

# Literature Review

*On Current Practices in First Nation Parents and  
Community involvement*

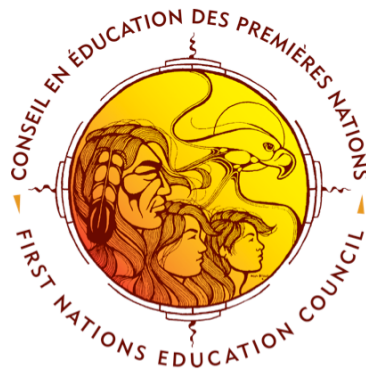
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## Overview

Parent-community involvement is generally thought to mean the ways that school, families and communities interact in order to support student learning and development. Traditionally, support of the student in school is thought of as parent-teacher interviews and volunteering in the classroom.

Research indicates there are several differences between First Nations and non-First Nations parental involvement in, and satisfaction with, the education system. Among the differences are:

- A lack of communication taking place between First Nations parents and school personnel in parent-school events and extra-curricular activities. According to a B.C. study over a seven-year period, fewer than 25% of the teachers surveyed were *satisfied* or *very satisfied* with their communication with First Nations parents.<sup>1</sup>
- Breakdowns in communication between First Nations parents and schools.
- No real understanding of teachers and administration of First Nations culture and worldview.
- First Nations parents fear and mistrust of the school system.<sup>2</sup>

## BARRIERS

There are many barriers that limit parental involvement in schools. These barriers include:<sup>3</sup>

- Negative educational experiences of First Nations parents (based on the residential school experience).
- Barriers to communication (the traditional structure of school is fragmented, whereas First Nations is more holistic in nature; body language and the use of language is a cultural barrier as well).
- Limited understanding by the schools of First Nations issues and values (by staff, administration, teachers, within the curriculum, etc).
- Cultural awareness.

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<sup>1</sup> R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. Parent and Education Engagement Partnership Project: A Discussion Paper. (2002). R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd: 7

<sup>2</sup>Ibid pg 3

<sup>3</sup> Ibid pg 10

- Poverty and illness in First Nation families.
- Lack of engagement strategies by the schools.
- Intimidation, racism and bullying.
- Negative parent-teacher contact (frequently teachers and parents communicate only in negative circumstances or when there is a problem); and
- “Segregation” of First Nations students.

## **EXAMPLES OF CURRENT ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES**

Engagement strategies that contribute to successful parent-school interactions are.<sup>4</sup>

- **Governance strategies/initiatives**

Such initiatives may include a First Nation/Aboriginal Education Committee to provide feedback on the structure and funding of programs; the promotion of First Nations parents as members of Parent Advisory Committees; and parents as sitting members of the District Board of Trustees.

- **First Nations support services**

Support services include home-school liaison activities; cultural/First Nation education support services; other support functions.

- **School orientation activities**

Schools provide an orientation day for new First Nations students and their parents prior to the first day of school; they organize one-on-one meetings with parents and First Nation support staff and teachers early in the year; they organize positive meetings (including meetings to celebrate student success); and develop parent handbooks that plainly outline school programs, policies, supports and expectations.

- **Cultural awareness/culturally inclusive activities**

Schools support cultural events to encourage parental involvement; they use parents as resources and assistants in the school; the schools also create a space for students and parents that is inviting in the school.

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<sup>4</sup> R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. Parent and Education Engagement Partnership Project: A Discussion Paper. (2002). R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd: 16-22

- **Other strategies**

Using the schools as a community resource; and offering seminars and workshops to parents.

In addition to the above, the following strategies were found to be effective in facilitating parental participation in First Nation schools:

- **Fostering Supportive Home Environments:** strategies to assist families with parenting and creating conditions to support student success in learning.
- **Promoting Shared Decision Making:** strategies that include families and communities as partners and equals in school decisions.
- **Expanding Family, Community, and School Communication:** strategies that promote effective communications so that the parent's, schools and communities needs are all heard and responded to.
- **Coordinating Resources and Services:** strategies that coordinate programs to provide services for families, students, schools and communities.
- **Fostering Volunteer Support:** volunteer strategies.
- **Supporting Youth Development.**
- **Supporting Learning Outside of School;**
- **Expanding Community Development.**<sup>5</sup>

## **CURRENT PRACTICES**

According to the research, practices that encourage positive parent and school relations consist of the following:

- **Get parents involved** in the decision making process: it is a well-known fact that as people feel ownership over something they engage more.
- **Communicate.** Communication must be two-way. This can take place through building trust, building relationships with parents, using a variety of means of communication and providing times for parents to meet in the school in a social setting.

