

Saskatchewan School Boards Association's Advocacy Paper for Mandatory Curriculum that includes the rich and diverse history of First Nations and Métis Peoples pre-contact and the legacy of the Indian Residential Schools

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Saskatchewan School Boards Association would like to thank our sector partners who provided feedback in regards to this position paper. First Nations and Métis experts within Regina Public, Saskatoon Public and Northwest school divisions and the Ministry of Education provided some comments that included the need to move towards, understanding, sharing and Reconciliation. Some of those observations included the desire to include the history of the Residential School era, where *"it's time to change and have all of our students understand that history."* *"When young people learn about the residential school era it becomes part of this whole reconciliation process".* *"It is not only the responsibility of Saskatchewan educators to educate students; all Canadians should take the time to learn about what happened".* *"With Ontario coming out and apologizing for Residential Schools, it is time for Saskatchewan to lead and do the same. An apology with mandatory (Indian residential school) education in our schools would speak very loudly in my opinion".*

For many that were educated in the mainstream Canadian education system, chances are they never learned about this dark chapter in Canadian history, the Indian Residential School System or the many contributions of Canada's First Peoples. This is an excerpt of the speech that was delivered to United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues from the chair of the TRC, the Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair; *"Education delivered through residential schools, was a tool for assimilation. It was education that helped to perpetuate the situation we see today for Indigenous Peoples of Canada. We at the TRC believe it will be education, again, that will be the tool that best addresses all of that, for education will create knowledge and from knowledge will come understanding. From understanding will come respect - both self-respect for Indigenous people and mutual respect for all."*

Across the country, much activity is occurring. Recently, Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne officially apologised to Indigenous communities for *'generations of abuse'* and dedicated a financial commitment towards initiatives addressing the TRC's Calls to Action. Here in Saskatchewan, the Ministry of Education is to be commended for their leadership on policy direction and support of initiatives that focus on better outcomes for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students. Mandatory Treaty Education was introduced in 2007. In 2009 the document titled *"Inspiring Success: Building Towards Student Achievement* was implemented and most recently, the *"Following their Voices"* provided professional development initiative for teachers to reflect on their relationship and interactions with First Nations, Metis and Inuit students.

This document highlights the current activity that each jurisdiction has embarked upon and provides support for the consideration of mandatory elements in the learning program in the Saskatchewan provincial school system for all grade levels. There are local governments, Churches, Chambers of Commerce, city councils and elementary, secondary and post-secondary institutions that have begun their journey of reconciliation and addressing the TRC's Calls to Action.

Education has the power to transfer the futures of individuals, their families and their communities. We all play a significant role in paving that path of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. We are to look internally and make changes within the core of our institutions, engaging all schools – administration, staff, students, and communities. The path to a shared journey is upon us with our partners in Education, partners that include representatives from the Ministry of Education, Indigenous organizations, community Elders, school administrators, teachers, parents and students. *“Residential schools are not only demonstrative of the failures to honour the spirit and intent of treaties and the treaty relationship; they are also demonstrative of the power of colonialism and racism to shape national narratives and understanding. As such, the history and ongoing legacies of the Residential School experience for Aboriginal peoples in Canada must not be ignored;”* (University of Regina, *Responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action: Faculty of Education, January 2016*).



Residential school group photograph, [Regina, Saskatchewan](#) 1908

INTRODUCTION

In the SSBA's Strategic Plan 2013-2025 there are clearly articulated directions and commitments for our organization to provide leadership;

Vision:

By 2025, Saskatchewan has a globally recognized education system that others wish to emulate.

Mission:

Provide leadership, coordination and services to member boards of education to support student achievement.

Desired Outcomes by 2025:

- *Globally recognized education system:*
 - *Quality supports contribute to the SSBA strategic direction*
- *Student achievement:*
 - *Saskatchewan has eliminated the education achievement gap for all students.*
 - *All Saskatchewan students achieve at the highest level globally, including our most vulnerable.*
- *Leadership:*
 - *The Ministry of Education and SSBA share leadership in setting direction and determining funding for student achievement.*

The SSBA has recognized the growing need for leadership on addressing First Nation, Métis and Inuit issues. There has been a significant focus led by Trustees to ensure that there is a shared understanding of what these issues are and how they affect the outcome for our students. The importance of this work has been deepened by the 2013 call for action to teach the history of residential schools by the Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair, Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). When Justice Sinclair was embarking on the work of TRC, he made the following remarks to the United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues:

“Mainstream Canada sees the dysfunction of Indigenous communities, but have no idea how that happened, what caused it, or how government contributed to that reality through the residential school policy. They do not realize that just as Indigenous children were taught that they were inferior, so were non-Indigenous children. They do not realize that for the non-Indigenous child, this teaching had an insidious aspect – it reinforced a false belief in their own superiority. This too must be addressed. Most Canadians do not realize therefore that for there to be true reconciliation, they must be part of the solution.

