

# WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW:

A RESOURCE FOR PRINCIPALS  
WHO ARE NEW TO FIRST NATION SCHOOLS  
IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

**DRAFT FOR CONSULTATIONS**  
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FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION STEERING COMMITTEE  
FIRST NATIONS SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION



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A RESOURCE FOR PRINCIPALS WHO ARE NEW TO FIRST NATION SCHOOLS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA - Draft for Review and Feedback

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## Glossary of Key Terms Used

<b>BC Tripartite Education Agreement: Supporting First Nation Student Success</b>	or “BCTEA”, an agreement signed by FNEESC, Canada, and British Columbia, and witnessed by the FNSA, which is intended to make systemic shifts to support successful educational outcomes of all First Nation students, regardless of where they live or are enrolled in school in BC.
<b>First Nations Education Steering Committee</b>	or “FNEESC,” a policy and advocacy organization that represents and supports First Nations’ efforts to improve the success of their students and advance First Nations education by disseminating information, undertaking research, administering programs and services, and advocating and negotiating with government at the direction of First Nations.
<b>First Nations Schools Association</b>	or “FNSA,” a society that supports First Nation schools in creating effective, nurturing, and linguistically and culturally appropriate education environments that provide students with a positive foundation in all academic areas.
<b>First Nations Education System</b>	a rigorous and accountable system of education advocacy, programs, and services that respects the authority of First Nations for the education of their learners, complemented by collective organizations designed to support First Nations’ efforts – i.e. the BC First Nations Education Steering Committee and the First Nations Schools Association.
<b>First Nation School</b>	means a school located on-reserve and operated and administered by one or more First Nations in British Columbia, providing education at one or more of the kindergarten, elementary or secondary levels, including First Nation Independent schools.
<b>First Nation Independent School</b>	a specific type of First Nation controlled school, which is regulated by the provincial <i>Independent School Act</i> .
<b>First Nations Education Funding Model</b>	the approach for federal funding for K4-12 First Nations education in BC, which is based on the Ministry of Education Operating Grants Manual, with specific adaptations to reflect the unique needs and circumstances of First Nation schools.

<b>First Nations Education Funding Handbook</b>	the funding manual that sets out the formula used to calculate funding for students attending First Nation schools.
<b>First Nations Schools Assessment and Certification Process</b>	a process for the assessment and certification of First Nation schools, managed by FNSA and FNEESC.
<b>Funding Estimator Tool</b>	a calculator that determines the funding allocation for a First Nation based on the BC First Nations Education Funding Model and First Nation student enrolment.
<b>Indigenous Services Canada</b>	or “ISC,” the federal department that manages funding for First Nation schools.
<b>ISC Nominal Roll</b>	the registry of all eligible elementary and secondary students funded by Canada to attend a First Nation, federal, provincial, or private/independent school.
<b>Reciprocal Tuition</b>	the arrangement reached by FNEESC and the BC Ministry of Education in 2009, according to which the Ministry of Education will pay the full tuition costs for off-reserve students attending First Nation schools.
<b>School Governing Authority</b>	the term used when referring to the Authority that oversees the ongoing operations of First Nation schools, including the schools’ purpose, mission, budget, and policies.
<b>1701 Form</b>	the data collection form the Ministry of Education uses to calculate Full Time Equivalent (FTE) students for BC public and Independent schools, including First Nation Independent schools.
<b>1701 Instructions</b>	the document published annually by the Ministry of Education to assist with the completion of the 1701 form.



## What are some of the key differences between First Nation schools and public schools?

First Nations people have long held that they themselves can and should 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.

As a practical expression of First Nations control of First Nations education, and reflecting a commitment to providing their students accessible, relevant, and high quality educational opportunities, First Nations across Canada have established their own schools, which are located within their communities, operated by First Nations according to their own priorities.

First Nation schools are generally under the authority of the First Nations that create them. Unlike public schools, First Nations schools are *not* part of public school districts and First Nation schools (other than First Nation Independent schools, described further below) are *not* under the authority of the BC Ministry of Education.

With the exception of several specific requirements associated with their funding agreements (as described further in this document), and with the exception of First Nation Independent Schools (described below), First Nations are able to determine the standards and procedures for their own schools – including the school calendar, the school's policies and procedures for reporting to parents, etc.

First Nations that operate their own school usually receive the majority of their funding from the federal government. Public schools are primarily funded by the Province of BC.

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## What is the difference between a First Nation school and a First Nation Independent school?

Some First Nations have chosen to seek Independent School status for their school. In these cases, the schools are subject to the same requirements that apply to all provincial Independent Schools in BC under the *Independent School Act*. Those requirements are detailed on the Ministry of Education website and related questions can be directed to the Ministry of Education Independent Schools Branch.

If your school is an Independent School, it is critical that you become familiar with the related requirements, which include specific standards for school operations, teacher certification, governance of the school by a provincially-recognized School Board, and required monitoring inspections by the Independent Schools Branch, among other things.

First Nation schools with Independent school status are also required to submit 1701 Forms to the Ministry of Education annually. Form 1701 collects information about individual students as of September 30, which is used for determining student numbers for funding purposes (for students who normally reside off-reserve).

The decision of whether or not to maintain Independent school status is very complicated, as it involves considerations that relate to the principles of First Nations control of First Nations education, First Nations authority for education, community preferences, as well as specific funding issues. If your community has questions about this topic, FNEESC staff are available to help.

If you are unsure if your school has Independent school status, you should clarify this issue right away to ensure that you understand and meet all relevant requirements.

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### How are First Nation schools governed?