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<sup>5</sup> What do we mean by Family and Community Connections with Schools? Module 1. Family and Community Relations. (2005). Southwest Educational Development Laboratory: 4

- **“Think outside the box”**. Strategies and processes must allow for creativity and flexibility.
- **Recognize and address barriers.**
- **First Nations role models.**
- **Other practices** such as establishing parent clubs, creating parent-student activities and other incentives.<sup>6</sup>

The key to designing successful practices is the inclusion of First Nations in the development of school programs and policies.

On the other side of things meeting for no reason, short-term initiatives, tokenism, inadequate promotion of activities and the offloading of parents and students to resource personnel are ineffective strategies in First Nation parent-school engagement practices.<sup>7</sup>

#### **EFFECTIVE PRACTICES OUTCOMES**

##### **Outcomes of Types of Involvement:**

The following are examples of outcomes of general current practices that support First Nation parent/school partnership engagement practices:

- **Increased student academic achievement** because students receive more support for classroom learning activities at home.
- **Greater knowledge and skill for family members** about how to support their children not only academically but physically and emotionally.
- When school and district leaders *promote shared decision making*, they can bring about **enhanced family-school interactions** resulting in improved relations and support for the school’s academic efforts.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. Parent and Education Engagement Partnership Project: A Discussion Paper. (2002). R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd: 22

<sup>7</sup> R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. Parent and Education Engagement Partnership Project: A Discussion Paper. (2002). R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd: 27

<sup>8</sup> What do we mean by Family and Community Connections with Schools? Module 1. Family and Community Relations. (2005). Southwest Educational Development Laboratory: 6,7



## **SAMPLES OF CURRENT PRACTICES**

Some examples of successful First Nation parent and community partnerships include the following:

1. Akwesasne Mohawk Board of Education (AMBE),
2. Kitigan Zibi School,
3. Kahnawake,
4. Ecoles Annie Whiskeychan and Wiinibekuu, and
5. Eskasoni Elementary/Middle School.

### **1. Akwesasne Mohawk Board of Education (AMBE)**

The Akwesasne Mohawk Board of Education has developed a variety of partnerships with local community organizations. One partnership is with the Ronathahonni Cultural Centre. The mandate of the centre is to educate the public about the culture, history, and traditions of the Haudenosaunee people. The centre includes administrative offices, a museum, library and bookstore. AMBE teachers regularly invite Ronathahonni staff to their classrooms to share information about Mohawk culture and history. The centre is funded federally and provincially. It also has a traveling troupe of Mohawk singers who regularly perform in the local schools.

Another partnership is with the Kanonhkwashter:ie *Social Development and Health Facility*. This facility is located near Kana:takon School in St. Regis, Quebec. This centre promotes healthy lifestyles and holistically treats the needs of the people of Akwesasne. The mandate is the promotion of a healthy lifestyle, the prevention of disease and the treatment of the physical, emotional, mental and social needs of members of the community. Staff from the centre regularly visit the school and educate students about healthy ways of living. In 2005/06 health nurses from the centre organized a walk-a-thon to raise funds for healthy snacks.

There is a unified parent council and parents volunteer in various ways in the schools such as science fairs and fundraising activities. School gyms and facilities are also used for various community activities.<sup>9</sup>

There is now an active Boys and Girls Club in the Kana:takon School which is a popular extra-curricular activity for students and parents. The Mohawk Council of Akwesasne (MCA), the Akwesasne Area Management Board (AAMB) and the National Child Benefit Reinvestment fund provide support for the program. The program is run by teachers and support workers who teach health, life skills, career services, computer education, sports and recreation programs.

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<sup>9</sup> Fulford, George. *Sharing our Success: More Case Studies in Aboriginal Schooling: Band-Operated Schools*. (n.d.) Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education: pp. 26-27.

