some directly affect the operation of the board and the school; others may be provided for information only. The following documents should be provided to new board members.

- Board meeting procedures, including an indication of how and when the chair is elected, when meetings are held, start and end times for meetings, expectations for board member attendance at meetings, what constitutes a quorum, and a list of board committees
- Minutes of past board meetings
- The school's policy manual
- Planning documents and school assessment project documentation
- Budget documents
- The school calendar

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### **A note on confidentiality**

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Maintaining confidentiality is a sensitive board issue, particularly in small communities where news travels fast and where people have a more intimate knowledge of others in the community. Board members must respect the confidential nature of information provided during the course of board deliberations. It is improper conduct for a board member to divulge, share or otherwise make public information that has been provided to the board in confidence. This includes not just the content of information, but also who said what, where and when.

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## 5.2 ESTABLISHING THE SCHOOL BUDGET

A budget is simply a forecast of expected revenues and expenditures for a stated period of time, usually a year. It is a projection of the funding needed to finance the school's operation for its budget year.

Boards may control two distinct budgets – an operational budget and a capital budget. The operational budget projects expenditures to cover basic operating costs, including, among other things: salaries and benefits for employees; instructional resources; technology and materials; training for board members, administrators, clerical and other staff; and utility, transportation and custodial costs. For most schools, the majority of operational costs are for staff expenses.

The capital budget includes, among others: costs for site purchases; facility construction and renovation; large information and technology infrastructure; and purchases of major pieces of costly equipment such as vehicles and buses. The board may need to enter into long-term financing arrangements to support the purchase of capital budget items.

Basically, the purpose of the budget is to carry the organization forward into the next year of its operation.

For some boards, budget planning basically involves thinking about what is required to maintain existing programs and services, and then to consider any additional services that might be possible with any remaining resources. With this approach to budget planning, boards may find themselves focusing on what they cannot do because of the funds they do not have.

A more effective approach is to focus on the board's vision and the goals first, and then consider how funds should be allocated to achieve the established priorities.

Once approved, the budget does not change, unless, of course, it is revised by the board. But the actual revenues and expenditures for a budget year will likely end up being different than what the board authorized for the final budget. Throughout the year, the board will receive information about spending. Generally, the principal makes spending decisions as required and keeps the Board informed about the school's financial situation.



A challenge for some First Nations school boards is starting a community conversation about appropriate pay scales for education staff. In some cases, this issue can be difficult to resolve, but adequate compensation and competitive rates of pay are important considerations in determining the quality of programming in First Nations schools. What can we do about that?

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## Questions and Answers About Establishing the Budget

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### ***What expertise in finance and budget should board members have?***

Board members are not expected to develop and monitor the school budget without assistance. Board members instead are expected to use common sense and ask appropriate questions. In-service training can be arranged if board members do want more information about financial management. It is also appropriate to ask the principal to present and explain all financial matters in an understandable format.

### ***What are the board's responsibilities related to developing, approving and monitoring the school's budgets and financial operations?***

The board is responsible for ensuring that processes are in place to: prepare the annual operating and capital budgets for approval by the board; monitor expenditures; and ensure that financial operations follow accepted accounting practices. The board can direct its principal to propose criteria, a process, and a schedule for the preparation and approval of the budget. When this information is received, the board can either accept the proposal as presented, or suggest changes it feels are necessary.

To monitor the budget and expenditures, the board creates policy as direction to the principal, and requests that budget information be presented in a format acceptable to, and understandable by, the board. For example, the board may direct that the principal provide monthly reports detailing the percentage of budget funds that has been spent or committed for each area of the school's operation.

### ***What if something is unclear?***

If the board is not satisfied with the presentation or formatting of budget information, it can request in-service training, further explanations from staff, or it may ask for the information to be presented and formatted differently. It is important that board members feel comfortable asking any questions they have, and they should never feel intimidated about requesting clarification or further information about financial issues.

Another check on the school's finances is the annual auditor's report. Independent auditors check the financial records and report their findings, in writing, directly to the board. If board members have questions about the auditor's report that the principal cannot answer, board members can expect the principal to help them in finding any answers they need.



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## Support to Know About: Tripartite Education Framework Agreement (TEFA)

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In December 2010, the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) announced that new financial resources would be provided for First Nations education in BC through what it then termed a “new approach to First Nations education funding.” The federal government made this announcement based upon the capacity demonstrated by First Nations in the BC Region to deliver collective educational support services and to establish strong partnerships with a range of stakeholders, meaning that First Nations in BC were seen to be prepared for the advancement of a respectful and effective tripartite arrangement.

After many months of negotiation, in January 2012 FNESC, the Government of Canada, and the Province of BC finally signed a Tripartite Education Framework Agreement (TEFA). This new agreement provides the foundation for a new funding arrangement that will provide funding to First Nations schools that is more flexible and more closely aligned to the financial resources provided to public schools by the BC Ministry of Education. The agreement also provides more comprehensive, flexible, and sustainable funding for the provision of second level services for First Nations education, building upon and supporting the research-based and unique First Nations school system that has been created in this province.

After considerable consultations with First Nations community and school representatives, ninety-nine percent of First Nations that operate their own schools in BC submitted the Band Council Resolution needed to confirm their participation in the TEFA. FNESC is now working with First Nations representatives and the FNSA to finalize details regarding the delivery of TEFA-related second level services for First Nations education.

More information about this new development is available at [www.fnesc.ca](http://www.fnesc.ca). Details regarding the second level services component of this agreement will continue to be shared and developed in collaboration with First Nations schools as the TEFA implementation proceeds.

### 5.3 ESTABLISHING POLICIES

Policies are the board's written directions that define the board's expectations and state what is to happen for various aspects of the school's operations.

Board policies direct and guide the actions and decisions of the principal in undertaking the daily management of staff and the school. They define the boundaries for administrative and staff action – boundaries about what can and cannot be done. They tell the principal what the staff is expected to do, and to what extent. All staff members, including the principal, are expected to follow board policies in their decision-making and in operating the school.

Policies may be general or specific, and long or short, as the board desires. Because they are intended to give direction only, and not to describe how something is to be done, they are often written as broad statements of intent. A policy may be as brief as a single sentence. For example, a school board may approve a policy stating: "The board directs that all school buildings and grounds be smoke-free." That is the policy - just the one sentence. There is no obligation on the board to make the policy longer or to provide more detail. Procedures for backing up the policy can be clarified by the principal.

A school board with a similar intention may approve a no smoking policy that provides more specific direction, such as one that states: "Smoking is not permitted on any school property or in the school building. The board will support programs that educate students and staff regarding the negative health consequences of abusive tobacco use." In this case the board has added an educational component to its policy.

