



ASSEMBLY OF FIRST NATIONS

It's Our Time: A Call to Action on Education

The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) is launching a National Call to Action on Education. We are asking the corporate sector, philanthropic organizations, higher learning institutions, provincial and federal governments and ordinary Canadians to join our campaign. By supporting education and skills training we can ensure First Nations youth will reach their full potential and that our Nations resume our place as integral to the success and prosperity of Canada.

A Vision for First Nations Education and Canada

Our call is grounded in our firm belief in First Nations control of First Nations education – a movement started in 1972. Since this time we have seen success and outcomes have improved. Today, though, the challenge is to quicken the rate and pace of change. Not only must we not lose another generation – we must not lose a single child to our past of oppression and inequality.



Our call to action has five components:

- 1. Reconciliation** – the federal government and provincial governments must reconcile our rights within education acts across the country. Canada's commitment to endorse the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples creates the appropriate framework to advance this work.
- 2. First Nations education guarantee** – a secure fiscal framework is needed for funding for education – something that is enjoyed by every segment of Canadian society except for First Nations.
- 3. Sustainability** – statutory funding arrangements based on real costs, indexation and appropriate treatment for northern and remote communities.
- 4. Systems** – First Nation education must be supported through professional and accountable institutional supports delivering second and third level supports including First Nation curriculum and immersion in First Nation languages.
- 5. Support and Partnership** – creating a learning environment in our communities and linking with organizations, the public and private sector to invest in our schools and our children.

Why is action needed now?

Investing in First Nations is not only a benefit to First Nations communities; it's a long-term and sustainable stimulus plan for Canada's economy. Statistics Canada has predicted that Canada will face a labour shortage by 2017 as baby boomers retire and there are fewer workers to replace them.



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With more than half of First Nations people under the age of 23, our youth can fill this gap, but only if they are empowered with the skills and education to meet the need. If we reach the targets we have set, First Nations workers would add \$179 billion to Canada's GDP by 2026 through employment and by reducing government expenditures on income support, social services, health care, and security.

The Difference Education makes:

- Only half of First Nation youth complete high school **but when** First Nations youth complete high school, they are twice as likely to be employed.
- Only 8% of Aboriginal people have a university degree, compared to 23% of the Canadian population, **but when** First Nations youth are able to complete a university degree, they triple their earning potential.

A modern approach to education is needed.

To be successful First Nations children need:

- Safe and Secure Places to Learn – A number of First Nations communities do not even have schools and children must leave their families and communities to attend school or forfeit their education. Many existing schools require renovations to ensure children have safe and secure places to learn.
- Gyms, libraries, textbooks, computers and science labs. Many First Nations children do not

have the most basic learning tools. The reason is that First Nations schools are funded in a completely different way than provincial schools. The funding approach is outdated, unstable and is not based on the actual number of students in the classroom. On average First Nations schools receive at least \$2000 less per child which accounts for the lack of learning materials. It is also difficult to retain qualified teachers in First Nations schools because they earn some of the lowest salaries among teachers in Canada.

- First Nations schools require support from First Nations school boards and management authorities. Many have been established, but are not empowered through funding, policy and legislation in the same way as provincial education systems. Strengthening First Nations control involves providing parents with meaningful involvement in the education of their children. It means having classes and curriculum which reflect First Nations identities and needs. It means strengthening linkages to other jurisdictions, and with other education providers. It means providing high quality, culturally relevant education to First Nations children wherever they attend school.
- Education in First Nations languages – First Nations languages are the core of First Nations identity. First Nations must have the opportunity to be educated in First Nations languages as members of Anglophone and Francophone language groups have to receive an education in those languages. Support for language teachers and relevant curriculum is essential.



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Everyone needs to be involved – Join our Call to Action

- We're calling on the federal government and the provincial governments to work hand-in-hand with First Nations to ensure equitable funding and support for First Nation education.
- We're asking all higher learning institutions in Canada to recognize, support and to contribute to improved First Nation education outcomes.
- We're asking Corporate Canada and philanthropic organizations to support us in partnership and with investments needed for programming, training and infrastructure.
- Sign up on our Call to Action website as a supporter. This is where you will also receive updates on how our partners are working to improve First Nations education and new ways you can help.
- Write to your Member of Parliament – you can find his/her contact information at www.parl.gc.ca.
- Plan an event in your school or community to raise awareness of the urgent need for all to be involved and all to contribute to improved First Nation education and understanding across Canadian society.