A broad range of governance models exist for First Nations schools in BC, such as:

- ▶ operating under the direct authority of Chief and Council, with no school board or education committee in existence;
- ▶ being governed by Chief and Council, advised or guided by some kind of an education or school committee or board, which may or may not be incorporated;
- ▶ being guided by some kind of education or school committee (non-legal entity), accountable back to the Chief and Council;
- ▶ having a formal school board (a distinct legal entity, usually under the provincial Societies Act); or
- ▶ for First Nation Independent schools under the provincial Independent School Act (BC), it must be an “authority” as defined in that Act, which may be: a society within the meaning of the Societies Act; a company within the meaning of the Business Corporations Act or a corporation incorporated under a private Act; or, a person designated, by regulation, that operates or intends to operate an independent school.

For supports provided by FNEESC and FNSA, the term “School Governing Authority” is used for simplicity.



It is critical that First Nation school principals fully understand how the school is governed and who has responsibilities for reporting to the community and Chief and Council. It is also valuable to have policy related to school governance.

Further information for School Governing Authorities is available in a FNEsc and FNsa publication: A Handbook For First Nation School Governing Authorities. That Handbook can be accessed from the FNEsc website at [www.fnesc.ca](http://www.fnesc.ca)

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### **In what ways are First Nation schools unique?**

First Nation schools are unique in innumerable ways.

All First Nation schools share a commitment to providing high quality, engaging and relevant learning opportunities that integrate the community's traditions, values, language and culture. How they achieve that goal, however, varies considerably.

In addition to the schools being created and directed by their own communities and using differing governance structures, the schools vary considerably in size, grade levels offered, operational standards (such as school calendar, hours of operation, etc.), and specific programming.

First Nation schools in BC generally offer the BC Ministry of Education curriculum, interpreted and supplemented in ways that reflect the distinct needs, circumstances, and values of each Nation.

What is most important for new principals of First Nation schools is to quickly develop your understanding of why the First Nation created its own school, the school's purpose and the community's vision for educating the Nation's citizens, as well as the school's mission. If a mission for the school does not yet exist, working collaboratively with the School Governing Authority on this priority will be important – after you have had an opportunity to get to know the school community.

Principals who are new to First Nation schools must also be aware that each community has its own protocols for respectfully incorporating the Nation's language and culture into school programs in respectful ways. For example, each Nation has its own protocols for using stories, dances, music, and art, including rules regarding who has permission to share and how that should be done.

New principals should ask experienced school and community staff to ensure that the school reflects the community's vision and appropriate cultural practices.

## What is meant by the First Nations Education System?

For almost three decades, First Nations in BC have worked to establish a robust and accountable BC First Nations Education System, including respectful partnerships for the benefit of First Nation students regardless of whether they attend a First Nation, public, or non-First Nation Independent school located off-reserve.

Fundamentally, the BC First Nations Education System is built upon principles that have been articulated by First Nations for decades, as described below.

- ▶ 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.

The BC First Nations Education System has been created to build upon First Nations' rights, First Nations languages, cultures, values, and traditions, and First Nations' commitment to quality education and improved students outcomes. The System respects the authority of First Nations for the education of their learners, complemented by collective organizations designed to support First Nations' advocacy for their students – i.e. the BC First Nations Education Steering Committee and the First Nations Schools Association.

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## What is the First Nations Schools Association?

The BC First Nations Schools Association (FNSA) was created to promote improved educational outcomes for students attending First Nation schools by supporting the development and implementation of appropriate, meaningful and quality education programs and providing a forum for networking and information sharing amongst schools and other education partners.

- ▶ The FNSA is a non-profit support organization.
- ▶ The FNSA does not set requirements for First Nation school calendars, reporting to parents, curriculum, teacher certification, or other operational matters.

- ▶ First Nation schools are welcome to be members of the FNSA, and almost all First Nations schools maintain this membership – including both Independent and non-Independent First Nations schools. To remain an FNSA “member in good standing,” an annual membership fee must be paid. Invoices are sent to all members each year identifying their annual fee, which is calculated at \$100 plus \$1 per student.
- ▶ Members must also identify an “Authorized Representative” for FNSA business. Only Authorized Representatives of “members in good standing” can vote at the FNSA Annual General Meeting and are eligible to be on the FNSA Board of Directors. Each year, FNSA member schools are asked to confirm the name and contact information for their Authorized Representative, and it is very important to keep this information up-to-date.
- ▶ Authorized Representatives are often the school principal, but other community representatives can be appointed to this position instead. The identification of the FNSA Authorized Representative should be a community decision (i.e. supported by the appropriate community authority).

More information about the FNSA is available at [www.fnsa.ca](http://www.fnsa.ca).

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### **What is the First Nations Education Steering Committee?**

The BC First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) is a policy and advocacy organization that represents and works on behalf of First Nations in BC. FNESC has a mandate to support First Nations in their efforts to improve the success of all First Nations students and advance First Nations education in BC by disseminating information, undertaking research, administering programs and services, and advocating and negotiating with the provincial and federal governments and other key stakeholders at the direction of First Nations.

All First Nations in BC are welcome to appoint a community representative to the FNESC Board of Directors.

More information about FNESC is available at [www.fnesc.ca](http://www.fnesc.ca).

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### **How do FNESC and FNSA relate?**

FNESC and FNSA work closely together and implement numerous support efforts for First Nation schools in partnership. However, each organization has a separate Board of Directors and its own mandate.

In an effort to avoid a duplication of services, FNEESC and FNSA share an organizational infrastructure, and FNEESC staff implement programs and services for First Nation schools under the direction of both the FNEESC and FNSA Boards.

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### **What is the BC Tripartite Education Agreement (BCTEA)?**

The June 2018 BC Tripartite Education Agreement: Supporting First Nation Student Success (BCTEA), which was signed by FNEESC, Canada, and British Columbia, and witnessed by the FNSA, is intended to make systemic shifts to support successful educational outcomes of all First Nation students, regardless of where they live or are enrolled in school in BC.