Finally, the AMBE collaborates closely with several partners to ensure a strong relationship between the school and the community. The gymnasiums at the schools and other facilities are shared for various community activities. In fact, the schools are also designated emergency shelters should the need arise. Teachers and other school staff are frequently invited to participate in local community activities.<sup>10</sup>

In addition there is a Parent Advisory Committee for the AMBE Head Start Program that meets monthly and provides parents the opportunity to participate in program decision making. Those parents who have children in the program are required to be available for home visits from Head Start staff in order for them to jointly design and monitor the IEP plans for their children. Parents who choose to participate are also required to attend workshops covering such topics as couple communication, Mohawk language, child development, etc. The impacts of these early interventions and training have had significant impacts in terms of school readiness scores and parental/teacher satisfaction rates.<sup>11</sup>

The Akwesasne Mohawk Board of Education is an elected board composed of nine members with three from each of the three districts in Akwesasne. Along with the Director of Education and staff, Board of Education members are responsible for oversight of the planning, policy, finance, staffing, evaluation, student transportation and community relations within the jurisdiction of the Board. The AMBE holds public meetings and is responsible for community relations. Formal parent committees function in each of the AMBE's three districts to assist with planning social events and fund raising activities. The parent committees, unlike the AMBE, are not involved with matters of school business.<sup>12</sup>

### Snapshot of Success

*There is an Akwesasne Mohawk Science Fair, which is organized by a volunteer committee of AMBE and St. Regis Mohawk School (located in Akwesasne, New York) teachers and community members that has been held every year since 1993. The Science Fair showcases the work of students at the three AMBE schools (two located in Quebec and one in Ontario) and Grade 6 students at the St. Regis Mohawk School (located in Akwesasne, NY). Grade 1-5 students compete in a poster competition, while older students present full demonstration projects. Awards are presented for the top projects and the winners are eligible to compete in the United Counties Science Fair Competition held in Cornwall, Ontario.*

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<sup>10</sup> Fulford, George. Sharing our Success: More Case Studies in Aboriginal Schooling: Band-Operated Schools. (n.d.) Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education: pp. 25-26.

<sup>11</sup> Fulford, George. Sharing our Success: More Case Studies in Aboriginal Schooling: Band-Operated Schools. (n.d.) Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education: pp. 30.

<sup>12</sup> Fulford, George. Sharing our Success: More Case Studies in Aboriginal Schooling: Band-Operated Schools. (n.d.) Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education: pp. 22.

*AMBE students have won awards in the United Counties competition and one student has even gone on to compete in the Canadian Science Fair. Students also participate each year in the American Indian Science and Engineering Society's National Fair in Albuquerque, New Mexico.*<sup>13</sup>

## 2. Kitigan Zibi School

Another example of a successful community/school partnership is with the **Kitigan Zibi School** in Kitigan Zibi, Quebec. By way of background, the school is a community controlled school with students ranging from Junior Kindergarten to Grade 11. Other community sites for education include the Pakinawatik Kikinamadinan Kindergarten, Head Start daycare, a cultural centre and the Mokusige Algonquin language half-day immersion program, and an alternative adult education program.<sup>14</sup> All of the staff positions in the school are currently held by First Nations community members.

The school is governed by the Kitigan Zibi Education Council which was established in 1978 (now referred to as the Kitigan Zibi Education Sector) by the Band Council to oversee the education of the community. Membership consists of people elected in the community, most often they are parents or Elders. Members of the Council are responsible for budgeting, personnel and management of the educational programming. This sector currently has five-full-time employees: a director of education, assistant director, executive secretary, administrative assistant and a post-secondary student support program officer. Resources for these positions comes from base operations funding for education in the community.<sup>15</sup>

The key factors for success in the school/community partnership at Kitigan Zibi is as follows:

The Kitigan Zibi School is well known and respected in the community for providing an open and warm environment for the students, parents and community members. Parents frequently visit the school and are warmly welcomed. Feedback from parents indicates that they feel very comfortable in the school and Education Council offices.

Communication with parents occurs at a variety of different levels. There are informal meetings, scheduled meetings, phone calls, radio announcements, flyers and letters sent home to parents. Communication also occurs informally as teachers are out and about in the community. In fact, many of the Kitigan Zibi staff and teachers are related to the students and their parents, thereby, creating an automatic level of comfort with the school and its personnel.

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<sup>13</sup> Fulford, George. Sharing our Success: More Case Studies in Aboriginal Schooling: Band-Operated Schools. (n.d.) Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education: pp. 29.

<sup>14</sup> Fulford, George. Sharing our Success: More Case Studies in Aboriginal Schooling: Band-Operated Schools. (n.d.) Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education: p. 74.

<sup>15</sup> Fulford, George. Sharing our Success: More Case Studies in Aboriginal Schooling: Band-Operated Schools. (n.d.) Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education: pp. 76.

