

## **Indigenous Education Overview - January 2025**

The following collection of topics and information provides information for school board trustees in Saskatchewan to support and advance Indigenous education in their school divisions. As trustees, understanding and integrating Indigenous knowledge, perspectives, and values into the educational system is not just a matter of policy but a vital part of the ongoing process of Reconciliation. The materials outlined here—ranging from the Saskatchewan School Boards Association’s Position Statement on Indigenous Education and the *Indigenous Education Responsibility Framework* to the Ministry of Education’s *Inspiring Success* policy framework - highlight the commitment to equitable outcomes for First Nations and Métis students and the broader goal of fostering an inclusive learning environment for all learners.

These pieces outline strategies for building relationships, creating welcoming environments, advocating for culturally responsive curricula, and engaging in professional development that supports Indigenous knowledge systems. By monitoring the implementation of these practices and frameworks, trustees play a crucial role in shaping a respectful and inclusive education system that acknowledges historical injustices, supports the revitalization of Indigenous cultures and languages, and ensures the success of all students. This collective approach not only contributes to the educational success of Indigenous students but also fosters a more just, informed, and compassionate society for future generations.

### **Saskatchewan School Boards Position Statement on Indigenous Education**

The SSBA has a Position Statement on Indigenous Education which was approved in November 2021. It can be found here: <https://saskschoolboards.ca/about-us/position-statements/>

Indigenous Knowledge resides within First Nations and Métis peoples and communities. While there is no one Indigenous way of knowing, there is a set of common themes that emerge when Indigenous peoples share their knowledge – land, languages, and relationships. These themes are built upon principles and values that are important to Indigenous peoples such as building relationships, seeking harmony, affirming and revitalizing Indigenous languages and cultures, putting children first, and honouring the land. Indigenous education in

Saskatchewan includes achieving equitable outcomes for First Nations and Métis learners, and for all Saskatchewan students to have knowledge of the contributions, perspectives and ways of knowing of Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous education is also about advancing Reconciliation by acknowledging truth including the history and intergenerational effects of residential schools, and championing Reconciliation. In Canada, this work is situated in the treaty relationship, in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In Saskatchewan, First Nations and Métis education is set out in the Ministry of Education's *Inspiring Success* policy framework and boards of education/Conseil scolaire fransaskois (CSF) are committed to its implementation and therefore build authentic relationships with Indigenous peoples to assist them on this journey. Boards of education/CSF create policies and strategies, resource programs, and monitor performance of Indigenous education within the school division in the following ways.

1. Building Relationships and Partnerships

Boards of education/CSF foster and nurture relationships and partnerships with First Nations and Métis communities, educational authorities, Elders, and traditional Knowledge keepers. These relationships are necessary to build an understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing, and to collaborate through shared values and priorities to ultimately enhance student learning and well-being.

2. Creating Welcoming Environments

Boards of education/CSF create a mandate for all schools to establish and sustain respectful and welcoming environments, including visible commitments such as flag raisings and symbols, that instill belonging for all students, including Indigenous learners. Strategies are developed that foster the engagement of youth, families and communities in schools.

3. Representative Governance and Workforce in the Education Sector

Boards of education/CSF encourage the participation of Indigenous peoples in governance, and work through the SSBA to encourage Indigenous trusteeship. Boards of education/CSF commit to a representative workforce and examine their recruitment, selection, retention, and promotion practices, and remove systemic racism and other barriers for Indigenous peoples.

4. Increasing Capacity Across the Education System

Boards of education/CSF engage in professional learning focused on Indigenous education and reconciliation, and ensure staff are similarly engaged in professional learning regarding Indigenous education, understanding the concept of colonization and its impact, anti-racist/anti-oppressive education, and

reconciliation. Through relationships developed with First Nations and Métis partners, boards of education/CSF invite these strengths from Indigenous communities to support them in these efforts.

#### 5. Culturally Responsive Curriculum, Pedagogy, and Assessment

Boards of education/CSF advocate for curriculum that includes Indigenous content, perspectives, and ways of knowing across the subject areas, and that is developed with the engagement of First Nations and Métis peoples, Elders and traditional Knowledge keepers. Boards of education/CSF advocate for teacher education programs that include courses on Indigenous histories and perspectives so that teachers are prepared to incorporate these areas into their practice. Boards of education/CSF support educators as they implement community education practices, land-based learning, and other experiential learning opportunities for students. Boards of education/CSF promote assessment practices that are culturally appropriate and acknowledge an array of learning models and styles and take steps to eliminate systemic racism and bias in student assessment. Finally, boards of education/CSF value Indigenous Knowledge and expertise by supporting Indigenous research to inform education practice and pedagogy for the benefit of all learners.