Education, delivered through residential schools, was the tool for assimilation. It was education that helped to perpetuate the situation we see today for Indigenous Peoples in Canada.

We at the TRC believe that it will be education, again, that will be the tool that best addresses all of that, for education will create knowledge, and from knowledge will come understanding. From understanding will come respect – both self-respect for Indigenous people and mutual respect for all.

That history is something that we all must teach our children and grandchildren. That history must be offered in classrooms across the country. We call for these things so that in a few generations, in place of disruption, dysfunction and disrespect, we will see a Canada where the relationship between Indigenous Canadians and non-Indigenous Canadians is founded on mutual respect.”

Speaking in Saskatoon in April, 2015, TRC Commissioner Marie Wilson said she hopes the legacy the TRC leaves behind will inspire jurisdictions across Canada to include the residential school history as a required course to graduate high school. She stated:

"Education was the tool that was used to assimilate and Christianize and otherwise diminish and damage all of these generations. It was also the tool that was used... mindlessly, to keep the whole rest of the community ill-informed and ignorant. We need to teach an honest history that includes the history of the indigenous peoples of Canada, whose homeland it is and that the history of this American continent didn't begin with the arrival of the Europeans."

Saskatchewan has had a long history of relationship in the area of First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education. Much of that relationship has created a leadership dynamic through which much courageous leadership has been experienced. The beginning of a national association (National Indian Brotherhood) representing First Nations interests for example, the first Metis post-secondary institution (Gabriel Dumont Institute) and many other initiatives have set the stage for strong leadership in Saskatchewan.

The Saskatchewan Government, Ministry of Education is to be commended for their leadership on policy direction and support of initiatives that have encouraged and increased the profile and focus on better outcomes for First Nation, Métis and Inuit Students. In particular, with the introduction of policies and initiatives such as mandatory Treaty Education, Inspiring Success: Building Toward Student Achievement and Following Their Voices. These initiatives are evidence that there continues to be significant changes happening in the Saskatchewan K-12 provincial education sector.

Other partners too, have provided leadership in a variety of ways that focus on ensuring that every child in this province has the opportunity to create a shared understanding of our mutual histories and contributions. The Saskatchewan Teachers Federation (STF), the League of Educational Administrators, Directors and Superintendents (LEADS), Saskatchewan Association of School Business Officials (SASBO), The Universities of Saskatchewan and Regina have all committed to initiatives and strategies to support better understandings within their organizations and more broadly.

All of this to say that we are on a shared journey with our partners in education, partners that must include representatives from both First Nations and Métis organizations as we co-construct the pathway forward. Martin Luther King Jr. had a dream, Chief Sitting Bull had a vision, we as a school boards association have a challenge, we must understand the urgency in which we must act and we must ensure that we all collectively take responsibility to ensure publically funded education maintains a high level of integrity in support of all children regardless of where they live or their personal circumstance.



Qu'Appelle Indian Industrial School in Lebret, District of Assiniboia, ca. 1885. Parents of First Nations children had to camp outside the gates of the residential schools in order to visit their children.

INTENT

In January, 2016, the Saskatchewan School Boards Association Executive passed the following motion at the request of the Aboriginal Constituency;

3.9 FNME/Residential Schools Position Paper

The Executive reviewed the briefing note with respect to the FNME/Residential Schools Position Paper. The Aboriginal Constituency has drafted a resolution requesting the SSBA to develop a position paper to be used to advocate to the Ministry of Education for mandatory curriculum that includes the rich and diverse history of FN/M peoples with the arrival of European newcomers and the legacy of the Indian Residential Schools era.

The intent of this paper is to provide support for the consideration of mandatory elements in the learning program in Saskatchewan that include opportunities for exposure to the rich and diverse history of First Nations and Métis peoples in Canada and their contributions as well as the history and legacy of the Indian Residential Schools era. The establishment of residential schools was enabled by government policies that supported assimilation of First Nation, Métis and Inuit peoples and it is important to provide that enabling context. While First Nations and Inuit peoples are identified in the Indian Residential School Settlement of 2007, addressing this history must also acknowledge that thousands of Métis children were separated from their families to attend residential schools with the same goal of assimilation and eradication of culture.