To clarify a policy statement, some boards preface it with a "rationale." The rationale briefly states why the policy has been developed. A preamble to the no-smoking policy may be stated: "The board is concerned with the negative health effects of smoking on community members. The board has reviewed research that concludes that abusive smoking can result in cancer and other health conditions." The rationale may be seen as helpful, but again it is not necessary. The format for policies is to be determined by each board, with advice from the principal.



A real concern for some First Nations schools is board members who are unaware of the school policies, or having under-developed, ineffective policies in place. We need a solid foundation for our decision-making and our actions.

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## Questions and Answers About School Policies (Thomas, 2002)

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### ***What is the best format for school board policies?***

Generally, there is no one standard way to write and format policies. It is only necessary that they provide concise, clear direction. The style depends largely by the person who writes them and the board that approves them.

### ***What are administrative regulations and procedures?***

For many schools, statements of procedure are written to accompany policy statements. While the policy states what is to be done, procedures – usually prepared by the principal – describe some specifics of how the policy will be implemented. The procedures should reflect the principal's role in implementing the board's policies.

### ***How many policies should a board have?***

There is no ideal minimum or maximum number of policies. What is important is that there are enough policies to provide for the effective operation of the organization.

### ***Who writes the board's policies?***

Normally, board members do not write policy. The board's responsibility is to approve policy. Often the principal or some other person with the appropriate expertise drafts policies for board review. One effective strategy is to have the board discuss a topic, with an appropriate person recording the main points of the discussion and then drafting a policy for board approval.

### ***What is a policy manual?***

In order to ensure that the board's policies are clearly understood and readily available, all of the board's

existing policies are normally collected into a policy manual. That document then becomes an important operational guidebook.

Not all decisions of the board need to be collected and published in the board's policy manual. It is the board's more important decisions that are translated into policies and then included in the policy manual. Other decisions may simply be recorded in the board's meeting minutes for future reference.

### ***How is the policy manual kept up to date?***

The policy manual should be a "living" document used regularly by board members and staff. But unless a process is established to keep policy manuals current, they can quickly become out-of-date.

There are several strategies for keeping policy manuals current. One is to annually republish and redistribute copies of the manual. Another is to use a three ring binder format and require all policy manual holders to update their manuals upon receipt of policy updates. Board members find it easier to check their policies if each manual clearly indicates the date of first approval, and dates of any subsequent amendments. The principal should ensure that a process is in place to keep policy manuals up-to-date.

### ***What is the legal status of board policy?***

Decisions of the board, whether translated into written policies and included in the board's policy manual or remaining as decisions recorded into board meeting minutes, carry the weight of law. Because boards can be held accountable and liable for their policies and decisions, it is essential that policies be accurate, current and relevant, and particularly that they communicate exactly what the board intends as direction on a given matter.

***Who decides what is a matter of policy for the board's action, and what are to be considered as administrative issues and procedures?***

Each board will develop its policies in a manner that is acceptable to the board. What one board may include in a policy, another may leave for the principal to include in administrative procedures. A simple guideline is to understand that the board determines what is to be done and then generally leaves it up to the principal to determine how the policy will be implemented.

***What is the difference between a draft policy and a final policy?***

When approving policy, it is not always possible to predict all of its implications and consequences for the management and operation of the school. To ensure that there is an opportunity for feedback to policies, some boards give approval-in-principle to a policy and then direct that it be circulated for comment and feedback. If it does not receive any negative feedback on its draft policy, or if any expressed concerns are minor and can be addressed without changing the policy, the board will then give final approval to the draft policy at the next regularly scheduled meeting. This can be an effective process; trying policies before they are given final approval lessens the chance that the board will have to retract a policy because of a meaning or interpretation that was not intended or predicted.

***How can a board decide if it is giving proper attention to its policy-making role?***

A quick check to see if the board is focused to its policy role is to think about: how often the board refers to its policies; if the board follows its policies, or ignores them; if the system's practices are consistent with policies; and whether or not policy matters are the focus of board and board committee meeting agendas.

The board speaks with only one voice. If the board approves a policy, all members must follow the policy unless the board as a whole retracts it. Similarly, new boards inherit the policies of the prior board. If a new board has concerns with policies, it should follow the established policy process for changing or cancelling them. In the meantime, a new board cannot ignore the established, written policy of the previous board.

## 5.4 EFFECTIVE STRUCTURES AND MEETING STRATEGIES

Board members and their principals sometime complain that they have too many meetings and that board meetings are less productive than they could be. Therefore, increasing the effectiveness of board and board committee meetings should be an issue for ongoing attention.

How school boards prepare for meetings and conduct their business differs, but overall boards should clarify their rules of order for board meeting discussion and debate and create procedures to resolve any disagreements that might arise.

As described above, the board properly conducts its business at, and only at, duly constituted board meetings.

### 5.4.1 Board Meetings

How a school board conducts its business will vary according to: the training, background and experience of board members; the influence of the principal; past practices and local politics; and reporting requirements, if any, to a higher authority.

Board meetings are of two types: regular and special.

Regular board meetings are held according to a predefined schedule that is set by the board. The frequency and length of the board's meetings and the topics for discussion are determined by the board, with input from the principal.

“Special” board meetings are called when an urgent matter requires the board's attention between regular board meetings. The discussion at a special board meeting should be limited to the topic(s) as stated in the published agenda for the meeting.

It is important that boards define the circumstances under which special meetings can be called and the required notice to board members. For example, a board might clarify that a special meeting of the board can be called for a specific stated purpose, but only with 72 hours notice to board members (the notice time will vary, depending on the decision of each board). The board might further clarify that, in emergency situations, the 72 hour notice requirement may be waived with the unanimous consent of board members.



People will have differing opinions. That is what makes a healthy board. Just make sure everyone is heard.

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In this situation, the board would be free to meet as quickly as board members could get together, providing of course that all board members had been notified of the meeting.

Reasons for special board meetings might include, among others:

- financial situations requiring direct and immediate board attention;
- a school incidence involving violence or a very serious problem;
- an incident that affects the ability of the principal to fulfill a critical aspect of the position.

#### 5.4.2 Rules of Order

Most commonly, decisions of school boards occur through motions made at properly called board meetings. Only a board member can propose a board motion and it must be seconded by another board member to be accepted for board discussion. At the time a motion is made, its wording should be clarified to ensure there is no misunderstanding among board members about what is being stated. Some boards require that board members put their motions in writing. Other boards do not require this approach.

All board members should have an opportunity to comment on proposed motions. Usually, when any board member feels the discussion has been sufficient and it is time for the board to decide on the matter, a board member will “call the question.” The chair will announce that the question has been called and ask which board members are in favour of the motion, and which are against it. Board members who do not wish to vote either for or against the motion, for whatever reasons, are said to abstain. One reason a board member may choose to abstain is a perceived personal conflict of interest in the matter under discussion. In this case the board member, in addition to abstaining from the vote, may also physically remove him or herself from the board discussion on the matter, and ask that the absence from the discussion and abstention from the vote be recorded in the minutes.