6. Affirming and Revitalizing Indigenous Languages and Cultures Boards of education/CSF recognize the central role of language in supporting identity and culture and in validating Indigenous worldviews and promote Indigenous language programs in schools.

### **Inspiring Success: First Nations and Métis PreK-12 Education Policy Framework**

*Inspiring Success* is the Ministry of Education's umbrella policy for all actions related Indigenous education in Saskatchewan. It was first created in 2009 and then renewed in 2018. This framework guides the development of First Nations and Métis education plans at the provincial, school division and school levels, and to ensure that Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing continue to shape the learning experience for all students. The policy can be found here:

<https://www.saskatchewan.ca/residents/education-and-learning/first-nations-and-metis-education>

The vision of *Inspiring Success* is a provincial PreK-12 education system that foundationally places Indigenous knowledge systems, cultures and languages within the structures, policies and curricula to ensure an equitable and inclusive system that benefits all learners.

*Inspiring Success* supports reconciliation, treaty education, Indigenous cultures and languages in the classroom, as well as the infusion of Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing into all renewed curricula to benefit all learners. The policy contains 5 policy goals. School board members should note that Goal #3 speaks to shared management of the provincial education system by ensuring respectful relationships and equitable partnerships with First Nations and Métis people at the local level.

#### Goals of Inspiring Success

1. First Nations and Métis languages and cultures are valued and supported.
2. Equitable opportunities and outcomes for First Nations and Métis learners.
3. Shared management of the provincial education system by ensuring respectful relationships and equitable partnerships with First Nations and Métis peoples at the provincial and local level.
4. Culturally appropriate and authentic assessment measures that foster improved educational opportunities and outcomes.
5. All learners demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the worldviews and historical impact of First Nations and the Métis Nation.

#### **Indigenous Education Responsibility Framework**

The *Indigenous Education Responsibility Framework* (IERF) was created in 2022 and at the request of Boards of Education for a resource to support at all levels, strategic improvement planning in Indigenous Education. The purpose of the IERF is to mobilize the *Inspiring Success* policy framework to guide everyday work and align all levels of the provincial education sector. Directly aligned with *Inspiring Success*, the *Indigenous Education Responsibility Framework* is intended to support strategic improvement planning at all levels across the education sector. The IERF can be found here: <https://saskschoolboards.ca/services/first-nations-and-metis-education-services/>

Originally, it was created as a self-assessment/reflection tool to support school divisions to evaluate, plan and report their Indigenous Education activities. Boards additionally can also use the tool to support governance and assist in strategic planning. It also has potential to be used as a measure in the Provincial Education Plan for the Inspiring Success Priority Action and in school division Annual Reports.

The IERF was officially released September 2022 and province wide implementation began Fall 2022. The SSBA continues to provide leadership and support IERF implementation. The Indigenous Education Operational Group which invites representatives from all school divisions, focuses on providing

support for using the IERF and advancing Indigenous education in the provincial education system. The Provincial Education Plan Inspiring Success goal speaks to using the IERF as a measure so there may be additional opportunities to use the data/reporting for multiple reporting requirements and information sharing for decision making. The IERF is a living document and with implementation there comes an opportunity to revise over time as divisions and the education sector overall improves in Indigenous education.

IERF questions boards can ask in their role of setting direction and monitoring performance.

- How is the IERF being implemented in our school division?
- How is the IERF aligned to our strategic plan?
- Who is responsible for reporting/implementing the IERF in the division?
- How will the Board receive regular/ongoing updates about IERF implementation?
- How will the Board use the updates to make strategic/governance decisions?

## **Reconciliation**

In 2016, the Saskatchewan School Boards Association (SSBA) passed a resolution urging the Government of Saskatchewan to officially recognize Orange Shirt Day on September 30 each year. This day, which is also the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, is crucial for reflecting on the painful history and enduring impacts of residential schools in Canada. It aligns with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action, which call for educational initiatives that honor Indigenous histories and cultures, and help non-Indigenous people understand the legacy of residential schools. This day encourages everyone to engage in meaningful learning about the history and intergenerational trauma caused by these institutions. For further details, you can access the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, <https://nctr.ca/> and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report here: <https://nctr.ca/records/reports/#trc-reports>

Reconciliation is a vital step toward addressing historical injustices and building an education system that is inclusive, respectful, and equitable for all students. By supporting Reconciliation efforts, school board trustees can ensure that Indigenous histories, cultures, and worldviews are integrated into the curriculum, promoting deeper understanding and respect among all students. This commitment not only benefits Indigenous students but also enriches the broader community by fostering a more just, informed, and compassionate society for future generations. By collaborating with Indigenous communities and acknowledging the truths of the residential school system, trustees play a key role in shaping a more inclusive and supportive educational experience for all Saskatchewan students.