Clearly there has already been progress in some jurisdictions on this front (NWT, Nunavut , MB, Ontario); we would propose that we use their experience and partner to create the most relevant approach for Saskatchewan. It would be anticipated that there remains a mandatory context to the learning expectations to ensure that every Saskatchewan student who attends publicly funded education has an expectation of inclusion of the context that surrounded the development of the Indian Residential School system and its ongoing impacts.

Further, that the Ministry of Education work with partners such as the SSBA to ensure that we as a province address and be accountable for ensuring the acquisition of knowledge and understandings that support the contributions of First Nation and Métis Peoples as well as the historical context that gave rise to residential schools, the impact for First Nation, Métis and Inuit children and their families, and the legacy that continues in Canada to this day.

We all believe that schools are one of the best vehicles to create and sustain a change in the attitude of all Canadians and our relationships that must exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in this country. Education and reconciliation go hand in hand, a comment that has been embedded within the TRCs documents and their final report. Let us be cognitive that teaching Indigenous history and that building mutual respect goes beyond the residential schools. The Indigenous voice should be utilized through a variety of different avenues to debunk myths that connect the real history of our First Peoples to the stream of negative stories and comments. It is necessary and vital for all of us to share that history, the stories and celebrate the diverse rich history of the First Peoples of Canada.

RATIONALE

Many Canadians that were educated in the mainstream Canadian education system did not learn about the Indian Residential School Era, a dark chapter in Canada's history. The most common reactions from individuals, young and old are "I never knew any of this".

It's time to change that. Thankfully, there is an appetite within our Saskatchewan publicly funded education system to include this history within our curriculum, mandatory in all grade levels, K to 12. School Board trustees, Administrators, teachers, parents, and students all agree.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was established on June 1, 2008, with a mandate of 5 years and to inform all Canadians about what happened in Indian Residential Schools. During the commission's tenure they travelled throughout Canada listening, collecting and documenting the stories from the survivors of this school system. Ten days later on June 11th, The Prime Minister of Canada, the Right Honourable Stephen Harper, made a Statement of Apology to former students of Indian Residential Schools, on behalf of the Government of Canada. Mr. Harper called the TRC a "*cornerstone*" of the settlement between the Canadian government and the Indigenous people, saying it presented "*a unique opportunity to educate all Canadians on the Indian Residential Schools system.*"

In testimony to the Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples last year, TRC commissioner Wilton Littlechild emphasized the importance of ensuring our young people know the history of residential schools. "*Once children in Canada, not just young children but also the critical age of the teenagers and the early university grouping, know that history, I think it will be very significant in terms of changing Canada for the better.*"

The opportunity to embark on that "Road to Reconciliation" is upon us, in Saskatchewan and all other Canadian provinces. Ontario recently shared their response to the TRC final report and officially apologised to the Indigenous communities for "*generations of abuse*". Also In the apology, Premier Wynne committed \$250million over three years to assist people in understanding the legacy of residential schools. This investment will go toward 26 new initiatives as part of a new report called "*The Journey Together*". This is one of the most recent activities occurring, where provincial governments are committing to addressing the TRC's Calls to Action. In Saskatchewan, the government has this opportunity to also address the TRC's 94 Calls to Action that address the education sector.

In 2015, the Boards of Education supported and approved the Saskatchewan Government's Education Strategic Sector Plan (ESSP). The ESSP and the Saskatchewan Plan for Growth identify key goals, which are the focus of sector action for the Prekindergarten to Grade 12 education system:

- All students' responses reflect positive relationships at school through the "Tell Them From Me" engagement measure;
- 65% of First Nations and Métis students will have graduated within three years of entering Grade 10;
- A 50% reduction of the Grade 12 graduation gap between First Nations and Métis and Non-First Nations and Métis Prekindergarten to Grade 12 students;
- Achieve an annual increase of 4 percentage points in the First Nations and Métis three-year graduation rate.
- Collaboration between First Nations and Métis and Non-First Nations and Métis partners, resulting in a significant improvement in First Nations and Métis student engagement.

During the 2013-14 year, Saskatchewan Boards of Education and the Ministry of Education came together to develop the Education Sector Strategic Plan. This was the first ever province-wide approach to be developed in cooperation with education sector partners, approved by all 28 boards and accepted by the Government of Saskatchewan. This approach provides a unified approach to education in order to meet the needs and improve educational outcomes for all students.

The SSBA applauds the Ministry of Education in their dedication on policy direction and strategic initiatives regarding successful outcomes for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students. Together Saskatchewan can continue their strong leadership and replicate the collaboration within the sector, with all partners for Reconciliation, by supporting mandatory curriculum regarding the Residential School history and the rich diverse history of Canada's First Peoples within the K to 12 grade levels.