BCTEA represents a cooperative commitment that formally recognizes the capacity of BC First Nation communities and schools to build and implement the relevant and research-based First Nations Education System. It maintains a flexible funding model for First Nation schools based upon the BC public education funding formula, with adaptations to reflect First Nation schools' unique characteristics. BCTEA also provides funding for a comprehensive collection of second and third level services, as described further in this resource.

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### **How can I learn more about BCTEA funding?**

The majority of First Nation schools in BC are now funded according to the BCTEA funding formula – including Independent and non-Independent First Nation schools. The exception to this situation is schools that are operated by a First Nation that has a treaty or self-government agreement or by a First Nation that has a block funding agreement with ISC. The funding arrangements for those schools are consistent with their Nation's agreement.

The BCTEA funding formula is based on the BC Ministry of Education's funding model for public schools, with adaptations to reflect the unique circumstances of First Nations.

First Nations schools' BCTEA funding allocations are calculated by Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) using student enrolment data and factors that apply specifically to each school. Enrolment data is collected by ISC annually using the Nominal Roll (described below).

Each year, ISC applies the BCTEA funding formula to First Nations schools, and outlines the schools' funding amount to each First Nation using a "Funding Detail Budget Report."

The BCTEA funding model and ISC's Funding Detail Budget Report is described in detail in a BCTEA Funding Formula Handbook, and a "Funding Estimator" tool is also available to allow First Nation schools to estimate funding for the upcoming school year. The purpose of the tool is to assist First Nations with forecasting their school funding based on projected enrolments.

The updated BCTEA Funding Handbook and Estimator Tool are available on the FNEC and FNSA web sites, and support for understanding BCTEA school budget information is available from FNEC staff.

### **What is the Nominal Roll?**

The ISC Nominal Roll is the registry of all eligible elementary and secondary students funded by Canada to attend a First Nation, federal, provincial, or private/independent school.

All First Nations in BC, except those that have signed a treaty or self-government agreement, complete and submit the Nominal Roll to ISC each year. Often a First Nation employee is responsible for completing the Nominal Roll, with assistance from the First Nation school principal for information about students enrolled in their school.

To be eligible for the Nominal Roll, a student must be:

- ▶ enrolled in a band-operated, federal, provincial, or a private/independent school;
- ▶ aged 4 to 21 years on December 31 of the school year in which funding support is required and enrolled in Kindergarten 4 through grade 12, or an adult student age 18 and over and enrolled in an Adult Graduation Diploma program, on December 31 of the school year in which funding support is required; and
- ▶ ordinarily resident on reserve.

### **What is Reciprocal Tuition?**

The Reciprocal Tuition Agreement, signed by FNEC and the Province of BC in November 2009, provides for the BC Ministry of Education to provide full per-pupil funding for students who are:

- ▶ attending a First Nation school as of September 30 of the current school year;

- ▶ school age as defined by the BC Ministry of Education (at least five years of age by December 31 of the current school year and up to age 19 before July 1 of the current school year); and
- ▶ ineligible for federal education funding.

These are students who would be funded by the Province of British Columbia if they attended a public or independent school – i.e. students who are not eligible for the ISC Nominal Roll.

In order to be eligible to access Reciprocal Tuition, First Nations with schools that are not registered with the Independent Schools Branch must meet several requirements – including being FNSA certified (described below). They also must make annual application to the BC Ministry of Education.

It is critical for First Nation school principals to understand the residency of students who are enrolled in their schools to determine if they should access Reciprocal Tuition. Principals must also stay informed about up-to-date Reciprocal Tuition application deadlines and procedures.

More information is outlined in a Reciprocal Tuition Handbook, available at [www.fnesc.ca](http://www.fnesc.ca).

First Nation schools that have Independent school status do not need to apply for Reciprocal Tuition – they are automatically eligible for funding from the Ministry of Education for students who normally reside off-reserve. This funding is allocated according to information submitted on the annual 1701 Forms.

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### **What are the reporting requirements for First Nation schools?**

For all First Nation schools that are funded pursuant to BCTEA, the First Nation (Band Council) is required to annually provide to Canada the following:

- a) Nominal Roll Student Census Report (commonly called the Nominal Roll); and
- b) Annual Education Staff Information Form (which is part of the Nominal Roll submission).

First Nations that receive funding through BCTEA are also required to provide the following performance indicator data to FNEC:

- ▶ percentage of First Nation students who meet or exceed grade level expectations for reading for grades K5 - 7, writing for grades 2 - 7, and numeracy for grades K5 - 7;
- ▶ student attendance rates of school-age students;
- ▶ teacher/student ratio;
- ▶ student/computer ratio;
- ▶ level of connectivity; and
- ▶ administration of standard learning assessments.

This means that all First Nations schools that are funded through BCTEA must use standardized student assessments to determine student results for reading, writing, and numeracy if they have students in grades K5 - 7. To assist schools in meeting that requirement, FNEsc and FNSA support interested schools in accessing the Canadian Achievement Test 4 (CAT4) and sponsor the scoring and analysis of the test results. Further information about this support can be requested from Karen Linkert at karenl@fnesc.ca.

Also, to support BCTEA reporting requirements, FNEsc collects the necessary performance data: i) through DRUMS (if the school participates on that data management system – described more below) or another on-line portal; or ii) through the submission of a completed PDF form.

Each year, FNEsc sends out a reminder notice to all BCTEA-funded schools about the reporting requirement and the mechanisms available for confirming the BCTEA data. FNEsc then aggregates the collective data and submits a summary report to ISC that does not identify individual schools or students.