## **Indigenous Council/Indigenous Constituency**

School board members have a long history of supporting Indigenous education in the public system through research, advice through the formation of a SSBA Council since at least 1990. The value of Indigenous voice in the Association was solidified in 2006 with the inclusion of an Indigenous Constituency representative on the SSBA Executive. The SSBA Indigenous Council provides a forum to engage Indigenous school board members and others in providing strategic advice to the SSBA Executive, and the SSBA Indigenous Constituency representative, on matters regarding and related to Indigenous Education.

The Indigenous Constituency consists of Indigenous school board members only, while the Indigenous Council includes non-Indigenous trustees and other allies who have an interest in supporting Indigenous education. All trustees can participate, and anyone interested in Indigenous Council membership should contact Felice McKay at [fmckay@saskschoolboards.ca](mailto:fmckay@saskschoolboards.ca) to be included on the email distribution list.

## **Future Directions and Opportunities**

The following areas of focus could be explored or developed in the future, with a significant impact on Indigenous education. By identifying new possibilities and opportunities for growth, school boards can move toward meaningful change. Key areas include developing local governance agreements, supporting Métis language programs, and empowering First Nations and Métis communities through co-governance. Movement in these areas will not only benefit Indigenous education but also help shape a more inclusive, culturally relevant system for all students. Looking ahead, these efforts set the stage for future actions and provide direction for what requires attention in the years to come.

## **Relevant Partners**

The SSBA currently has a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Métis Nation-Saskatchewan and one with the Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations, the Office of the Treaty Commissioner and the Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural Centre. These MOUs guide the relationships between the organizations. Discussions between organizations on renewals were held but are paused. Ongoing relationships with the partners continue to be supported by the SSBA. More information on the MOUs can be found here:

<https://saskschoolboards.ca/services/first-nations-and-metis-education-services/>



## **Local Governance Agreements with First Nations and Métis**

Forming strong partnerships and developing local governance agreements with First Nations and Métis locals in school divisions is one of the goals of *Inspiring Success*. School boards support co-governance with First Nations and Métis because it fosters reciprocal relationships built on mutual respect and shared responsibility and will benefit and support all students and staff in the division. By integrating Indigenous perspectives and voice into decision-making, school boards can create a more inclusive and culturally relevant education system that reflects the values and needs of Indigenous students. Shared governance and management not only engage First Nations and Métis communities to have a direct role in shaping educational policies but also strengthens the broader community's understanding of Indigenous cultures. This collaborative approach supports reconciliation and ensures that Indigenous voices are meaningfully heard in shaping the future of education.

## **Métis Nation-Saskatchewan**

The Métis Nation-Saskatchewan (MNS) is a unique Indigenous group with a deep cultural heritage and are pursuing a self-government agreement or a modern treaty with Canada. This would constitutionally protect the right of self-government of the Métis in Saskatchewan, recognizing its jurisdiction over core governance matters. This would have significant implications for governance, funding, and education. The agreement would allow them to manage resources and make decisions that best serve their communities. Specifically, it could ensure dedicated funding for Métis schools, supporting the development of educational institutions that reflect Métis culture, history, and language. This funding would also help improve access to quality education for Métis students, empowering them with the tools to succeed while preserving their identity. An agreement would be a transformative step in advancing Métis rights and opportunities for future generations. More information about the Métis Nation-Saskatchewan can be found here: <https://metisnationsk.com/>

## **Indigenous Languages**

Indigenous languages are critically endangered across Canada, with over 70 already at risk of extinction without concerted efforts. There are calls for increased support and resources for Indigenous language programs in public schools at both the provincial and federal levels. Key milestones, such as the *Indigenous Languages Act* (2019) and the establishment of the Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages, are important steps, but further support is needed to ensure these are effective into the future, to strengthen Indigenous community-based language acquisition, and to also explore separate funds to integrate Indigenous languages into public education. More information can be found here: <https://commissionforindigenouslanguages.ca/>

## **Conclusion**

Trustees play a pivotal role in setting the tone for their division and guiding the commitment to advancing Indigenous education. By integrating Indigenous knowledge, cultures, and perspectives into the curriculum, fostering strong relationships with Indigenous communities, and supporting initiatives such as the IERF and local governance agreements, trustees help shape an inclusive and equitable educational environment while demonstrating leadership in Reconciliation. Trustees can set a positive, forward-thinking direction that supports the success of all students in the provincial education system, including Indigenous students. Their leadership ensures that the division remains a place where diverse voices are respected and Indigenous histories, cultures, and worldviews are celebrated. Through their efforts, trustees lay the foundation for a future that honors and enriches the educational experience for all learners, fostering a just and compassionate society for future generations.

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