Some Canadian jurisdictions experience Aboriginal student success, such as British Columbia where "school districts work together with Aboriginal Communities, embed local Aboriginal knowledge throughout the school curriculum, offer provincially developed courses such as the First Peoples 10, 11, and 12 and First Nations Studies 12." First Nations, Métis and Inuit high school student graduation completion is an important education milestone; however it is not the only marker of success. Appreciation and knowledge of First Nations, Métis and Inuit history, culture and language still need to become integral and vibrant components of the publicly funded education system within Saskatchewan.

There is an appetite within the education sector, provincially and nationally, to include the "true rich and diverse history of Canada's First Peoples, including the dark history of the Indian Residential Schools and the many contributions the First Peoples provided to the new comers. This path to a shared journey is upon all of us partners in education; Ministry of Education representatives, Indigenous and Métis organizations, community Elders, school administrators, teachers, parents, and students. *"Residential schools are not only demonstrative of the failures to honour the spirit and intent of treaties and the treaty relationship; they are also demonstrative of the power of colonialism and racism to shape national narratives and understanding. As such, the history and on-going legacies of the Residential School experience for Aboriginal Peoples in Canada must not be ignored."* (University of Regina, *Responding to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action: Faculty of Education, January 2016*).

The SSBA values the long-term commitment, the sustained hard work and wealth of knowledge and the skills of the Indigenous community and education partners who place priority and accountability in shifting First Nations, Métis and Inuit education to the forefront.

Two of the TRC's Calls to Action urge governments to create "age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, treaties and Aboriginal Peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada, a mandatory education requirement for kindergarten to Grade 12 students"; and "for the development of culturally appropriate curricula and for respecting and honouring the treaty relationships".

The Saskatchewan School Boards Association supports these two Call's to Action and looks to the Saskatchewan Government for collaboration and to strengthen the work already established through the Office of the Treaty Commissioner, the many school divisions' Trustees, administrators, teachers, parents and students. We all understand that education is the way forward and as partners and education policy makers, we can, through our decisions about what is taught in our schools and how it is taught focus on the goal that every Saskatchewan student graduates with a balanced knowledge of the contributions of First Nations, Métis and Inuit Peoples (pre and post contact), not to diminish the contributions made by all settlers and immigrants who came to this land, but to fill the gaps of Canada's First Peoples history and culture, whether it be positive or negative.

WHAT IS HAPPENING IN CANADA REGARDING THE JOURNEY OF RECONCILIATION

In Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Final Report, the work of the TRC, Justice Murray Sinclair stated that *"much of the current state of troubled relations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians is attributed to the educational institutions and what they have taught, or failed to teach, over many generations"*. The TRC truly believes that *"education is the key to reconciliation"*. Educating Canadians to move forward towards reconciliation the education sector plays a key role in this task. *"Education must remedy the gaps in historical knowledge that perpetuate ignorance and racism"*. Indian Residential School survivors have said, many times, that all Canadians *"must learn about the history and legacy of the residential schools in ways that change both minds and hearts"*.

Many examples are listed within this section and highlight the happenings in many Canadian jurisdictions regarding their approach, their response, their commitment to the TRC's Calls to Action and their own journey of Reconciliation

In January 2016, **Provincial and territorial Ministers of Education** acknowledged the release of Truth & Reconciliation Commission's final report on the history of Indian Residential Schools in Canada. Ministers were *"pleased to note that the current CMEC Aboriginal Education Plan aligns closely with Recommendation 63 of the TRC report by supporting the professional development of Aboriginal students interested in pursuing teaching as a career; developing teaching resources that highlight the legacy of Indian Residential Schools for use in Bachelor of Education and teacher-education programs across Canada; promoting understanding about the history and legacy of Indian Residential Schools in K-12 education systems across the country; and sharing promising practices in Aboriginal education"*.

In Canada, the Catholic Church, along with other Christian churches strongly supports the TRC process. On March 29, 2016, The **Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops** released their response to the TRC's Calls to Action. They addressed two of the TRC's 94 Calls to Action. *"One responding to the invitation to repudiate concepts used to justify European sovereignty over Indigenous lands and peoples, the other responses endorsing the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples"*.

Bishop Donald Bolen, head of the Canadian Bishops' Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon, Chair of the Commission for Justice and Peace, provided a response to the TRC's Calls to Action. Bishop Bolen also indicates that more responses will be forthcoming, not only in written form, but also through a deeper engagement with Indigenous peoples, focusing on strengthening those relationships, standing in solidarity in the pursuit of justice, and pursuing small steps on the long walk towards healing and reconciliation.