The BCTEA reporting requirements also require: “The Council must make available to parents / caregivers of school-age First Nation students attending the First Nation school an aggregate outcome report on school performance.”

To support First Nations in meeting that requirement, FNEsc annually provides each First Nation that operates a school a template report for parents / caregivers that can be completed and shared as appropriate. First Nation school principals generally help First Nations in completing and distributing those reports.

Finally, BCTEA requires that all First Nation schools demonstrate to ISC that they have completed a school evaluation once every five years, including First Nations adult education centres that are funded by ISC through the Nominal Roll. That requirement can be met by satisfactorily completing one of the following three processes on a five-year schedule.

- a) an assessment under the First Nations Schools Assessment Process (described further below);
- b) an evaluation conducted in accordance with the Independent School Act; or
- c) an alternate form of assessment or evaluation mutually agreed to by the First Nation and ISC.

First Nation schools that participate in the First Nations Schools Assessment Process are notified when they are scheduled for the ISC evaluation requirement. Further information can also be accessed by contacting Karen Linkert at karenl@fnesc.ca.

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### **Can First Nation schools offer the Dogwood or Adult Dogwood to graduating students?**

Reflecting a BCTEA commitment, non-Independent First Nation schools and adult education centres that are FNSEA certified through successful completion of the First Nation Schools Assessment and Certification Process (described further below) can grant their eligible students the Dogwood or Adult Dogwood Diploma.

First Nations schools that offer grades 10 -12 and adult education centres that want to offer the Dogwood or Adult Dogwood diploma can find additional information in the *Guide to the Dogwood / Adult Dogwood Graduation Process for Non-Independent First Nations Schools*, which is updated annually and is available by contacting Lauranne Hutton at lauranneh@fnesc.ca.

First Nations schools that have Independent school status can grant the Dogwood or Adult Dogwood according to that status.

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### **Can we offer our own locally developed courses?**

Many First Nations and First Nation schools are interested in creating locally developed courses with a focus on issues that are directly relevant to their Nation's culture, history, values, and traditions. Like public schools in BC, First Nation schools can offer courses that they create locally up to the grade 9 level based upon the approval of their own School Governing Authority.

For courses at the grade 10, 11 and 12 levels, locally developed courses must be formally approved in order to count for credit toward the Dogwood.

For Independent schools, grade 10-12 locally developed courses can be offered for recognized credit if they are approved through the Ministry of



Education Board/Authority Authorization (BAA) Course process. For First Nations Independent Schools, this means the courses must be approved by the Independent School Authority. More information about this process is available from the Independent Schools Branch of the Ministry of Education.

For non-Independent First Nation schools that are offering the Dogwood Diploma, a First Nation-controlled First Nation Authorized (FNA) Course Process can be used for course approvals.

The BC Ministry of Education Board/Authority Authorized Courses and First Nation Authorized Courses Policy states that students may earn elective credits toward graduation by successfully completing FNA Courses. There is no limit to the number of FNA Courses that may be used to satisfy the 28 credits of electives required for graduation. In some cases, at the Grade 11 level only, FNA Courses may be used to satisfy the Arts Education and/or Applied Design, Skills and Technologies (ADST) requirement towards graduation. Grade 12-level FNA Courses may count towards the 16 Grade 12-level credits required for graduation.

In order to be approved, FNA courses must: not be preparatory, remedial or modified; not significantly overlap with Ministry of Education curriculum Content Learning Standards; and be described in a FNAC Framework Template.

For more information about the development of FNA courses, and to request a copy of the FNAC Framework Template, please contact Lauranne Hutton at [lauranneh@fnesc.ca](mailto:lauranneh@fnesc.ca).

### **How does a school become FNSA certified?**

All BCTEA funded First Nation schools in BC are welcome to participate in the First Nations Schools Assessment and Certification Process, which has been designed to assist communities and schools with improvement planning.

Participation in that process also allows First Nations schools to become FNSA Certified.

The First Nations Schools Assessment and Certification Process is a five-year cycle of review and follow-up that was established almost two decades ago. The Process supports participating schools – working closely with their communities – in reviewing all aspects of their operations, including student achievement data and input from students, parents / caregivers, school staff, and other community members, with the goal of identifying strengths and creating a plan for improvement.

FNESC and FNSA sponsor First Nations schools that undertake the First Nations Schools Assessment and Certification Process through an information meeting and ongoing assistance from FNESC staff. Participating schools are also visited by an appointed team of individuals who review the findings and resulting School Growth Plan in order to provide suggestions and feedback, and the schools are then assisted in implementing their School Growth Plans through funding grants and continued assistance from FNESC and FNSA.

Interested First Nations also may request “Certification” upon completion of their assessment reviews, which requires meeting a set of collectively established standards.

Principals and School Governing Authorities generally lead their school reviews and improvement planning together, as the First Nations Schools Assessment and Certification Process is intended to be an opportunity to ensure the school is meeting the community’s expectations for its learners.

It is also important that new principals fully understand the potential consequences of not participating in the Assessment Process according to the established five year cycle.

### **ISC Evaluation Requirement**

As described above, ISC requires that all First Nation schools demonstrate that they have completed a school evaluation once every five years. That requirement can be met through satisfactory completion of an assessment under the First Nations Schools Assessment Process, an evaluation conducted in accordance with the Independent School Act, or an alternate form of assessment or evaluation mutually agreed to by the First Nation and ISC.

First Nations that use the School Assessment Process to meet the ISC evaluation requirement must complete the assessment process according to the expected five-year schedule.

Schools that choose not to participate in the First Nations Schools Assessment process must ensure they are using one of the other evaluation options.

### **Reciprocal Tuition**

As mentioned above, in order to access Reciprocal Tuition, First Nations schools must have up-to-date FNSA Certification through successful participation in the First Nations Schools Assessment and Certification Process. Certification lasts for a period of five years – matching the cycle for Assessment Process participation.