The Kitigan Zibi Education Council also facilitates communication in the community. Elected members comprised of parents, grandparents and elders add the element of community control and responsibility over educational programs which ensures community ownership of the school and its programs.<sup>16</sup>

Quantitative research conducted by McGill University confirms this reality as follows:

*An evaluation sponsored by the Education Council and conducted by McGill University in 2005 sampled parents' opinions on school programs and delivery. Comments concerning the availability of teachers were all positive. When parents were interviewed they indicated that teachers were open and willing to make time to discuss issues. A large majority of the 16 parents interviewed during this evaluation felt that the school was doing a good job academically for their children, although some parents expressed concern regarding the lack of time to discuss student issues with teachers beyond the scheduled report card meetings. Parents interviewed during the study viewed communications between the school and the community as generally good.<sup>17</sup>*

Qualitative data conducted by the Council confirmed the following:

A 2004 survey sponsored by the Kitigan Zibi Education Council involved the completion of 93 surveys by parents of children attending the Kitigan Zibi School. The most significant trends seen in these data relating to parental involvement and communications were:

- 92% of parents believed that the school's communication with them was satisfactory or very satisfactory, with 51% of parents stating that the school's communication with them was very satisfactory;
- 66% of parents stated that they were very involved in their child's education, while 33% stated that they were somewhat involved;
- 56% of parents remarked that they received most of their information about the school through their children; and,
- 69% of parents stated that someone from the school communicates with them when their child is misbehaving, while 52% stated that they were contacted when their child was performing exceptionally well.

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<sup>16</sup> Fulford, George. Sharing our Success: More Case Studies in Aboriginal Schooling: Band-Operated Schools. (n.d.) Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education: pp. 76.

<sup>17</sup> Fulford, George. Sharing our Success: More Case Studies in Aboriginal Schooling: Band-Operated Schools. (n.d.) Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education: pp. 76.

One parent's comment from this study summarized the state of parental involvement in the school as follows:

We have parents who are very involved and those who are never involved. It is always good to have informed parents even if they do not want to be actively involved. (Parent).<sup>18</sup>

Other partnerships that the school has with the community include the following:

- Local health programs.
- Police services.
- Community services liaison.
- Band Council liaison.
- School events that include Kokomis/Mishomis (Grandmother/Grandfather) Day which brings together students and their grandparents to share stories and accomplishments in a fun and supportive climate.
- Business relationships where the school purchases locally whenever possible (such as printing services).
- Community gymnasium which is shared by school for community events such as the annual powwow.<sup>19</sup>

The school/home partnership has resulted in strong ties with the community which is ongoing between home, school, and the community representatives. The primary factors leading to the success of Kitigan Zibi's efforts are:

1. Community responsibility for educational programs.
2. Local control which is a major factor in the success of the school.
3. The fact that the community challenged the "status quo" and decided to actually control the outcomes of their school program by putting in place what they *need*.
4. Fostering of a supportive school environment. The open and accepting climate in the school is realized through the large numbers of First Nations teachers and administrators present in the school. Many students become staff at the school as adults, or are strong supporters of the school in the community which has a significant impact over time.
5. Strong political and administrative leadership. Consistent work on the part of the Band Council, elders and administration has contributed towards the strength of the partnership between parent, school and community.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Fulford, George. *Sharing our Success: More Case Studies in Aboriginal Schooling: Band-Operated Schools*. (n.d.) Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education: pp. 76.

<sup>19</sup> Fulford, George. *Sharing our Success: More Case Studies in Aboriginal Schooling: Band-Operated Schools*. (n.d.) Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education: pp. 79-81

<sup>20</sup> Fulford, George. *Sharing our Success: More Case Studies in Aboriginal Schooling: Band-Operated Schools*. (n.d.) Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education: pp. 95.

### 3. Kahnawake

Kahnawake has a unique model for their parent-school partnership. Each school (there are 2 elementary schools and 1 secondary school) has an in-school parent committee. There are between 6 to 12 parents on each of these committees. The committees work with school staff to provide support to programs and with fundraising types of activities. Two parents from each of these committees are appointed to the *Combined School(s) Committee of the Kahnawake Education System*.

The *Combined School(s) Committee of the Kahnawake Education System* is comprised of 12 members: two from each school, one representative from each longhouse and four members at large who are elected parents by the General Assembly. This Committee is responsible for school governance from pre-school to post-graduate studies and is responsible for planning, monitoring and supervising all aspects of school governance. The Committee has been in operation since 1978.