In his reflection, Bishop Bolen shared how he did not know of the large history of Indigenous Peoples on the Prairies. He acknowledged how the TRC process brought about a painful awakening for many Catholics. The TRC brought forth historical findings that the churches were involved with running 60 percent of the Indian Residential schools, how a large number of children were forcibly removed and taken away from their families, forbidden to speak their own languages, prevented to learn about their culture and forced into an establishment, destined for their assimilation. Bishop Bolen encourages people to engage themselves in the text of the TRC's Final Report

The **Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC)** have confirmed that this work has already begun or has been planned at the “pan-Canadian level” and in the provincial jurisdictions, in collaboration with First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities, tailoring that work to align with their unique local histories.

CMEC went on to confirm their commitment to addressing the painful Canadian legacy of the Indian Residential Schools by ensuring that curricula in the provincial and territorial school systems allow all students to gain the understanding of how Indian residential schools affected First Nations, Métis and Inuit children, families, and communities, and ultimately Canada as a whole. Many Canadian jurisdictions have announced their initiative to bring and include the Indian Residential School history into the classroom.

“Education can help us shed light on the history and legacy of Indian Residential Schools,” said the Honourable Alfred Moses, co-lead for CMEC's work on Aboriginal education and Minister of Education, Culture and Employment for Northwest Territories. “We are working toward a shared awareness and acknowledgement of what happened to Aboriginal children across Canada, planting us firmly on the path of understanding and reconciliation. Never again should a student be able to say, ‘I never knew’.”

In 2012, the **North West Territories**, which has the highest per capita number of residential school survivors, and Nunavut launched a new mandatory curriculum that includes the history and legacy of residential schools, much of it told directly through the stories of the survivors. *“The Residential School system in Canada: Understanding the Past – Seeking Reconciliation – building Hope for Tomorrow”*. https://www.ece.gov.nt.ca/files/Early-Childhood/ns_-_residential_schools_resource_-_second_edition.pdf. All students study this history, which also includes the concept of reconciliation and what reconciliation would look like. Not only is mandatory enrollment into this course necessary to obtain a high school diploma, all N.W.T. teachers are also required to be trained in *“how to teach the emotionally difficult subject matter”*.

The **Yukon** has committed to implementation of this mandatory curriculum. It was introduced in the 2014/15 school year in five schools. In the 2015/16 school term, Yukon's Grade 10 social studies course about residential schools was introduced in all Yukon schools and is a mandatory credit for graduation.

This mandatory curriculum highlights the Yukon government's commitment *“to acknowledging the history, experiences and impacts of residential schools,”* Minister of Education Doug Graham said. *“This new unit educates young people about this difficult chapter in our country's history and is an important step in our journey toward reconciliation between First Nations and non-First Nations people.”*

Grand Chief Ruth Massie of Council of Yukon First Nations said, *“Yukon First Nations are pleased the history of residential schools is ready to be taught in the new Grade 10 unit. The residential school experience marks a dark side in Canadian history everyone should be educated on in order to move forward on the path of reconciliation.”*

“This is an important step in bridging the knowledge gap between First Nations and non-First Nations peoples,” co-chair of the First Nations Education Commission Tosh Southwick said. “It is exciting to see a part of our collective history finally being taught in our schools.”

The **Nova Scotia** Premier Stephen McNeil's response to the TRC's "Calls to Action" report has his government committed to continuing *"to work hand-in-hand with our Aboriginal partners as well as our federal, provincial and territorial colleagues to answer the calls to action"*. There are opportunities for progress to be made in Nova Scotia and work already started includes:

- Online treaty education resource for all educators
- The integration of treaty education, Mi'kmaw language and culture, into pre-K to grade three curriculum
- The distribution of 300 education kits entitled "100 Years of Loss: The Residential School System in Canada" to all high schools in the province <http://www.legacyofhope.ca/projects/100-years-of-loss-curriculum> ;
- The signing of a memorandum of understanding on treaty education.

Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne, is *"very interested"* in the N.W.T.'s curriculum and teacher training on residential schools. She has further said that her department of education has revised its curriculum to include *"greater requirements"* for students to learn about the experience of residential schools. Recently, Premier Wynne officially apologised to the Indigenous communities for *"generations of abuse"*. Her government went further to commit \$250million over three years to assist people in understanding the legacy of residential schools. This investment will go toward 26 new initiatives as part of a new report called *"The Journey Together"*. A spokesperson for the Ontario Education Minister stated that *"there are opportunities to learn about residential schools"*. Mandatory learning requirements are embedded within the province's elementary curriculum and high school courses. Students learning about the culture, history, ways of knowing of Aboriginal peoples, and the residential schools era will become a mandatory part of the core curriculum in faculties of education in Ontario. The Ontario Secondary Schools Teachers' Federation has produced a classroom resource about Aboriginal peoples in Canada. The organization's president, Paul Elliot said in a statement that this topic *"should be required learning for all students in Ontario"*.