First Nations schools (other than First Nations Independent Schools) that enroll eligible students must complete the Assessment Process in time to renew their Certification on schedule, or they will be unable to access Reciprocal Tuition.

### **Dogwood and Adult Dogwood**

Also as mentioned above, First Nations schools that want to award eligible students the Dogwood / Adult Dogwood Diploma (if they are not Independent schools) must have current Certification. First Nation schools that do not have Independent School status will not be able to offer the Dogwood/Adult Dogwood Diploma directly to their eligible students if their Certification has lapsed as a result of not undertaking the School Assessment Process according to the expected schedule.

Anyone interested in further information about these important issues can contact Lauranne Hutton at [lauranneh@fnesc.ca](mailto:lauranneh@fnesc.ca).

It is also important to reiterate that First Nation Independent schools are subject to external evaluation and inspections for the purpose of ensuring that they meet and maintain the legislated standards and requirements for their certificate of group classification under the Independent School Act. Group 1 and 2 Independent Schools are evaluated by an External Evaluation Committee at least once every 6 years, and receive a monitoring inspection every 2 years. The external evaluation is a comprehensive exercise that examines the school's program, facilities, curriculum, operations and teacher certification to ensure that the school meets all basic statutory requirements. These evaluations are carried out by External Evaluation Committees appointed by the Inspector of Independent Schools. More information is available from the Independent Schools Branch.

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### **Does my school have to employ certified teachers?**

Non-Independent First Nations schools in BC must employ teachers who are: a) certified by the BC Ministry of Education (including a Certificate of Qualification, a Letter of Permission, or a certificate specific for Language and Culture teachers); or b) a valid teaching certificate issued by another Canadian province.

First Nation schools that have Independent school status must employ teachers who are certified by the BC Ministry of Education, including those who hold an Independent Schools Teaching Certificate.

More information about those certification options is available on the Ministry of Education Teacher Regulation Branch web site. First Nation schools and teachers

must work directly with the Ministry to apply for certification – including applying for a Letter of Permission.

Additionally, it is very important that school principals are aware that the Ministry of Education Teacher Regulation Branch (TRB) enables employers (including First Nation schools) to access information about applicant’s certification status and teaching history.

First Nation school staff – including principals – also have obligations for reporting to the TRB Commissioner regarding difficulties and discipline matters, and transparent information sharing about teacher misconduct or incompetence is critical for ensuring the safety and well-being of all students.

FNESC and FNSA have created a pamphlet to raise awareness about these very important matters: *BC First Nations Schools and Hiring Certified Teachers: Things to Know*. That resource is available on the FNESC and FNSA web sites.

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**It appears the school’s policies need attention. Is help available?**

It is very important that principals work closely with the School Governing Authority to set out in policy expectations for various aspects of the school’s operations. Effective policies can help guide daily management and decision-making and provide direction about what the staff is expected to do in operating the school. Principals often then lead the development of school-level procedures that are consistent with the policies approved by the School Governing Authority.

*A Policy and Procedure Resource Guide For First Nation Schools in BC* includes sample policies to assist First Nations schools in establishing thorough and effective policies of their own. Sample policies related to operations, personnel, special education, and safety are included in the guide, all of which can be adapted to reflect local circumstances, as appropriate.

Anyone interested in receiving a copy of the Guide can contact Karen Linkert at [karenl@fnesc.ca](mailto:karenl@fnesc.ca).

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**What should I know about student information management systems?**

First Nation schools in BC are able to use a variety of student information management systems – having the option of selecting a system that best meets their unique needs and circumstances.

Most First Nation schools in BC use the Data Records and User Management System (DRUMS), which is operated by FNESC and FNSA. DRUMS was designed

specifically for First Nation schools in BC to support them in managing student demographic data, students contacts, course enrollments and completions, attendance, grades, medical and legal information, and other data. DRUMS also allows schools to produce student report cards and attendance reports, and DRUMS can be used to extract student data needed for the ISC Nominal Roll and for Ministry 1701 forms. Training opportunities are available for schools that are using DRUMS, and anyone interested in more information about the system can contact Joe Risbey at [joer@fnesc.ca](mailto:joer@fnesc.ca).

There is no charge for BCTEA-funded schools that want to participate on DRUMS.

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### **What is the PEN? Do we need them for our school?**

The Personal Education Number (PEN) is the student identification number used by the Ministry of Education for tracking students who are enrolled in BC public and Independent Schools. First Nations Independent schools must have PENS for their students, and they often use the PEN as the student identification number for their school record keeping and student information management purposes – including using the PEN as the student identification number in DRUMS.

First Nation schools that do not have Independent school status must access PENS for any students who are funded for Reciprocal Tuition; applying for PENS is part of the Reciprocal Tuition application process, as described in the *Reciprocal Tuition Handbook* that can be found on the FNESC and FNSA web sites.

PENS are also required for all students who are going to access the BC Ministry of Education literacy and numeracy assessments and the Dogwood and Adult Dogwood. Again, applying to the Ministry of Education for PENS is an important step for schools interested in this option, as described in the *Guide to the Dogwood / Adult Dogwood Graduation Process for Non-Independent First Nations Schools*. Please contact Lauranne Hutton at [lauranneh@fnesc.ca](mailto:lauranneh@fnesc.ca) for more information.

First Nation schools that are not Independent and are not accessing the opportunities described above do not have to access PENS for their students; they can assign their own student identification numbers – including on DRUMS.

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### **Are criminal record checks needed for staff and volunteers in First Nation schools?**

Yes. It is imperative that all First Nations schools ensure that, at minimum, employees who work with children directly, or who have unsupervised access to children, have successfully completed a criminal record check once every five years. Criminal record checks are also strongly recommended for volunteers who will be in contact with students.