A board member who, at any time during the meeting, feels that proper meeting procedures are not being followed may call a “point of order,” which requires the board chair to listen immediately to the member’s concern and decide on its validity. If the board member is not satisfied, or if any other board members feel the chair has not made the right decision on the concern, the

member may “challenge the chair.” In this situation, the board chair asks for a vote of the board members to determine whether they support the chair’s decision.

To assist the board with the conduct of its business, many boards use commonly accepted rules of order for their meetings. One common guidebook often used by boards for the conduct of meetings is Robert’s Rules of Order. A consensus model also is an entirely legitimate approach to the conduct of meetings. What is important is that each board find practices and procedures that meet its needs, and that all board members fully understand how board meetings will be run.

The rules of order can become quite technical in their application, and many board members find it frustrating when their meetings get bogged down in what they perceive as bureaucratic rules of order. However, having commonly accepted rules of order ensures fairness in the manner in which board matters are discussed and decided, and they do help create a businesslike atmosphere to board meetings.

### **5.4.3 The Board Chair**

#### **How is the board chair selected?**

Every group needs a leader. Although boards often elect their leader at the inaugural meeting of the board, this practice varies. The election or appointment of the chair should be defined in the board’s meeting procedures. Some boards desire that the chair position rotate annually or biannually to give more than one board member the opportunity to lead the board. Other boards find comfort in a strong leader who represents the board well and who is willing, with the confidence of the board, to remain in the position. Both approaches are fine.

#### **What are the duties of the board chair?**

The board chair usually acts as the board’s spokesperson and is viewed as the communication link between the board and the principal when the board is not in session. The chair does not, without the approval of the board, make board decisions, speak on behalf of the board, or direct the principal. The

chair's specific responsibilities and duties, as approved by the board, should be clarified in writing. A chair's primary duties are to: prepare for and conduct board meetings; provide leadership at and away from the board table; act, with the authorization of the board, as the board's representative; and, with the principal, ensure follow-up to decisions of the board.

#### 5.4.4 Board Committees

It is up to each board to decide what committees it needs, their purpose, their membership, and their terms of reference. The board's committee structure and operation is often explained in board policy. Terms of reference should be defined for each committee, and should include, at a minimum:

- the committee's membership (who will be on the committee?);
- purpose (why does it exist?);
- duties (what is the committee expected to do?); and
- communication and reporting mechanisms (who will the committee communicate with, and how will the committee report back to the board?).

Overall, Board committees exist to help the board govern, not to help the principal manage the school.

It is also important to remember that committee meetings are not meetings of the board – and therefore board decisions cannot be made at those meetings. The conduct of board committee meetings generally follow many of the same procedures as board meetings, but with important differences. The committee cannot make decisions on behalf of the board. The committee chair will present the committee's report to the board at a board meeting, and will present any recommendations of the committee as motions for the board's consideration.



Make board meetings as manageable as possible. The most capable people are often the busiest. This can be especially true in First Nations communities, which are small and sometimes have a limited pool of people who can act on boards. It can be hard to find people who can commit the time required to be an effective board member. Trying to accommodate demanding schedules as much as possible while still making sure the board's job is done well ... that's our challenge.

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## Key Elements of Effective Meetings (Thomas, 2002)

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**A Stated Meeting Purpose:** It may seem self-evident to say that every meeting should have a stated purpose, but in practice this is not always the case. Sometimes meetings are held simply because someone decided it was time to have a meeting. Perhaps a board committee has not met for a while, and the committee chair feels guilty about this. In other cases, a committee may set a regular meeting schedule (for example, the first Monday of each month), and committee members may find themselves meeting according to the schedule, even if there is no formal business to conduct. When this happens, the chair may “create” an agenda to justify the meeting, and the meeting may consist of a series of informational reports that could have been communicated in other ways. This is not necessarily the best use of time. Instead, clarifying the purpose of the meeting can serve to clarify the need for the meeting.

**Attendance of Key People:** Once the purpose of a meeting has been clarified, the next consideration is “Who should attend, and for what reasons?” People who are not required at the meeting should not be asked to attend. The principal can usually determine whether key personnel are needed at the meeting as resource people.

**A Published Agenda:** Generally, board meetings should be about board business, not about the staff’s business, and because the board owns the agenda, the board should create it and all board members should have equal opportunity for input. Typically, the board chair and the principal meet to prepare the agenda and then share it with other board members for comments and additions. Also, finalized agendas, along with background information, should be distributed in sufficient time for board members to read and study agenda materials, and to be fully prepared for the board meeting.

A big issue for many boards is “surprise” agenda items, which can create many problems. At the start of the meeting, the board chair will ask for approval of the agenda. Generally, this is not the best time to be adding items to the published agenda.

**Meeting Start and End Times:** Meetings should have a clear start time as designated by the board. It is frustrating when delays occur because one or more members are late, and so it is important that all members strive to arrive on time. Boards should also agree on their expected end-times for meetings. The board chair should pace the meeting and help focus discussion in order to meet that end-time. Board meetings should not be endurance contests. People do not contribute their best ideas when they are tired and exhausted, and meetings should end at a reasonable hour whenever possible.

**Frequency of Board Meetings:** The frequency of meetings is not a sign of an effective or ineffective board. Boards that are governance focused, that provide clear direction, and that put their time and effort into hiring the right principal, generally find they need fewer, not more meetings.

**An Effective Board Chair:** An effective chair is critical for an effective board meeting. The effective chair knows and follows established rules of order, treats board members and staff fairly and with respect, and allows sufficient discussion of topics to permit good board decisions. Each board member should have an opportunity to speak on any matter before the board.

Unfortunately, some boards have members who do not or will not comment at the meeting but then later, after the meeting is over, give their opinions about what should have happened. One way for the chair to deal with this issue is to call on each board member,



in turn, to speak on the topic. Directors who choose not to comment cannot later say that they didn't have an opportunity to share their thoughts on the matter.

**Focused Discussion:** Once the agenda has been adopted by the board at its meeting, board members should discipline themselves to ensure that their discussion and debate is properly focused to agenda topics. It is important that board discussion not wander off topic and that excessive repetition does not prolong discussion unnecessarily.

**Striving for Consensus:** Many boards strive for consensus when making decisions. On the positive side, striving to reach consensus requires board members to truly listen to the debate and to try and understand and appreciate positions that are contrary to their own. If taking a little longer with discussion produces a decision that all board members feel they can support, then the board should strive for this level of agreement. If this is not possible, some boards decide to rely on a voting process. Regardless of which approach is used, board members must remember that the board speaks with only one voice. There is only one board position on any matter, whether it is arrived at by consensus or by majority vote. Obviously, board members will feel better about a consensus decision than a 4-3 vote, but regardless – once the decision has been made, the principal must respond to the outcome.

