



ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

Language and Culture

The Assembly of First Nations has been a staunch defender of Indigenous linguistic, cultural and education rights.

On December 21, 1972, the National Indian Brotherhood presented *Indian Control of Indian Education* (ICIE, 1972) to the Minister of Indian Affairs, Jean Chretien, who gave it official recognition, approved its proposals and committed the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development to their implementation. ICIE, 1972 noted:

The present school system is culturally alien to native students. Where the Indian contribution is not entirely ignored, it is often cast in an unfavorable light. School curricula in federal and provincial/territorial schools should recognize Indian culture, values, customs, languages and the Indian contribution to Canadian development. Courses in Indian history and culture should promote pride in the Indian child, and respect in the non-Indian student.

There are 11 Indigenous language families in Canada, with over 60 unique language dialects spoken – **all** are considered to be critically endangered, except Inuktitut. In 1996, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) stated that "Canada's Aboriginal languages are among the **most endangered** in the world."

Chiefs-in-Assembly have responded to linguistic statistics that proved Indigenous languages in Canada are "**in danger of extinguishment**" through various resolutions. In Resolution 35-1998 Chiefs-in-Assembly declared a "**state of emergency**" noting the last 30 years have seen the most drastic decline in First Nations languages.

AFN Resolutions have called for:

- Aboriginal Languages Foundation (1987;1988; 1991; 1992; 1998; 1999; 2000); Aboriginal Languages Foundation Act (1989); First Nations Language Council (2005); Access to Residential School Funding for the Establishment of a First Nation Language and Culture Foundation (2006).
- Legislation supporting Indigenous languages as official national languages of Canada (1990; 1991; 1992; 2000; 2005; 2006; 2007; 2008).
- Immersion education as the fastest, most efficient means of reversing language loss (1994; 1998; 2006; 2007).
- Establishment of a First Nations Language Commissioner to oversee harmonization of legislation and policies and implementation of language strategies (2007).



ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

Language and Culture

CURRENT STATE OF LANGUAGE & CULTUREⁱ

According to the 2008-2010 First Nations Regional Health Survey:

- Almost half (49.7%) of all First Nation children were reported to be able to speak or understand a First Nations language.
- 86% of youth (12 to 17 years old) living in nearly every First Nation and northern community felt that learning their own Indigenous language was "very important" or "somewhat important."
- More than half (56.3%) of First Nation youth across Canada reported speaking or understanding their own languages.
- More than 4 of every 5 First Nation youth feel that learning their own First Nations languages is either 'very important' or 'somewhat important' to themselves and to their First Nation.
- 83% of First Nation adults say they feel their cultures on-reserve and in northern communities had either improved or stayed the same.
- 67% of First Nation adults "sometimes" participated in cultural events in their territories.
- 4 out of 5 First Nation adults considered traditional ceremonies or spirituality at least "somewhat" important, although young adults were less likely to feel the same way.

FEDERAL FUNDING FOR INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES

Funding for Schools – Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC)

Originally, the national funding formula allocated **\$215 per student** for First Nation schools to support First Nations languages, based on the salary of one language teacher for 200 students. It is estimated that about \$15 million was allocated to all Band Schools in 2008.

An example of how AANDC Regional Offices applied their own formula can be found in Quebec, where this amount was reduced to **\$185 per student** for First Nations languages. An additional amount of \$190 per student was given for teaching French.

Funding to Communities – Canadian Heritage (CH)

The Aboriginal Languages Initiatives (ALI) provides \$5 million for First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities. The amount allocated for First Nations is \$3.75 million.



ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

Language and Culture

The regional formula applied by CH is \$100,000 per region + number of languages within that region. Funding is described as “notional,” meaning that if a region does not use all their funding, it can be reallocated to another region. In addition, \$8 million is provided to Northern Aboriginal Broadcasting and dedicated funding to the Territorial Language Accords (NWT: \$1.9 million; Yukon: 11 Self-Government Agreements receive funding directly and three First Nations have CH Territorial Language Accords).

FEDERAL/PROVINCIAL FUNDING FOR “MINORITY” FRENCH & ENGLISH EDUCATION

The *Roadmap for Canada’s Linguistic Duality 2008-2013: Acting for the Future*, notes that Canadian Heritage provides \$611.0M for minority and second-language education.

Provincial Costs per Pupil for Francophone & Anglophone Education

Generally, there is a wide variance between funding provided to Francophone and Anglophone Divisions or School Boards. A few examples:

ALBERTA	Francophone Authorities \$15,252	Anglophone Boards \$8,840
BRITISH COLUMBIA	Conseil Scolaire Francophone \$13,520	Other Districts \$8,043
NFLD & LABRADOR	Conseil Scolaire Francophone \$23,020	Other Districts \$8,050
ONTARIO	Commission Scolaires \$14,652	English School Boards \$9,776

However, the funding gap per student in Quebec between French and English school boards is only about \$324.

Estimating Costs for Indigenous Language and Cultural Education

In 2009, the First Nations Education Council (FNEC)ⁱⁱ estimated that First Nation language funding required approximately **\$126.6 million annually**, based on provincial funding for official languages. The amount would vary according to the language program, whether it was language immersion, second language or per credit.

In 2007, the *First Nations National Language Strategy* was endorsed by Chiefs-in-Assembly. Costs to implement this strategy were estimated at approximately



ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

Language and Culture

\$165,888,600 annually. Elements included in this estimate were costs associated with: technological applications (including curriculum development, library and archival infrastructure); Language Nests – Immersion; Head Start On Reserve and Day Care; K-12; Community Adult Language training; and, Teacher Language Training.

The United Nations Human Rights Council's report *Role of languages and culture in the promotion and protection of the rights and identity of Indigenous peoples: Study of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* makes the following recommendation to States:

14. States, in partnership with indigenous peoples, must advance the protection, promotion and respect for indigenous cultures, languages, traditions and customs. State laws and policies addressing indigenous peoples' languages and cultures must go beyond symbolism and be effective in practice, setting out clear and practical methods to support indigenous peoples in their own promotion and protection of their languages and cultures, in accordance with their right to self-determination. This must include the allocation of sufficient financial, legal and policy support for the learning of indigenous languages, the teaching of indigenous cultural values and the training of indigenous educators. Also, States must provide incentives for indigenous peoples to transmit their languages and cultures to younger generations, recognition of place names in indigenous languages, strategic plans for implementing public awareness campaigns about indigenous cultures and languages, incorporating indigenous language and cultures in relevant media, publishing books (for example, textbooks) and establishing immersion and bilingual schooling.

ⁱ The First Nations Information Governance Centre, First Nations Regional Health Survey (RHS) Phase 2 (2008/10) National Report for Adults, Youth and Children Living in First Nations Communities. (Ottawa: The First Nations Information Governance Centre, June 2012).

ⁱⁱ First Nations Education Council (FNEC). (2009). *Paper on First Nations Education Funding*, p. 22.