Normally, written offers of employment for anyone who will be involved with children should include a criminal record check as a condition of employment.

To provide further details about this important issue, FNEESC and FNSA have produced a pamphlet that outlines what First Nation schools need to know – *Criminal Record Checks and First Nation Schools*. The information in that pamphlet is separated for First Nations schools that have Independent school status or receive provincial funding and those that do not, as the requirements and procedures differ in each of those cases.

The information pamphlet is available on the FNEESC and FNSA web sites. New principals should review the status of criminal record checks of their staff to ensure they have been completed appropriately.

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**We may not be equipped to offer all secondary courses. Are other options available?**

First Nation schools use a variety of approaches to offer secondary courses to students – often using various methods simultaneously for different courses and different students.

Offering instruction on-site is an ideal option if a teacher with the appropriate expertise is available. Offering instruction on-site – with both school-age and adult students – can help to build a sense of connectedness for students and can be especially beneficial for supporting students directly and pro-actively.

For schools that do not have a teacher with the necessary subject matter expertise available to deliver specific courses on-site, the FNEESC/FNSA-sponsored Connected Classrooms program facilitates an innovative opportunity for collectives of BC First Nation schools to offer high school courses using a combination of technologies to create an integrated, interactive classroom environment for students in various locations. This project differs from other online learning initiatives as the students use real-time video conferencing to participate in a virtual classroom with a FNEESC-employed instructor who is qualified to teach the subject, complemented by in-person support from a co-teacher who is located on-site in the school. More information about this option is available by contacting Lauranne Hutton at [lauranneh@fnesc.ca](mailto:lauranneh@fnesc.ca).

Some First Nation high schools also help their students take specific courses through arrangements with provincial Online Learning schools – i.e. using instruction that relies primarily on indirect communication between learners and educators, including internet or other electronic-based delivery. If you are using online learning through an arrangement with a provincial agency, it may be

helpful to review the pamphlet *Things to Know If You Are Using Online Learning To Offer Courses To Your Students*, prepared by FNEESC and FNSA.

Finally, FNEESC and FNSA are beginning a pilot project this September, creating online courses for secondary level that will be available from a designated web site. The courses will be designed for schools to deliver directly to students on-site, with training and supports provided by FNEESC and FNSA. More information about this option will be forthcoming soon.

### **What is the FNEESC and FNSA Special Education Program?**

For almost two decades, a Special Education Program (SEP) administered by FNEESC and FNSA has supported First Nation schools in meeting the needs of their students with exceptionalities. Each year, the majority of the funding available for this program is allocated to all First Nation schools through grants to support their special education programming. A separate portion of the BC SEP funding is also available through a proposal process to address extraordinary needs that cannot be met using schools' annual grants.

Information about this funding is sent to all First Nation schools each year.

The funding provided for school-based services is complemented by a range of collective initiatives to create economies-of-scale and increase access to necessary expertise and special education materials by all First Nation schools in BC. Those services include the following.

- ▶ SEP staff share information with schools, answer questions, organize services, and provide overall management to ensure the effective operation of the program. SEP also provides professional development through workshops and in-school support from SEP Coaches who have a range of specialized skills.
- ▶ SEP-sponsored Speech Language Pathologists (SLPs) provide teachers and education/learning assistants with information and language development strategies that are of benefit to all students, and assessment and intervention recommendations for specific students with exceptional language learning needs.
- ▶ Occupational Therapists (OTs) and Physical Therapists (PTs) provide families and school staff with relevant training and provide needed student assessments and follow up, including intervention recommendations and supports.

- ▶ First Nation schools are invited to participate in a Coordinated Psycho-Educational Assessment initiative; individual psycho-educational assessments are sponsored to determine students' needs, establish follow-up procedures, recommend interventions, and provide direct supports for students, as appropriate.
- ▶ Additional specialists provide autism-focused assistance for students identified through assessments and SEP staff visits to schools.
- ▶ Specialized supports and materials are provided for students who require specific assistive technologies in order to access the curriculum and demonstrate their progress in learning.

Further Information about SEP funding grants and how to access support services can be found on the FNSA and FNEC web sites.

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### **What is the FNEC and FNSA First Nations Language and Culture Program?**

FNEC and FNSA manage a comprehensive First Nations Language and Culture Program, which provides grants to First Nations schools totaling approximately \$14 million annually – in addition to the \$5 million that is provided directly to schools for Language education through the BCTEA funding formula.

BCTEA-funded First Nation schools are provided details about the Language and Culture grants each year, including information about their specific funding amounts as well as the process for accessing their allocations and reporting on the sponsored activities. School principals are expected to inform their School Governing Authority about this funding opportunity and collaboratively identify the school's Language and Culture plans and priorities.

FNEC and FNSA also implement a range of programs and services to provide collective language and culture supports to First Nation schools and communities, including:

- ▶ school visits from a Language Curriculum Manager and Language and Culture Coaches to support staff and students;
- ▶ regional First Nations school information sharing sessions;
- ▶ workshops on curriculum and resource development; and



- ▶ a range of professional development opportunities for Language teachers.

More information about the First Nations Language and Culture program and the available services can be found at [www.fnsa.ca](http://www.fnsa.ca) and [www.fnesc.ca](http://www.fnesc.ca).

### **What other funding opportunities are managed by FNESC and FNSA?**

Through BCTEA, FNESC and FNSA are now managing funding from ISC for the purchase of school buses for First Nation schools. Following direction from a Working Group comprised of representatives of First Nation communities and schools, this funding is allocated to First Nations based upon factors including bus age, mileage, and bus route conditions. Grants allow for the purchase of a range of bus sizes depending on school needs, with ninety percent of the grants provided up-front and the remaining ten percent provided based upon proof of purchase.