**Meeting Minutes:** There are many formats for recording meeting minutes. What is important is that the meeting minutes record the board's key decisions and directions. It is not necessary to provide a transcript of the meeting, nor to provide a summary of the discussion and debate. However, if the board wants a summary to help capture the discussions that

took place, the minute-taker may be asked to take more extensive notes, which should be written as objectively as possible.

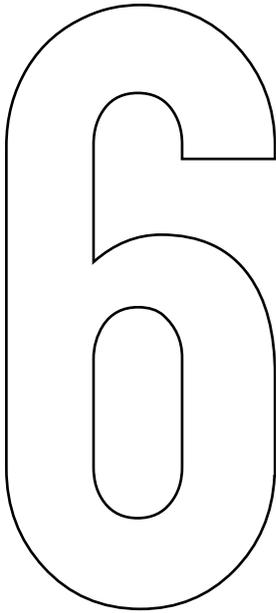
The board secretary's job is to oversee the preparation of the minutes. When motions are made, they should be clearly stated and it should not be left to the secretary to "clean up the wording" for the minutes.

Board minutes should be quickly typed, checked, and circulated to board members and the principal. This is necessary to ensure that required follow-up occurs, and that the direction of the board is properly understood.

**Agreement on Follow-Up Action:** It is frustrating to put time and energy into discussion and decisions, only to find that the direction was not carried out as intended. But this can occur if board direction is vague and unclear, and if meeting minutes do not specify who is to do what and by when. An effective board chair will ensure that the motions made and directions given are clear, and that there is a common understanding about what action is required, and by when, from the principal. Also, board members with concerns regarding board meeting follow-up should ask for a status report from the board chair or principal, as appropriate.

**Dealing with Delegations:** Boards may encounter situations where others request to attend a board meeting and speak to the board. The board therefore should consider approving a policy specifying the process by which delegations will be heard at board meetings. The delegation should be asked to clarify its concerns and questions in writing, and submit them for inclusion in the agenda package. This is important. The group may not be clear about its concerns and what action it expects from the board, and requiring the delegation to put its concerns into writing helps the

delegation become clear about what it is requesting. The delegation also should be asked to designate a leader to speak on behalf of the group, and because it has other important business to conduct the board may specify that a limited time period is available. Otherwise, several people may speak out at one time, making it difficult to understand the proceedings, different and contradictory comments may be made by delegation members, and their presentation and comments may stretch on during the meeting. Trying to shut down discussion without a pre-set timeframe can make people more upset than necessary.



## Conclusions & References

The FNSA fully recognizes the invaluable contributions made by members of First Nations school governing agencies throughout BC. Their dedication and commitment is a key component of the success being achieved by First Nations schools. First Nations schools play a critical role in overall efforts to revitalize First Nations languages and cultures, and they represent special learning environments where First Nations learners can feel particularly valued and supported. They also maintain high expectations for First Nations students and are striving to raise levels of achievement for learners. School boards are key to leading all of that work.

The FNSA therefore hopes that this handbook can assist First Nations school boards as they define their school's purpose, effectively direct school staff, plan for and monitor school growth, and ensure that their schools are places where First Nations learners can thrive.

Feedback and comments on this document are welcome at any time, and school boards are encouraged to contact the FNSA with any questions or requests for help.

<b>A BOARD SELF EVALUATION</b>	<b>Yes / No</b>
<b>WORKS TOWARD A CLEAR PURPOSE</b>	
The board focuses on student learning as its highest priority	
The board supports all efforts to promote student learning related to their language, culture, traditions and values	
The board oversees the development of a school mission and vision statement, which provide the foundation for board decision-making and school actions	
The board annually approves school goals, consistent with its vision, which are regularly reviewed and discussed by the board and principal	
The board encourages strategic planning and supports innovation and change	
<b>MAINTAINS A GOVERNANCE FOCUS</b>	
The board focuses on governance, not administrative issues	
The board has clarified the decision-making authority of the principal	
The board supports the principal and has confidence in his or her daily management of the school	
<b>ACTS ETHICALLY AND PROFESSIONALLY</b>	
The board maintains effective policies, procedures, and practices	
Board members maintain confidentiality appropriately, especially in regard to board discussions and student and parent information	
Board members diligently avoid conflicts of interest	
Board members follow clear policies that guide decision-making	



<b>A BOARD SELF EVALUATION</b>	<b>Yes / No</b>
<b>COMMITTS TO INFORMED PRACTICE AND DECISION-MAKING</b>	
The board has clarified and understands its authority and responsibilities to Chief and Council	
The board provides a comprehensive orientation for new board members	
The board encourages, supports and participates in ongoing training in governance	
Board members are knowledgeable and well informed regarding the school's programs and services	
The board regularly conducts a self-assessment with the goal of enhancing effectiveness	
<b>MAINTAINS RESPECTFUL, COLLABORATIVE BOARD RELATIONS</b>	
Board members respect the opinions of others	
The board maintains clear expectations for board member behaviour and conduct	
The board has a clearly defined code of ethics for board members and the principal	
Each board member is given the opportunity, and is encouraged, to express opinions on any matter under consideration	
Differing opinions are fully accepted as a positive part of board discussion	



<b>A BOARD SELF EVALUATION</b>	<b>Yes / No</b>
<b>FOCUSES ON EFFECTIVE BOARD OPERATIONS</b>	
Board members commit to the concept of the board as a corporate body and speaks with one voice	
Board members understand that they do not have any individual powers, and that they cannot make decisions, or take action individually, on behalf of the board	
The board has clear policies related to meeting notice requirements	
The board has clearly defined rules of order for the conduct of meetings, including quorum, voting procedures, and the selection of the chair	
Board meetings are conducted in a business-like manner according to the established rules of order	
The board receives information (e.g., agendas, minutes, reports, etc.) in a timely manner	
Minutes of board meetings clearly state board decisions and direction, and are distributed in a timely fashion	
The board ensures appropriate follow-up to board decisions	
<b>FULFILLS ITS FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT ROLE EFFECTIVELY AND EFFICIENTLY</b>	
The board has clarified, in writing, the process and criteria for developing the school's budget	
The board understands and monitors budget expenditures	
<b>MAINTAINS EFFECTIVE AND APPROPRIATE COMMUNICATIONS</b>	
The board ensures relevant information sharing with constituents	
The board establishes collaborative relationships with staff and the community	



<b>A BOARD SELF EVALUATION</b>	<b>Yes / No</b>
For substantive issues, the board's communication with staff, and the staff's communication with the board, is through the principal	
The board communicates information effectively through a variety of methods	
<b>FULFILLS ITS ACCOUNTABILITY OBLIGATIONS</b>	
The board requests and reviews timely reports on school programs and student progress	
The board makes regular, formal reports to Chief and Council	
The board ensures that there is responsible and appropriate reporting to parents	
The board reports to the community about important and relevant issues	

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## APPENDIX

# 1

# DRAFT FNSA Standards for First Nations School Boards

These Standards are being shared as **DRAFT** in order to facilitate discussion and feedback. The Standards have not been finalized. The document has not yet been endorsed by the FNSA. The final draft will be presented to the FNSA Membership at the 2014 Annual General Meeting for dialogue and, if appropriate, endorsement.

