

ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS



Communiqué from National Chief Shawn Atleo

February 2014

The Assembly of First Nations issues regular updates on work underway at the national office. More information can be found at www.afn.ca.

FIRST NATIONS CONTROL OF FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION ANNOUNCEMENT AND FEDERAL BUDGET 2014

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) is pleased to offer this update regarding recent discussions, strategy sessions, meetings and developments and the continued priorities of First Nations in achieving change for our peoples, communities and nations.

First Nations Control of First Nations Education: A New Way Forward

On February 7, 2014, I had the honour to be at Kainai High School in Treaty No. 7 territory to participate in the announcement of a new approach to First Nations control of First Nations education and significant new investments to support First Nations education.

The key points are:

- A new approach is now in place to support First Nations control of First Nations education based on our rights, Treaties and jurisdiction (consistent with AFN resolution 21/2013).
- This new approach will not negatively impact any existing agreements or approaches but rather will specifically support and enable First Nation regional and Treaty approaches.
- There are significant new investments to support this work that will add billions of dollars to education funding.
- These resources are secure and not subject to clawbacks or election results.

The announcement and ceremony was attended by First Nations leaders, Regional Chiefs and Grand Chiefs, Elders, students, children and citizens. The Prime Minister and Minister of Aboriginal Affairs were in attendance representing the federal government. I want to thank Grand Chief Charles Weaselhead for welcoming us into the territory of the Blood Nation for this important work focussed on our kids and on our future.

In the days since the announcement there have been a number of questions about details and next steps. I am sending this Bulletin to provide more information on this major announcement and the new way forward.

The Announcement

The announcement is the culmination of more than forty years of advocacy for First Nations control of First Nations education and fair and equitable funding for our children, an approach articulated in *Indian Control of Indian Education* in 1972 and reaffirmed as *First Nations Control of First Nations Education* in 2010.

The federal government's proposed First Nations Education Act is dead. The new approach places our children front and centre and is founded on our rights, Treaties and jurisdiction.

The new approach meets all the principles in AFN resolution 21/2013, "Outlining the Path Forward: Conditions for the Success of First Nations Education", adopted by consensus at the AFN Special Chiefs Assembly in December 2013 (see attached document "A Clear Path Forward on First Nations Education"). Consistent with the resolution, the new approach:

- respects and recognizes First Nations rights, title, Treaties and jurisdiction;
- provides for a statutory guarantee of funding, including a predictable annual growth rate to ensure funding keeps pace with costs of delivering quality education;
- includes support for First Nations languages and cultures;
- calls for the development of mechanisms for reciprocal accountability with no unilateral federal oversight or authority;
- and provides for ongoing meaningful dialogue and development of options by First Nations and Canada for an enabling framework that will ensure the success of First Nations students and schools.

The clear direction in resolution 21/2013 provided the AFN with a mandate to advocate for this new approach. These key principles are not and can never be negotiable.

The only thing that has been agreed to is the resolution and its conditions. Now together we must build the new way forward and confirm the federal obligations and support for First Nation control of First Nation education. This work is not driven by the AFN – it **must** be driven by First Nations.

For the same reason, there is no new legislation. Any legislation must be driven by First Nations and must enable the full range of approaches that First Nations want to pursue.

For those who question the purpose of new legislation, we must recognize that there already is legislation governing First Nations education: it is the same provisions in the Indian Act that allow the government to set up the residential schools system. Those sections of the Indian Act will be repealed as stated at the announcement. We must develop new legislation that enables and supports full First Nations control and provides a statutory guarantee of funding.

This is our opportunity to fully realize what First Nations control of First Nations education means to us, to get the Minister and government out of our schools and to support success for our children and students – our way.

We recognize and celebrate that some First Nations have already implemented their vision of First Nations education. Some are embarking on new approaches. **This new approach will not impact any existing agreements or approaches.** On the contrary, it will enable and support approaches driven by First Nations and regions across the country.

The work begins now – First Nations must articulate their vision of First Nations control of First Nations education. The AFN will support and help facilitate this work but it must be driven by First Nations. We know that we have the expertise and the approaches that work to ensure success for our children and students.

I recognize there are many questions and details that remain. We are in a new space, a new moment in time to make real what First Nations control of First Nations education means to us. First Nations must drive this work and next steps.

The AFN's role now is to help to continue to facilitate this dialogue. Ultimately it will be up to every region, every Treaty area and every First Nation to determine their path forward. The AFN will support this work, and there is investment to support this transition.

Together with the leadership of our education portfolio holder, Regional Chief Morley Googoo and our supporting committees, we plan to host roundtable discussions that can gather direction that helps elaborate on the key principles and supports every First Nation moving forward. There will be information coming forward on this work in the very near future.

Funding: Investments in First Nations Education

Investments to support this new way forward were announced at Kainai High School on February 7 and locked into Canada's fiscal framework in the federal budget tabled on February 11, 2014. The investments are significant and, in fact, represent the largest dollar amounts in the federal budget.

The 2014 federal budget confirms:

- new core funding of \$1.25 billion from 2016-17 to 2018-19 in support of First Nations education with an annual growth rate of 4.5 per cent;
- includes an Enhanced Education Fund that will provide funding of \$160 million over four years starting in 2015-16;
- and \$500 million over seven years beginning in 2015-16 for a new First Nations Education Infrastructure Fund.

Based on an initial analysis of the funding projections, First Nations will see more than \$2 billion in education support by 2021/22. Please see the chart "Summary of New Investments in First Nations Education" on the AFN website for more detail.

For greater clarity, I want to emphasize the following points.

First, the funding announced in the federal budget is **new money**. This is not funding that has been "re-profiled" or re-announced in previous budgets.

Second, the 4.5% annual growth rate means **we have eliminated the 2% cap** on education funding that has held back our youth and students for too long. This annual growth will be enshrined in statute which means it is guaranteed.

Third, this **new funding is not subject to the outcome of the 2015 federal election**.

Regardless of which party wins in 2015, these investments will have been passed by Parliament, locked-in and on the books. On this point, it is worth noting that all parties in the House of Commons have stated their support for this new approach and the new investments.

This is only the start of our work. This work may not always be easy but it is important work and essential work to strengthen our citizens and rebuild our nations. Together we will transform the education system to meet the needs of our children, students, and communities supported by secure, stable and sustainable investments.

There is more information on the AFN website and we will be providing more information in the coming days, weeks and months.

Federal Budget 2014: Other Announcements

The Federal Budget 2014 was tabled on February 11, 2014. As with all federal budgets, the AFN participated in the pre-budget process and advocated strongly for investments in key areas and priorities.

We have already looked at the significant new investments in education. In addition, the federal budget includes resources for broadband connectivity in rural and northern communities, disaster mitigation in First Nations communities, continued funding for the First Nations Water and Wastewater Action Plan, First Nations Commercial Fisheries Initiatives, a two year renewal of the Aboriginal Justice Strategy and resources aimed at ending violence against Indigenous women and girls.

These budget amounts are a start but we need more concerted efforts and action based on First Nations direction. Investments upfront reduce costs in the short- and long-term. And we continue to push for action beyond the budget. We stand firm in our call for specific action to end violence against First Nations women and girls, to deal with the tragedy of missing and murdered women and girls and for a national public commission of inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls.

I encourage you to visit our website for full details on the budget announcements that affect our people and our communities. I invite you to contact my office if you have questions or suggestions.

Now is our time to stand together to press for progress, action and change that builds stronger First Nations citizens, government and nations. Your involvement and direction is not only critical, it is absolutely essential.

Kleco, Kleco!