To support the effective management of the bus capital funding, First Nations schools are asked to regularly provide information regarding their school buses to inform the prioritization of bus needs. Notices are sent to all schools regularly, and it is important that the requested information is submitted for effective funding management.

### **What is the First Nations Education Jurisdiction initiative?**

In 2006, FNESC, Canada and British Columbia signed a set of Education Jurisdiction Framework Agreements, with associated enabling legislation passed by Canada in 2006 and British Columbia in 2007. Twelve Negotiating First Nations (NFNs) are now actively negotiating with Canada and BC to finalize updates to the suite of agreements originally signed in 2006, with full implementation scheduled to begin in September 2022.

Principals who are new to First Nation schools should ask whether their Nation is actively participating in the Education Jurisdiction Agreement. If they are, it is important to learn more.

Additional information is available at [www.fnesc.ca](http://www.fnesc.ca).

### **Are any resources available to assist with parental and family engagement?**

All schools are aware of their crucial link with parents and families, and for First Nations schools, their relationship with and responsibility to families is even more critical.

The integral role of First Nations families in their children's development and learning is entirely consistent with First Nations education traditions. 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. First Nations people have persistently emphasized the need for education systems that reflect and reinforce their cultures and traditions, noting that a positive sense of identity is a source of strength that allows First Nations students to become much more successful in all areas of education and life. To achieve that goal, family and community involvement in the education process is crucial.

In addition, in First Nations communities, parents often have a choice regarding where their children will attend school; in many cases, a public school is located in close proximity, and parents choose to have their children attend the First Nations school because they believe their children will be offered valuable learning opportunities in a school that is controlled by their own community. That situation adds even greater importance to the school's need to foster commitment and trust with families.

Extensive educational literature also shows that the home environment is inseparable from the work of schools. Strong educational environments in the home provide children with intellectual, social and emotional capacities that greatly improve school success. While in no way discounting schools' responsibilities for and impact on student learning, it is widely acknowledged that when families are involved in their children's education, students do better in school and schools improve.

In response to those understandings, the First Nations Parents Club began in 2000, with the intention of encouraging greater family involvement in schools and home learning efforts. The initiative involves the establishment of locally-based Parents Clubs that are organized and operated according to the needs of parents. Each Club receives support materials, newsletters, Parents Club calendars, books for parents to read with their children at home, as well as a variety of incentives to recognize the significant contributions being made by First Nations parents throughout the province. All Parents Club materials and activities are offered at no charge.

Anyone interested in more information can visit the FNEESC or FNSEA web site.

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**Are there other key issues I should be especially aware of?**

A critical issue for ongoing, pro-active attention from all school principals is student attendance, and data demonstrates that this is a pressing concern for all First Nation schools in BC.

Research is clear that students who have the best chance to succeed in school are generally those who attend school on a consistent basis. Regular school

attendance is an essential part of the learning process and crucial to graduating from school with a strong foundation for further studies and a successful career.

- ▶ Chronic absenteeism is generally defined as missing ten percent or more of a school year, including excused and unexcused absences – which results in approximately 18 days a year, or about two days every month.
- ▶ Evidence shows a strong correlation between chronic absenteeism and lower achievement rates, as well as a greater possibility that a student will drop out of school before completing their secondary education. Poor attendance can leave students more likely to become long-term unemployed, homeless, caught in the poverty trap, dependent on welfare, and involved in the justice system.
- ▶ Students who regularly miss school receive fewer hours of instruction, often leading to lower grades. In effective classrooms, instruction builds over time; when students are absent, they miss vital building blocks of information. Subsequent absences can then leave students further and further behind, making them want to avoid school more, thus creating a continual cycle of absenteeism.
- ▶ Students who are absent also miss out on opportunities to develop important behavioural and social-emotional skills, and to create positive relationships with adults and other students in the school.
- ▶ High rates of student absences can threaten schools' overall efforts to raise student achievement. When teachers must accommodate students who have missed class, it affects the learning environment overall. Sometimes teachers must slow the pace of instruction or spend more time in review when too many students are absent or late, meaning important instructional time is lost. And if teachers must concentrate on students who have fallen behind due to chronic absences, other students receive less attention.
- ▶ Some schools even suggest that absenteeism can become “contagious,” as peers may see school as less compulsory or attendance as less important if some students are regularly absent.

In order to assist schools and communities in understanding and addressing this critical aspect of student and school success, FNEC and FNSA have published a Toolkit: *Raising the Attendance Rates of First Nations Students in British Columbia*. This Toolkit is intended to help First Nations and schools consider issues related to

student attendance, why it is important, why students might not attend school regularly, and what can be done to help. The information is intended to apply to a variety of education settings – public schools, First Nation schools, First Nation adult education centres, and independent schools. See [www.fnesc.ca](http://www.fnesc.ca) to download a copy of the Toolkit, which includes ideas, template forms and documents, and template hand-outs for parents, staff, and school leadership.

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### What other resources are available for support?

FNESC and FNSA have produced a number of additional resources that may be of interest to principals who are new to First Nation schools.

#### Student Record Keeping Handbook For First Nations Schools in BC

This Handbook is intended to assist schools in adopting and maintaining student records in ways that reflect effective practice and that meet their needs, including information related to student files, confidentiality, and student record policies and procedures.

#### Employment Handbook For First Nation Schools

This resource provides a range of suggestions for topics including defining employment needs, recruiting new employees, and implementing effective human resource practices for staff that work in First Nation schools. The Handbook provides ideas and suggestions for First Nations schools regarding their personnel practices, as well as sample job descriptions, forms and letters.

