



Association of Canadian Community Colleges

Response to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada on:

Developing a First Nations Education Act – A Blueprint for Legislation, July 2013

Given the First Nations Education Act focuses on primary and secondary level education, the feedback from the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC) is provided from the lens of linkages between K-12 education and post-secondary education. Colleges and institutes have a pivotal role in education systems across Canada to facilitate access and transitions between secondary school and post-secondary education. All colleges and institutes in Canada are located in proximity to First Nations communities. Through the 2010 ACCC survey on Aboriginal programs and services, 65 colleges and institutes confirmed they deliver education and training programs in First Nations and Inuit communities. This feedback is based on lessons learned gathered from ACCC member institutions.

- The Blueprint for Legislation should recognize more explicitly and in an integrated manner throughout the document, the foundational importance of First Nations languages and cultures.
 - This should be addressed in the Section on Education Standards on page 3. Although this section indicates that the legislation will include a framework for First Nations and First Nations education authorities to set standards that respond to their community needs, this section should also state that standards would be founded upon and reflective of First Nations cultures and traditional knowledge.
 - Surveys and consultations with ACCC members confirm the importance of wrap-around support services for learner success. In the Section on Education Services (pages 5 and 6), the support services listed do not reference second language training supports, language revitalization and the all-important services from Elders to provide students guidance, counseling and connections to First Nations cultures, values and traditional knowledge. These are key for First Nations students at all education levels, from Early Childhood Education to primary, secondary and postsecondary education.
 - The document should recognize the importance of embedding First Nations culture and traditional knowledge in curriculum and ensuring First Nations languages are taught at all levels to support language revitalization.
- The Blueprint for Legislation must acknowledge and recognize the significant contributions First Nations have made to improving education and build on the successes already achieved.
- In terms of program delivery, the proposed legislation should encourage innovation in program models and not support only one model or approach, and ensure hands-on, experiential components are integrated across all subjects and education levels.
- Linkages to adult education, apprenticeship and post-secondary education programs must be strengthened in the proposed legislation. On page 4, for the statement entitled, *Access to Education*, we suggest that agreements with colleges and institutes also be included.

Colleges and institutes are primary providers of high school equivalency programs and adult upgrading across the country. Many First Nations are turning to colleges and institutes to provide their youth who have dropped out of high school with a learning pathway that gives them their high school diploma or equivalent and transitions them to post-secondary education. This is particularly the case for First Nations where there are challenges of capacity. Many colleges and institutes also offer dual credit options for high school students whereby they gain their high school diploma and some post-secondary credits at the same time.

- The Blueprint for Legislation should also acknowledge the importance of Early Childhood Education and ensure linkages are fostered to provide First Nations children with early learning opportunities.
- In recognition of the significant funding gaps between provincial and First Nations education systems, the document should affirm a commitment to address the shortfalls.
- The funding models must take into account the different scenarios of First Nations education, including those specific to the North where the schools may not be on reserve but the children face many of the same realities, particularly in the northern territorial rural communities.
- We have some suggestions on the use of language in the document as follows:
 - In the Preamble to the Bill on page 3, the use of the term “Aboriginal” in the heading *Addressing Aboriginal Rights within a First Nation Education Act* could lead to confusion given this Act is for First Nations, and not for other Aboriginal groups in Canada.
 - In the section Access to Education, the use of “children” is somewhat limiting given the Act includes secondary school, we suggest “children and youth” as a more encompassing term.
 - There is incongruence in the section entitled, *A Recognized High School Diploma*, with the use of the conditional verb, “First Nations could offer high school diploma”.