In 2013, **Manitoba** Education released *"From Apology to Reconciliation a guide for Grade 9 and 11 teachers of Social Studies"*, it was developed in response to the Government of Canada's 2008 "Statement of Apology – to former students of Indian Residential Schools". This project was created to support Grade 9 and 11 Manitoba students understanding of the history of the residential school experience, its influence on contemporary Canada, and the responsibilities of Canadian citizens. http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/socstud/far/doc/full_doc.pdf

The **Manitoba** government saw the Federal Government's 2008 apology as an opportunity to further the dialogue about the Residential school era and expand the awareness among the province's population. Elements of the Manitoba residential school experience are introduced to students through the social studies curriculum as early as Grade 4. In Grade 9, students study Canada in the contemporary world, which includes a section of the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians. The Grade 11 students study the history of Canada and how it has shaped the Canada of today. These students examine the history of the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, defined by this Social Studies curriculum. This Social Studies curriculum is organized into five distinct themes, where the first cluster includes the First Peoples and Nouvelle-France.

In 2007, **Saskatchewan** undertook to make treaty education a mandatory component of curriculum for Kindergarten through Grade 12 and in 2014 committed to addressing the need for mandatory education on the history of residential schools. The Government stated their commitment to strengthening partnerships between First Nations and non-First Nations peoples in Saskatchewan in the spirit of the Treaties. The former Deputy Premier and Minister of Education Ken Krawetz stated *"how treaty knowledge is important for students to better appreciate our province's past and present"*.

Learning about treaties also promotes cultural appreciation and understanding through the teachings that respect and honour First Nations.”

In 2008, the **Saskatchewan** Government guided implementation through the publication of *“A Time for Significant Leadership: A Strategy for implementing First Nations and Métis education goals – Implementation guide and toolkit”*. These documents provide evidence of *“postcolonial approach to education underpinned by school effectiveness theory in the Saskatchewan education system”* (Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and Métis Peoples. The Joint Task Force on Improving Education and Employment Outcomes for First Nations and Métis Peoples. Saskatchewan Educational Leadership Unit, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, March 2013). Other benefits of these documents could assist in creating that ethical space where the Aboriginal culture is viewed as an asset and a foundation for new learning.

In 2009, the **Saskatchewan** Government released *“Inspiring Success: Building Towards Student Achievement”*, a policy framework which addressed four areas: cultural affirmation and school climate; shared decision making; curriculum actualization; and lifelong learning. Within these four areas the First Nations and Métis Education Provincial Advisory Committee (FNMEPAC) proposed that schools must *“promote the well-being of each individual and community by affirming the cultures, traditions, languages, spirituality, and world views of the students,” “ensure that decisions affecting the lives of children are made in partnership with Elders, parents, the community, educators, and government,” “ensuring that Core Curriculum actualization takes place as intended, for all students and with concern for quality and authenticity,” and offer “respect for diverse perspectives on learning, and recognition of education as a multifaceted process that occurs continuously, in, and beyond school”* (Government of Saskatchewan, 2012, FNMEPAC, Four Areas of recommendations).

The Joint Task Force (JTF) on Improving Education and Employment Outcomes was a task force created by the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations. The JTF provided reports to the **Saskatchewan** Government that included recommendations of ways to work towards decreased education and employment gaps among First Nations and Métis peoples. The Ministry of Education has responded to the advice of the JTF by using the JTF recommendations to develop outcomes and priorities for the Education Sector Strategic Plan (ESSP).

In 2015, six schools across **Saskatchewan** participated in field testing and were integral in the evolution of the *“Following Their Voices”*. This initiative is designed to improve First Nations, Métis and Inuit student outcomes by engaging and supporting students through changes in student-teacher relationships and interaction, teacher instructional practices and the learning environment. The *“Following Their Voices”* is a priority in the **Saskatchewan** Education Sector Strategic Plan.

Like the activity across Canada, much is occurring here in Saskatchewan and the Ministry of Education is to be commended for their leadership on policy direction and support of initiatives that focus on better outcomes for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students. The introduction of these policies and initiatives is evidence that significant changes are occurring in the K-12 provincial education sector however our province stands in front of an opportunity to further strengthen those initiatives and policies and follow suit with the other provinces and territories where the history of the residential school era becomes mandatory curriculum in the K to 12 education system.