Other partnerships between the school and community include the:

- Band Council: two chiefs who are assigned the Education portfolio,
- Relationship with the New Frontier School Board,
- Cultural centre: for language programs, CDs, TV programs etc.,
- First Nations Technical Institute,
- Community Services programs,
- Health programs through the health centre and hospital,
- Economic Development in-house training,
- Vocational and career training,
- In-house teacher training in partnership with McGill University; and
- Theatre programs in summer for students.

The parent-community partnership is quite successful. Communication with parents is done well by Kahnawake through their local newspaper, TV programs and letters to parents.<sup>21</sup>

Kahnawake has a successful community based parent committee in place. One example of a parent and school partnership is the *Diabetes (in school) Prevention Program*. The approach taken by this community is based on four cornerstones to success. They are:

1. Community members and researchers are in partnership in all aspects of projects and programs.
2. The agenda is flexible and responsive to community needs.
3. All projects allow for learning opportunities for all involved.
4. The integration of intervention and evaluation components.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with Edward Cross, Director of Education, Kahnawake Education Centre, Kahnawake, Quebec, March 24, 2009.

<sup>22</sup> *Implementing participatory intervention and research in communities: lessons from the Kahnawake Schools Diabetes Prevention Project in Canada*. Retrieved March 22, 2009 from

## SNAPSHOT OF SUCCESS:

*The Kahnawake Schools Diabetes Prevention Project (KSDPP) exists within a context of traditional Iroquoian history and belief system. The Iroquois foundations include The Great Law of Peace -the Kaianereko:wa-and the Creation Story and ancient ceremonies. These reflect key teachings-the importance of the balance of society between men and women, the equality of all human beings in the society, and the emphasis on responsibilities of men and women in not only taking care of today, but providing for the seven generations ahead. The strength of the Iroquoian spirit is demonstrated in Kahnawake Mohawk Territory from the 1960s to today with events such as the re-emergence of traditional government within the community, parents coming together to control of the educational system, and community members taking control of health, community and social services.*

*Within that context, there is the Kahnawake Schools Diabetes Prevention Project. In the mid-1980s, doctors at the local hospital documented the high rates of diabetes-12% of the adult population. When they brought this information back to the community, elders said, "We have diabetes, and we have to live with this, this is our problem. But please do something so the children don't get it. Prevent it in the children."*

*The doctors believed there was need for research to move it forward and approached the local Kahnawake Education Center, the Kateri Memorial Hospital Centre (KMHC), McGill University, and the Université de Montréal. From this came a community - university team that developed a project proposal that in 1994 received funding to set up KSDPP. KSDPP includes nutrition and physical activity programs and an elementary school diabetes prevention curriculum (which was developed by KMHC personnel)."<sup>23</sup>*

## 4. Ecole Annie Whiskeychan and Wiinebekuu Secondary

The *Waskaganish School Committee* is one way that community members are involved in their schools. This committee has an advisory function and advises on everything from the education budget to planning, human resources and the school calendar. The committee, which is comprised of parents and community members, hold public meetings six times a year. Generally the community is in favor of the *School Committee* although some feel that not enough information is shared with respect to school budgets and student performance data.

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[http://www.sciencedirect.com/science?\\_ob=ArticleURL&\\_udi=B6VBF-45TTJJF-3&\\_user=10&\\_rdoc=1&\\_fmt=&\\_orig=search&\\_sort=d&view=c&\\_acct=C000050221&\\_version=1&\\_urlVersion=0&\\_userid=10&md5=85836e1cee231e4202a759607d3e797a](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science?_ob=ArticleURL&_udi=B6VBF-45TTJJF-3&_user=10&_rdoc=1&_fmt=&_orig=search&_sort=d&view=c&_acct=C000050221&_version=1&_urlVersion=0&_userid=10&md5=85836e1cee231e4202a759607d3e797a)

<sup>23</sup> Kahnawake Schools Diabetes Prevention Project. Retrieved March 22, 2009 from <http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/irbcasestories.html>

Positive engagement of the parents in the *Annie Whiskeychan and Wiinebekuu Schools* is facilitated by teachers and administrators through parent participation in report card nights, graduation and other school activities. As well, a number of more informal type partnerships have arisen between the school and other community entities. Some of these other entities include the:

- Band Council,
- Local Area Management Board,
- Cree Trappers Association,
- Cultural Centre,
- Waskaganish Police Force and Fire Department, and
- School gym, auditorium and classrooms which are used for community meetings, feasts, sports activities and other events<sup>24</sup>

### **5. Eskasoni Elementary/Middle School**

The Eskasoni Elementary and Middle School has a variety of innovative approaches to parent and community involvement. They have found through their experience that there is no one right solution to community/school partnerships. What works for one community will not necessarily work for the next.