## PREAMBLE

The BC First Nations Schools Association (FNSA) Standards for First Nations school boards are founded upon the FNSA's commitment to the principles of First Nations control of First Nations education. A key component of any education system is strong school leadership – including effective governance of schools by local governing agencies. The following Standards, based on research and input from First Nations representatives, attempt to outline the characteristics of effective governance of First Nations schools, which are operated by First Nations as a reflection of their jurisdiction for the education of their learners.

The FNSA is aware that First Nations schools differ greatly in terms of their governance structures. In some cases, the schools are under the direct authority of Chief and Council, with no school board or committee in existence. In other cases, communities have decided to establish a formal, independent school board, with members elected through a community voting procedure. Other schools are guided by some kind of education or school committee. Membership on those committees can include elected members or volunteers, sometimes involving only parents, or some mix of parents, community members and Elders.

The relationship of the school board or committee and the Chief and Council can be relatively separate, with the board providing regular

updates to the Chief and Council but functioning with significant autonomy. In other cases, the relationship could be one in which the board or committee reports to and is under the authority of the Chief and Council.

The FNSA respects that the choice of how to operate the school is entirely dependent upon what works best given the circumstances of each school and community, but it generally supports the creation of independent governing agencies with a specific focus on the success of students enrolled in the community's schools. For simplicity, these Standards use the term school board to describe these agencies.<sup>1</sup>

The FNSA in no way expects that every First Nations school board in BC will demonstrate all of the attributes highlighted below. The Standards have been written to represent exemplary practices – ideals to which First Nation school boards can aspire. The hope is that the Standards will provide inspiration to school boards, providing a foundation for efforts to review their own practices, assess their strengths, and strive toward improvement. School boards also are encouraged to consider these Standards within their own contexts and determine whether any other issues are of particular importance to their communities, schools, and students. The Standards are really meant to be a basis for reflection.

The following FNSA Standards and Performance Indicators assert that First Nations school boards should:

- maintain a consistent focus on the school's purpose, using evidence to ensure that the school is reflecting the community's vision for education and continually supporting high levels of learning and achievement for all students;
- reflect the governance role of school boards, hiring and supporting effective senior staff and recognizing their responsibility for the administration and day-to-day management of the school;
- act according to clear codes of ethics, policies, and procedures to maintain a consistent focus on the best interest of students, parents, the community, and the school;
- effectively fulfill their advocacy role for the benefit of the school and students;

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1. The Standards have not been written to have relevance for public school boards, which operate within different structures, legislation, and environments, with their own support structures.

- address the need for adequate professional development and information sharing to support informed board practice and decision-making;
- maintain respectful, collaborative relationships;
- operate effectively, conducting business according to transparent, efficient practices;
- fulfill their financial management role for the benefit of the school;
- ensure appropriate, relevant, two-way communications and support information sharing with the school's constituents and partners; and
- embrace their accountability to students, parents, staff, the community, and Chief and Council.

**The following Standards are currently in DRAFT form only.** They are meant to promote discussion about the challenging and very important role of school boards in supporting effective schools and student success.

*Feedback to this draft is welcome. All comments and suggestions will be fully considered as the Standards evolve in consultation with First Nations representatives.*

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**STANDARDS FOR FIRST NATION SCHOOL BOARDS** - Draft

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**Standard 1: First Nations School Boards work toward a clear purpose, ensuring and overseeing the development and implementation of a shared school mission, vision, goals, and values to support high levels of learning and achievement for all students.**

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*Performance Indicators: the School Board ...*

- a. maintains a clear, persistent focus on student learning as its highest priority.
- b. understands the potential and responsibility of schools to teach all children at high levels, recognizing that challenges exist but expecting timely improvements in student achievement as a result of the school's efforts.
- c. focuses on quality instruction and measurable results.
- d. supports all school efforts to embed the Nation's values, culture, language, and priorities in the school curriculum and classrooms.
- e. ensures that the school has a community-driven mission statement that clearly defines the school's purpose and provides the foundation for board decision-making.
- f. supports a school vision statement that describes the school's desired future.
- g. approves the school's goals, which are consistent with its vision, and regularly reviews and discusses the goals with the principal.
- h. sets strategic direction based upon the desired future for the school.
- i. encourages and supports innovation and change.

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**Standard 2: First Nations School Boards understand and commit to their governance role, understanding that administration of the school is the responsibility of the principal / school staff.**

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*Performance Indicators: the School Board ...*

- a. clearly demonstrates that it is visionary and goal-oriented.
- b. focuses its efforts and meetings on governance, not administrative issues.
- c. fulfills its responsibility for hiring a principal who is responsive to the community's vision of education, and effectively monitors the performance of the principal in ensuring improvements in student achievement.



- d. supports the principal's efforts to maintain a safe, culturally relevant, academically rigorous learning environment for all students.
- e. demonstrates trust, confidence and support for the principal.
- f. collaborates with the principal regularly to review and discuss progress towards annually approved school goals.
- g. works with the principal as a team, and is perceived by staff and constituents to be effective in its governance role.
- h. clarifies the decision-making authority of the principal, respecting which decisions should be made by the principal and which decisions are to be made by the board.
- i. does not direct or interfere in staff matters that are the jurisdiction of the principal.

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**Standard 3: First Nations School Boards act ethically and in the best interest of students, parents, the community, and the school.**

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*Performance Indicators: the School Board ...*

- a. makes student-centred decisions at all times.
- b. through its policies, procedures, and practices, respects and maintains the confidentiality of students, parents, staff, and board members.
- c. ensures its members continually work to avoid conflict of interest.
- d. promotes professional conduct and attitudes on the part of all members.
- e. has processes in place to support board members in following all appropriate protocols.
- f. creates and maintains policies that provide clear direction.
- g. makes personal wellness a priority – for students, parents, school staff, and board members themselves.

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**Standard 4: First Nations School Boards are committed to fulfilling their advocacy role for the benefit of the school and students.**

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*Performance Indicators: the School Board ...*

- a. uses its mission and goals to set direction for its advocacy efforts.
- b. asks critical questions related to student learning to inform their advocacy and identify areas of needs.



- c. bases its advocacy on substantive evidence to focus attention appropriately and validate its efforts.
- d. understands policies related to how information is shared and who speaks for the board in varying situations.
- e. appropriately involves Elders to reinforce the school's respect of the Nation's values, traditions, language and culture.
- f. recognizes the rights of parents and the benefits associated with effective parental involvement in home and school learning.
- g. seeks funding and resources to address the needs of students.
- h. builds strong connections to other agencies and social groups to address the range of issues that affect the interests of children.
- i. keeps leadership fully informed of key issues and seeks direction as appropriate.