The Saskatchewan Office of the Treaty Commissioner (OTC), an independent body, serves as the primary mechanism to coordinate and facilitate a mutual process between the Government of Canada and the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations to achieve a common understanding on Treaties No. 4, 5, 6, 8, and 10 in Saskatchewan. OTC Commissioner George E Lafond stated that reconciliation is about building a common understanding of the spirit and intent of Treaties:

“Reconciliation is the restoration of a friendship after an estrangement. It does not require agreement on every aspect of how to live together. It is not an apology that has been accepted once offered. Rather, it is about the process of coming together—a conscious choice that the future will be better if we work through difficulties and differences with an openness to hearing about, and responding to, the harm that has occurred.”

The OTC is working with partners to convene a series of dialogues to provide the people of Saskatchewan with an opportunity to articulate and build public consensus around a vision and plan for reconciliation. One group of 23 diverse and experienced Saskatchewan citizens met in June 2015. The dialogue centered on “what does Reconciliation look like for health? For education? For justice? For economic livelihood? For child welfare? Some key comments from this June conversation regarding what Reconciliation looks like for education were “inclusiveness”, “truth”, “changing mindset of teachers and professors”, “educating newcomers”, “First Nations/Indigenous studies mainstreamed into Canadian studies”.

The OTC has committed to continue the dialogue with roundtable discussions on the topic of Reconciliation across the province. Attendees assist in the creation of a strategy that focuses on two key areas of interest: changing the narrative of Reconciliation from challenges to opportunities and sharing what’s working in order to inspire innovation.

In March 2014, the **Alberta** Minister of Education stated: *“In the spirit of reconciliation, the Government of Alberta commits that all Alberta students will learn about the history and legacy of residential schools, along with the history of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples of Canada. Provincial Kindergarten to Grade 12 curriculum will include enhanced mandatory content for all Alberta students on the significance of residential schools and treaties.”*

Shortly following the May 2015 election, **Alberta** Premier Rachel Notley, committed to renewed relationships with Alberta’s First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. This commitment included a promise to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In an open letter to the provincial cabinet ministers on July 7, 2015, Premier Notley stated, *“at its heart, the UN declaration encourages all of us to celebrate and preserve Indigenous cultures and traditions, and to work alongside Indigenous people to ensure they are participating in decisions that concern them.”* Other acts of reconciliation include an apology on behalf of the Province of Alberta for not taking a stand against the residential school system and a commitment to act on the calls to action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Fall 2015, **British Columbia** teachers had an opportunity to review new curriculum material about residential schools and reconciliation. Prior to this point, BC students didn’t typically learn about residential schools until Grade 11 social studies. September 2015, new curriculum material will be available for Grades 5, 10, 11 and 12. These Indian Residential Schools and Reconciliation Teacher Resources were developed by the First Nations Education Steering Committee and the First Nations Schools Association. They are in response to the TRC’s “Calls to Action” for the education sector to develop age-appropriate educational materials about Indian Residential Schools.

It is hoped that these resources will help students of all cultural backgrounds gain an understanding of the history of the relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people over Canada’s history, with a focus on the BC experience. The materials are also designed to engage young people to take part in the journey of reconciliation.

The TRC indicated in March 2014 that **Newfoundland** and **New Brunswick** have also committed to teaching about residential schools.

In a January 2016 report, **Canada's** history education watchdog stated that Ontario is on the top of the list for its strong Canadian history curriculum, where the Grade 10 history credit course is "so jam-packed". The report goes on further to suggest that this rich "history course" is delivered over two years. Additionally in Ontario, there is a mandatory half-course in citizenship. This commitment earned Ontario a mark of 82% on the Canadian History Report Card, released by a group that promotes the awareness of Canadian History.

Also included in this report the following provinces scored as follows; British Columbia (81%), Quebec (80%), Manitoba (80%), Saskatchewan (69%) and Alberta (62%). It is evident that schools need to work harder to help students understand their country, Canada.

<https://www.historicacanada.ca/content/canadian-history-report-card>.

Another Report Card (prepared by KAIROS) has been used as a baseline to assess progress in achieving reconciliation through education in schools across Canada. <http://www.kairoscanada.org/what-we-do/indigenous-rights/windsofchange-report-cards>. Each province and territory has been assessed and from these findings there has been progress in a number of provinces and territories. This report card highlights that curriculum changes need to occur in partnership with Indigenous organizations and experts, including survivors.