#### Offering Unique Opportunities and Experiences: Teaching In a First Nation School In BC

This resource was created to assist schools in sharing information with potential job applicants about the unique learning opportunities available in First Nation schools in BC. The pamphlet may be useful for sharing at career fairs, with employment applicants, and possibly with new employees as part of an orientation package. Principals who are new to First Nation schools may also find some of the information included in the resource informative.

FNESC and the FNSA offer a wide variety of support services for First Nations schools in BC, including professional development supports, as well as coaching for instruction, special education, First Nations Language and culture, human resources, and technology. All of the support services available, as well as ways to access the opportunities that exist, are outlined in an information pamphlet: *Description of Services and Support Personnel Available to Assist First Nations Schools in BC*. Copies of this resource can be requested from Benjamin Panatti at [Benjaminp@fnesc.ca](mailto:Benjaminp@fnesc.ca).

## Quick Check: First Nation Versus First Nation Independent Schools

FIRST NATION SCHOOLS	FIRST NATIONS SCHOOLS WITH INDEPENDENT SCHOOL STATUS
Under the authority of the First Nation that established the school	Under the authority of the First Nation that established the school, and subject to requirements under the BC Independent School Act
Funded for students who ordinarily reside on reserve according to the BCTEA funding formula through submission of the ISC nominal roll	Funded for students who ordinarily reside on reserve according to the BCTEA funding formula through submission of the ISC nominal roll
Can apply to the Ministry of Education for Reciprocal Tuition for funding for students who normally reside off reserve if the school is FNSA certified	Are funded for students who normally reside off reserve through submission of Form 1701 to the Ministry of Education
Must submit BCTEA reporting variables to FNEESC each year	Must submit BCTEA reporting variables to FNEESC each year
Must confirm to ISC that an evaluation has been completed every five years; can be fulfilled through participation in the First Nations Schools Assessment Process	Must confirm to ISC that an evaluation has been completed every five years; can be fulfilled through participation in the First Nations Schools Assessment Process or an Independent School evaluation / monitoring process  Must be inspected and monitored by the Independent Schools Branch according to the Independent School requirements
Must employ teachers who are certified by the BC Ministry of Education or another provincial certification authority	Must employ teachers who are certified by the BC Ministry of Education
Can offer the Dogwood or Adult Dogwood Diploma if the school is FNSA certified	Can offer the Dogwood or Adult Dogwood Diploma
Can offer locally developed courses that count for graduation purposes if they have been approved through the First Nations Authorized Course Process	Can offer locally developed courses that count for graduation purposes if they have been approved by an Independent School Authority
Should develop and maintain policies approved by the School Governing Authority	Should develop and maintain policies approved by the School Governing Authority that are consistent with the Independent School requirements and Province of BC Ministerial orders
Can access funding grants through the FNEESC and FNSA Special Education Program and First Nations Language and Culture Program	Can access funding grants through the FNEESC and FNSA Special Education Program and First Nations Language and Culture Program

### Questions New Principals Should Ask (... and not wait to be told)

- ▶ Who is the School Governing Authority? How do I contact them?
- ▶ What is the relationship of the school / School Governing Authority with Chief and Council?
- ▶ Is there a Council portfolio on education? Who holds that position? What is his or her relationship to the school / School Governing Authority?
- ▶ Who is the Education Coordinator / Manager? What is his or her relationship to the school?
- ▶ Has a school mission / vision been developed? How was it created? Who was involved?
- ▶ How does funding flow to the school? Who do I talk to for more information about the school's funding?
- ▶ How is the school budget developed, and by whom? Can I have a copy of the existing school budget?
- ▶ Does a school policy manual exist? How was it developed? Who was involved? What is the role of Chief and Council in developing / approving / monitoring school policy?
- ▶ Does the school have its own human resources policies, or is the school staff covered by the Band's human resources policies?
- ▶ What services are available to support the school / school staff? What other relevant community service agencies exist? How do I contact them?
- ▶ Are health services available for students? Are counseling services available?
- ▶ Does a Parent's Handbook exist? Is it up-to-date?
- ▶ What codes / access do I need?
  - If our school uses DRUMS, do I have the password? Call the DRUMS Helpdesk if you need more information.
  - If our school offers the Dogwood / Adult Dogwood, what is our school's Ministry of Education code? Do I have the School Secure Web password to access the Ministry's TRAX system? Contact Lauranne Hutton (lauranneh@fnesc.ca) if you need help.

## Checklist: Things To Look For / Find Out

Transitioning to a new principal can be a challenging time for the school community, and it can be difficult to remember to transfer everything the new principal will need. The list below, while not exhaustive, represents a general inventory of things to consider, which will need to be adapted for specific circumstances.

- Passwords for online services, such as DRUMS or MyEd BC (whichever system the school uses), School Secure Web (if relevant), Make a Future, websites to which the school has subscribed, etc.
- Details about the school's review process and growth plan, if one exists (eg. First Nations School Assessment and Certification status and expiration date, or Independent School evaluation / monitoring schedule)
- Schools handbooks and policy manuals
- School keys and alarm system details
- School calendar and timetables
- Summary of the school's communication strategy (i.e. monthly newsletter, school Facebook account, etc.)
- Status of school grants and reporting deadlines (eg. Special Education Program (SEP), First Nations Language and Culture Program, etc.)
- Busing schedule and routes
- Financial policies, possibly including how payroll is completed or expenses are reimbursed
- Summary of bills and invoices the principal is responsible for paying (eg. utility bills)
- A list of supplies the school uses
- A list and contact information for FNESC staff that support the school (eg. Regional Principal, SEP Coach, etc.)
- Contact information for any other contractors working with the school
- Maintenance schedule for the building and/or contact information for contractors associated with the school (eg. electricians, plumbers)