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**Standard 5: First Nations School Boards are committed to informed practice and decision-making.**

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*Performance Indicators: the School Board ...*

- a. has clarified and understands its authority, accountability, and responsibilities to Chief and Council.
- b. provides a comprehensive orientation for new board members.
- c. supports all members to ensure they are knowledgeable and well informed regarding the school's purpose, programs and services.
- d. seeks training and external support to adequately address capacity building for successful board governance.
- e. regularly conducts a self-assessment with the goal of enhancing its effectiveness.

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**Standard 6: First Nations School Boards are committed to respectful, collaborative board relations.**

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*Performance Indicators: the School Board ...*

- a. requires that all members respect the opinions of others.
- b. maintains clear expectations for board member behaviour and conduct.
- c. has a clearly defined code of ethics for members and the principal.



- d. encourages each board member to express opinions on any matter under consideration.
- e. accepts differing opinions as a positive part of board discussion.
- f. welcomes, values, and appreciates the individual contribution of each member.

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**Standard 7: First Nations School Boards focus on effective board operations.**

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***Performance Indicators: the School Board ...***

- a. encourages all members to commit to the concept of the board as a corporate body that speaks with one voice.
- b. makes certain that all board members understand that they do not have any individual powers, and that they cannot make decisions, or take action individually, on behalf of the board.
- c. has clear policies related to meeting notice requirements.
- d. has clearly defined rules of order for the conduct of meetings, including quorum, voting procedures, and the selection of the chair.
- e. conducts meetings in a business-like manner according to the established rules of order.
- f. maintains meeting minutes that clearly state board decisions and direction.
- g. receives information (e.g., agendas, minutes, reports, etc.) in a timely manner.
- i. ensures follow-up to board decisions.

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**Standard 8: First Nations School Boards fulfill their financial management role effectively and efficiently.**

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***Performance Indicators: the School Board ...***

- a. has clarified, in writing, the process and criteria for the development of the school's annual budget.
- b. remains knowledgeable about and understands the school's budget.
- c. has a process in place for monitoring budget expenditures.



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**Standard 9: First Nations School Boards maintain effective and appropriate communications.**

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*Performance Indicators: the School Board ...*

- a. ensures relevant people are informed of the school's mission, vision, values, goals, policies, and achievements.
- b. establishes collaborative relationships with staff and the community.
- c. engages both internal and external stakeholders to achieve relevant goals.
- d. communicates information effectively through a variety of methods.
- e. communicates formal and substantive issues to staff through the principal.
- f. listens, seeks input, and hears feedback from constituents.
- g. celebrates the school's accomplishments and shares its progress pro-actively and positively.

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**Standard 10: First Nations School Boards fulfill their accountability obligations.**

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*Performance Indicators: the School Board ...*

- a. requests and thoroughly reviews timely reports on school programs and student achievement.
- b. formally reviews budgets and maintains financial transparency.
- c. makes regular, formal reports to the Chief and Council.
- d. ensures that there is appropriate and responsible reporting to parents.
- e. regularly and thoroughly reports to the community on school operations and student progress.



## APPENDIX

# 2

# FNSA Standards for Teachers and Principals

## FNSA STANDARDS FOR TEACHERS IN FIRST NATIONS SCHOOLS

Last updated July 2012

### PREAMBLE

The following First Nations Schools Association (FNSA) Teaching Standards, Competencies, and Performance Indicators are intended to support First Nations school principals and teachers in providing the highest quality education to students. The materials are based upon the following assumptions.

Teachers in First Nations schools:

- promote high expectations and academic achievement for all students in a safe and nurturing environment
- help all students achieve their full potential in the context of relationships that are based on trust, respect, and positive regard
- recognize that students are best understood and supported in the context of their culture, traditions, extended family, and community
- respect the dignity, worth, and uniqueness of each individual (student, family member, and colleague)

Teachers in First Nations schools are primarily responsible for providing safe, healthy, and responsive settings for students. The teachers are committed to supporting students' holistic development, respecting

students' individual differences, dignity, contributions, and unique potential. They strive to promote students' positive self-identity, competence, self-worth, and resiliency. They recognize the special and critical role of families and communities in First Nations schools. Teachers in First Nations schools are committed to effective practice, a focus on high levels of learning, contributing to a collaborative culture, and striving for continuous growth in order to contribute as effective professionals.

The following materials outline a concept of professional responsibilities in the following standard sections.

- Valuing all students
- Implementing effective teaching practices
- Involving families and communities
- Applying principles of assessment
- Understanding and conveying critical issues associated with First Nations, Canada, and the world
- Engaging in effective professional development
- Acting ethically and professionally

In each of those areas, the Standards, Competencies, and Performance Indicators describe a set of ideals for exemplary practice.

Guiding Questions are also available, which elaborate on those ideas and describe the FNSA's expectations in further detail. The goal of the questions is to assist practitioners in thinking about their own teaching practice and areas for improvement. While the questions provide direction and suggestions, teachers and principals are encouraged to combine the guidance of these materials with their own professional judgment and the spirit that informs the overall work.

These materials present the FNSA's concept of professional responsibility that reflects our commitment to the core values of our schools and profession. The FNSA intends that this work will celebrate the work of our teachers and promote excellent practice within our schools.

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**FNSA STANDARDS FOR TEACHERS**

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**Standard 1: Educators in First Nations schools value and care for all students, acting at all times in the best interest of students.**

**Competency 1.1: Educators in First Nations schools ensure the physical, intellectual, and emotional security of all students.**

*Performance Indicators: the teacher ...*

- 1.1.1 demonstrates an understanding that all students should receive an education, regardless of location, ethnicity, or academic abilities.
- 1.1.2 demonstrates an understanding of and respect for the community's mission and vision for the school and for the education of their children.
- 1.1.3 ensures that the classroom physical environment is well maintained, clean, safe, and appropriate for a variety of learning needs.
- 1.1.4 implements effective classroom rules / behavioural expectations with students to ensure their safety.
- 1.1.5 promotes students' self-esteem and positive self-identity.

**Competency 1.2: Educators in First Nations schools treat all students with dignity, respect, warmth and freedom from domination.**

*Performance indicators: the teacher...*

- 1.2.1 interacts in a positive, friendly and respectful manner while maintaining a professional stance.
  - 1.2.2 incorporates First Nations cultural understandings and practices in relationships with students and in teaching interactions.
  - 1.2.3 promotes polite, respectful, and caring student-to-student interactions.
  - 1.2.4 communicates information from an anti-bias perspective.
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**Competency 1.3: Educators in First Nations schools act within ethical and legal boundaries for the benefit and protection of all students.**

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*Performance Indicators: the teacher ...*

- 1.3.1 demonstrates an understanding of Child Protection legislation, as well as school / community protocols regarding referrals and child safety.