At least **10 universities across Canada** have started talks towards implementation of the TRC "Calls to Action" that apply to education. Universities realize that the task ahead of them involves setting up a structure to which education will continue the conversation regarding this Canadian history and advise the sector that the this information needs to go through all levels of education.

The week following Chief Justice Murray Sinclair's visit to the **University of Regina** to discuss the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations, a roundtable discussion was organized by staff and faculty on campus to continue the conversation. The University of Regina, Faculty of Education recognize the *"many ways that education has been used as a tool for assimilation of Aboriginal peoples in Canada, and indeed as a vehicle for cultural genocide. Residential schools are not only demonstrative of the failures to honour the spirit and intent of treaties and the treaty relationship; they are also demonstrative of the power of colonialism and racism to shape national narratives and understanding. As such, the history and ongoing legacies of the Residential School experience for Aboriginal peoples in Canada must not be ignored therefore the Faculty acknowledges their shared constitutional, historical, and ethical responsibility in this respect."*

The **University of Saskatchewan** was honoured to host a national forum: *"Building Reconciliation: Universities Answering the TRCs Calls to Action"* event. This U of S forum focused on how universities could respond to the urgent calls to action directed at post-secondary education institutions.

<http://www.usask.ca/reconciliation/>

The **Ryerson University** Chair of Indigenous Governance has embarked on the journey of sharing a commitment to transformative change. The journey included the engagement conversation on how to work towards reconciliation and decolonization, and why it matters in relation to their work at Ryerson – a university named after Egerton Ryerson who played a key role in the establishment of the residential school system.

A consortium of ten other schools Laurier University, University of Manitoba, University of Winnipeg, University of British Columbia, l'Université de St. Boniface, Carleton University, Lakehead University, University College of the North, Algoma University and Red River College has committed to implementing each of the TRC's recommendations regarding post-secondary education by partnering with the TRC on a research agenda that will both increase an understanding of the concept of reconciliation and how to work towards it.

CONCLUSION

This Position paper reflects the desire, the need for Reconciliation, and highlights Canada's education interest for including mandatory components in elementary and secondary school curriculum, and in all subject areas. These arguments imply the need for the overarching recommendation:

That the Ministry of Education move forward with curriculum renewal that includes the rich and diverse history of First Nations and Métis Peoples with their experience of the arrival of the European newcomers, and the legacy of the Indian Residential School era.

The six-year mandate of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada has created an opportunity to engage in a deep and meaningful process of Reconciliation. TRC Commissioner Marie Wilson tells us:

"Whether or not we were aware of it at the time, we created this situation by Canadian laws and policies. Now we are waking up to the fact that we are going to have to work together to build our way out of it by reshaping and redesigning our notion of society and our nation of what is fair and just in this country."

We understand that education is the way forward. As educators and education policy makers, we can, through the decisions that are made about what is taught in schools and how it is taught. We can focus on a goal that every Saskatchewan student graduates with a balanced knowledge of the contributions of First Nations and Metis peoples (pre and post contact), not to diminish the contributions made by all settlers and immigrants who came to this land, but to fill the gaps of Canada's First Peoples history and culture, whether it be positive or negative.

The TRC Call to Action #62 urges governments to create *"age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, treaties, and aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada, a mandatory education requirement for kindergarten to Grade 12 students."* The Saskatchewan School Boards Association supports this Call to Action and is requesting this by submitting this document.

TRC Call to Action #10 calls for *"the development of culturally appropriate curricula and for respecting and honouring the treaty relationship"*. Again the Association is committed to building on this work already completed by the Office of the Treaty Commissioner and other sector partners.

Clearly progress has been made in some Canadian jurisdictions (NWT, Nunavut, Manitoba, Ontario) and we propose that we use their experience and partner to create the most relevant approach for Saskatchewan learners, ensuring that every Saskatchewan student who attends the publicly-funded education system has a clear understanding of the rich and diverse history of the First Peoples of Canada and the historical chapter of the Indian Residential School era.

We all understand that this is a journey together for education sector partners and policy makers, where we can, through our decisions influence what is taught in schools and how it is taught. We can focus on a goal that every Saskatchewan student graduates with a balanced knowledge of the contributions of First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples (pre and post contact), not to diminish the contributions made by all settlers and immigrants who came to this land, and to fill the gaps of Canada's First Peoples history and culture, whether it be positive or negative. In the words of the Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commissioner Justice Murray Sinclair: *"Education is what got us here and education is what will get us out". "Education is the cornerstone for change. Reconciliation is not an Aboriginal problem – it is a Canadian problem. It involves all of us"*.