**Standard 2: Educators in First Nations schools implement effective teaching practices.**

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**Competency 2.1: Educators in First Nations schools create an environment that promotes high levels of learning for all students.**

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*Performance Indicators: the teacher ...*

- 2.1.1 demonstrates a broad knowledge base as well as an in-depth understanding of the subject areas they teach.
- 2.1.2 sets high and realistic expectations for all students and implements programs accordingly.
- 2.1.3 includes evidence of cultural values and concepts in the classroom.
- 2.1.4 learns about students' previous learning strengths and needs.
- 2.1.5 encourages feedback, questioning, and experimentation.
- 2.1.6 provides learning opportunities that help students understand and develop their own roles and responsibilities in the learning process and as lifelong learners.

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**Competency 2.2: Educators in First Nations schools design, implement, and monitor learning experiences to benefit student achievement.**

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*Performance Indicators: the teacher ...*

- 2.2.1 effectively prepares lessons and long term plans to meet appropriate Learning Outcomes that facilitate seamless transitions between education systems.
- 2.2.2 uses instructional time in an effective, purposeful, focused way.
- 2.2.3 creatively uses and develops resources and materials.



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**Competency 2.3: Educators in First Nations schools understand and apply relevant theories of human development, including individual learning differences.**

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*Performance Indicators: the teacher ...*

- 2.3.1 applies knowledge of how students develop and learn physically, socially, and cognitively.
- 2.3.2 differentiates curriculum expectations and teaching strategies to meet the needs of all students.

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**Competency 2.4: Educators in First Nations schools show a commitment to the principles of inclusion by treating all students equitably.**

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*Performance Indicators: the teacher ...*

- 2.4.1 demonstrates a commitment to inclusiveness.
- 2.4.2 supports learners with special needs through the development and implementation of Individual Education Plans.

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**Competency 2.5: Educators in First Nations schools use current technology in their teaching practices and professional duties.**

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*Performance Indicators: the teacher ...*

- 2.5.1 models and promotes the appropriate use of technology to enhance student learning.
- 2.5.2 uses current technology to improve efficiency and effectiveness in planning, instructional delivery, reporting, and assessment.

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**Competency 2.6: Educators in First Nations schools collaborate with educators, support staff, parents, and others to improve student achievement.**

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*Performance Indicators: the teacher ...*

- 2.6.1 works effectively with other stakeholders for the benefit of students.
- 2.6.2 supports an effective and appropriate sharing of information to benefit students, always respecting the need for confidentiality.



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**Standard 3: Educators in First Nations schools demonstrate an understanding of the role of parents, extended family, and the community in the life of students.**

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**Competency 3.1: Educators in First Nations schools communicate openly, effectively, sensitively, and in a timely manner with parents and the extended family.**

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*Performance Indicators: the teacher*

- 3.1.1 demonstrates a positive, professional attitude when communicating with parents and the extended family.
- 3.1.2 ensures that parents / extended family members are fully informed about and involved in school activities and issues related to student performance.

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**Competency 3.2: Educators in First Nations schools understand and support the important connection between the school and the community.**

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*Performance Indicators: the teacher ...*

- 3.2.1 creates meaningful connections to the community to contribute to student learning.
- 3.2.2 works collaboratively with the community to support students and families in a comprehensive way.

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**Standard 4: Educators in First Nations schools apply principles of assessment, evaluation and reporting to ensure high levels of student learning.**

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**Competency 4.1: Educators in First Nations schools understand the strengths and limitations of assessment, evaluation and reporting.***Performance Indicators: the teacher ...*

- 4.1.1 understands the appropriateness of various assessment tools' usefulness, comprehensiveness, and cultural relevancy.
- 4.1.2 understands the teachers' responsibility for effectively using and responding to assessment results.



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**Competency 4.2: Educators in First Nations schools effectively utilize appropriate assessment and reporting for the benefit of their students.**

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*Performance Indicators: the teacher ...*

- 4.2.1 ensures the use of assessment: as learning (student self-assessment), for learning (to guide instruction), and of learning (evaluation).
- 4.2.2 uses assessment to assist with short-term and long-range planning to ensure high levels of learning for all students.
- 4.2.3 uses a variety of assessment strategies and measures to monitor and report on individual student progress.
- 4.2.4 contributes to school-wide efforts to use data to monitor program effectiveness and school growth.

**Standard 5: Educators in First Nations schools are knowledgeable about First Nations peoples.**

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**Competency 5.1: Educators in First Nations schools have general knowledge of First Nations' histories, cultures, and government practices.**

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*Performance Indicators: the teacher ...*

- 5.1.1 can articulate critical First Nations issues – national, regional, and local.
- 5.1.2 demonstrates an understanding of the community's perspectives, diversity, and values.
- 5.1.3 ensures that his or her knowledge of First Nations issues and the community is respectfully reflected in his or her practice.



**Standard 6: Educators in First Nations schools model their interest in, commitment to, and enthusiasm for learning.**

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**Competency 6.1: Educators in First Nations schools participate in relevant professional development opportunities and actively share / use the information acquired through those opportunities.**

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*Performance Indicators: the teacher ...*

- 6.1.1: maintains a continual focus on learning.
- 6.1.2: contributes to a collaborative culture with a focus on high levels of learning for all.
- 6.1.3: actively participates in inquiry into best practice and current reality.
- 6.1.4: is committed to an action orientation (learning by doing).
- 6.1.5: focuses on continuous improvement.
- 6.1.6: demonstrates a results orientation.

**Standard 7: Educators in First Nations schools have a responsibility to self, students, parents, extended family, the community, and the public.**

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**Competency 7.1: Educators in First Nations schools understand that they are viewed as role models by students, parents and the community.**

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*Performance Indicators: the teacher ...*

- 7.1.1 acts in an exemplary manner at all times.
- 7.1.2 understands that he/she is accountable to students, parents, the community, the employer, the profession and the public.

## FNSA STANDARDS FOR PRINCIPALS IN FIRST NATIONS SCHOOLS

Last Updated September 2011

### PREAMBLE

The First Nations Schools Association (FNSA) Standards for Principals in First Nations Schools are founded upon the FNSA's belief that the effectiveness of our principals is fundamental to the effectiveness of our schools.

While support from parents and the community, and of course the important work of teachers, are essential for student success, the ability of the principal to establish positive direction, lead change, mobilize involvement, and focus the entire educational community on student learning is critical if all students are to achieve at their full potential.

The FNSA knows that the role of principal in a First Nations school can be extremely challenging, but equally rewarding. Our principals must continually promote a recognition and celebration of the uniqueness of our schools, communities, and learners. They are responsible for ensuring that the school is a reflection of each Nation's vision for its learners and the future of the community. Principals must work in partnership with parents, family members, and the Nation to create an inclusive, respectful, and engaged educational community in which students are supported and encouraged to grow in all aspects of their intellectual, cultural, spiritual, and personal development.

Our principals shape the environment in which teachers and students succeed or fail. As the instructional leader, the principal affects every factor that encourages student learning in the school, and is also responsible for consistently and meaningfully assessing the school's operations and programs to ensure that they are meeting the expectations of students, staff, parents, and the Nation. Ultimately, principals in First Nations schools act as unrelenting advocates for high achievement, encouraging a focus on excellence and instilling a common belief that **all** students will succeed, and that anything less is unacceptable.

The following standards are intended to complement and reinforce the FNSA's beliefs about principals. The standards are meant to assist principals in considering their important role, assessing their efforts, celebrating their strengths, and continually striving for improvement in their own effectiveness and that of their school.

The following FNSA Standards and Performance Indicators assert that principals in First Nations schools should:

- guide the school community in determining a shared mission for the school, sustaining a broad commitment to high expectations and relevant support for all students;
- ensure quality teaching and the achievement of essential outcomes, leading a commitment to students' needs as the central consideration in all activities and decision-making;
- support teachers so that they are effective in creating inclusive classrooms that meet the diverse needs of all learners;
- build their school's capacity and lead innovative change to sustain continual improvement;
- work positively and inspire others to support learning for all; and
- acquire and demonstrate appropriate knowledge and personal qualities that enable them to fulfill their responsibilities effectively and respectfully.

The following Standards and Performance Indicators present an expanded description of those characteristics, articulating the fundamental skills, abilities, and understandings that are common to excellent principals. The FNSA intends that this work will acknowledge the central role of principals in promoting quality and culturally appropriate educational opportunities within our schools. The document provides a framework upon which the FNSA can build its support for principals, including efforts to facilitate the identification of professional growth priorities for principals in all First Nations schools. The Standards are not meant to be used in a prescriptive or evaluative way; they are meant to represent aspirations, promising practice – goals that principals can reflect upon and internalize into their practice in ways that are valuable for them and, ultimately, for learners, schools and the learning communities they create.

As with all of its efforts, the FNSA welcomes feedback about these Standards and Performance Indicators. It is expected that the document will evolve to reflect new ideas, advances in research and knowledge about school leadership, and most importantly the wide spectrum of experiences of the principals who use these standards as a tool for continued growth.

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**Standard 1: Principals in First Nations schools guide the development and implementation of a shared mission, vision, goals, and values to support high levels of learning and achievement for all students.**

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*Performance Indicators: the Principal ...*

- 1.1 facilitates a collaborative process with the First Nation and school community to develop a shared mission for the school.
- 1.2 leads an inclusive process for articulating the school vision that supports and sustains the shared mission.
- 1.3 models the moral courage to defend the mission, vision, and values of the school.
- 1.4 recognizes and celebrates individual and collective accomplishments that support the mission, vision, and values.

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**Standard 2: Principals in First Nations schools ensure quality teaching and learning opportunities to support all students learning at a high level.**

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*Performance Indicators: the Principal ...*

- 2.1 ensures that First Nations values, cultures, languages, and concepts are embedded throughout the school and all its classrooms.
- 2.2 ensures that students' educational needs are central to all decision-making.
- 2.3 ensures a consistent commitment to high expectations for all students on the part of all school staff.
- 2.4 ensures alignment among curricula, instructional practices, student needs, and assessment.
- 2.5 understands, communicates, encourages, and supports the use of current educational research and promising practices.
- 2.6 ensures the use of assessment: as learning (student self-assessment), for learning (to guide instruction), and of learning (evaluation).

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**Standard 3: Principals in First Nations schools create a system and structures for effective instructional supervision to maximize student learning and achievement.**

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*Performance Indicators: the Principal ...*

- 3.1 consistently monitors the learning environment and its impact on student learning.



- 3.2 engages classroom teachers in data collection, analysis, and dialogue about student learning and instruction.
- 3.3 leads teachers in collective inquiry and promotes joint responsibility for appropriate action in response to evidence and ongoing dialogue.
- 3.: supports teachers in their design and achievement of plans for professional growth.

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**Standard 4: Principals in First Nations schools build the organizational capacity of the school to support safety, student learning, and achievement.**

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*Performance Indicators: the Principal ...*

- 4.1 ensures that roles, duties, and responsibilities are clearly defined, understood, and purposefully interconnected.
- 4.2 ensures that effective decision-making models are in place.
- 4.3 develops and maintains an effective system of communication.
- 4.4 aligns financial, human and material resources with the school goals.
- 4.5 ensures that effective structures and processes are in place to support safety, school operations and facilities management.
- 4.6 uses technologies to enhance school operations.
- 4.7 fulfills and manages legal and contractual obligations.

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**Standard 5: Principals in First Nations schools lead school-wide planning and change processes to promote increased student achievement and sustain school growth over time.**

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*Performance Indicators: the Principal ...*

- 5.1 leads the use of student achievement data and other appropriate measures to evaluate student learning, monitor program success, and plan for improvement.
- 5.2 leads school-wide assessment and planning processes in order to promote quality programming and growth in student achievement.



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**Standard 6: Principals in First Nations schools develop and sustain a positive, collaborative culture and climate with staff, parents, extended families, and the community.**

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*Performance Indicators: the Principal ...*

- 6.1 models and develops a positive climate of trust, risk-taking, and optimism.
- 6.2 recognizes and builds the leadership capacity of staff, parents, extended families, and community members.
- 6.3 builds collaborative teams, structures, and processes that support learning for all.
- 6.4 supports an effective and appropriate sharing of information to benefit students, always respecting the need for confidentiality.
- 6.5 respects the role of and works effectively within community decision-making processes and governance structures.
- 6.6 supports meaningful connections with the community to contribute to student learning.
- 6.7 mobilizes community resources, creates networks, and works collaboratively with other community agencies for the benefit of students and families.

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**Standard 7: Principals in First Nations schools have an appropriate understanding of First Nations' histories, cultures, and government practices.**

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*Performance Indicators: the Principal ...*

- 7.1 can articulate critical First Nations issues – national, regional, and local.
- 7.2 understands and applies knowledge of local and global issues and trends that affect teaching and learning in First Nations schools.
- 7.3 demonstrates an understanding of the community's perspectives, diversity, values, and policies.
- 7.4 is aware of and makes effective use of services available to support First Nations schools and students.



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**Standard 8: Principals in First Nations schools demonstrate personal qualities that enable them to fulfill their responsibility to themselves, students, parents, extended families, the community, the public, and the profession.**

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*Performance Indicators: the Principal ...*

- 8.1 demonstrates self-awareness, self-management, and social and situational awareness.
- 8.2 sets professional goals to remain current with educational practice.
- 8.3 models ethical practice and decision-making.
- 8.4 protects the rights and confidentiality of students, families, and staff.
- 8.5 establishes and maintains the boundaries of professional relationships.
- 8.6 consistently models and promotes the importance of maintaining a focus on personal health and well-being.