The Eskasoni Elementary/Middle School is currently finding ways to increase parental levels of involvement in their school. Fundraising and volunteer activities in the school has not generated much interest among parents. However, special workshops given for parents with children who have special needs have been more successful.

One way the school has managed to improve communications and the relationship with parents is through their positive feedback policy. Each teacher is expected to make a home visit for every one of their students to get to know the family and focus on positive experiences. This happens for the first five years of the child's education. Following the first five years, parents receive a positive telephone call per term for each student. The positive feedback policy has gone a long way in establishing rapport with the parents and has given them a positive outlook on the school system.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Fulford, George. *Sharing our Success: More Case Studies in Aboriginal Schooling: Band-Operated Schools*. (n.d.) Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education: pp. 100-101.

<sup>25</sup> Fulford, George. *Sharing our Success: More Case Studies in Aboriginal Schooling: Band-Operated Schools*. (n.d.) Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education: pp. 54



Other partnerships within the community include the:

- Band health department which created a total health assessment for each student grades 5-9.
- Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counseling Association (NADACA) which visits students and make presentations on relevant topics.
- Mi'kmaq Child and Family Services which works closely with the school and children who are in their care.
- Community liaison officer with the RCMP who works with students to increase their comfort level with the police.
- School Exploratory Program where community members teach a variety of activities such as traditional crafts and other activities of interest.<sup>26</sup>

## **OTHER SAMPLE OF CURRENT PRACTICES**

### **THE GOVERNING BOARD (GB) (QUEBEC)**

The education reform in Quebec contains several lines of action aimed at school success for the greater number of children. One of these lines of action envisions that greater autonomy be conferred to the school, notably via the decentralization of duties and responsibilities in terms of educational services. Amendments to the Law on education have allowed, to this end, the setting up of a Governing Board within each educational institution.

The Governing Board therefore embodies a decision-taking organ which, through management of processes and mediation between the educational institution and the School Board, grants the school the necessary levers to meet the educational needs of all its students.

### **GB Composition**

According to Law, the election of the School Governing Board members is to be held at latest on September 30; the School Board thus determines the composition of the Governing Board before September 30 each year, after consultation with each group concerned.

The Governing Board consists of a maximum of 20 members and is made up of the following:

1. At least four parents of students attending the school, and who are not members of the school personnel, elected by peers;

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<sup>26</sup> Fulford, George. *Sharing our Success: More Case Studies in Aboriginal Schooling: Band-Operated Schools*. (n.d.) Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education: pp. 54

2. At least four members of the school personnel, including at least two teachers and, if agreed upon by the persons concerned, at least one member of the non-teaching professional personnel and at least one member of the support personnel, elected by peers;
3. In the case of a school dispensing second-cycle secondary education, two students of this cycle elected by the school's secondary students or, if need be, nominated by the student committee or association;
4. In the case of a school where child care services are organized for children in preschool and elementary education, a member of the personnel working in these services, elected by peers;
5. Two community representatives, who are not members of the school personnel, nominated by the members as defined in paragraphs 1°, 2° and 4°.

### **Voting rights**

Student and community representatives cannot vote in the Governing Board.

### **Functions and duties of the GB**

The GB exercises its functions and duties on the following aspects of the educational system<sup>27</sup>:

- It adopts and renders public, the educational project as well as the success plan and accounts for their evaluation.
- It approves the rules of conduct and security measures set up by the management.
- It produces an annual report of its activities for the School Board.
- It informs the parents and the community about the services offered by the school.
- It modifies or revokes the Act of Settlement.
- It is consulted concerning the selection criteria for the school provincial.
- It gives its opinion to the School Board on matters relating to the good functioning of the school.
- It approves the implementation measures of the pedagogical scheme, the time allocated to each subject, as well as the general orientations in terms of enrichment and adaptation of the program objectives and contents.
- It is informed on local study programs, the choice of school books, criteria relating to the implementation of new pedagogical methods, student admission criteria, ranking system regulations, as well as evaluation norms and procedures.
- It approves the planning of educational activities requiring modifications in the daily time-schedule.
- It approves the setting up of complementary and particular services programs.

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<sup>27</sup> Source: [http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/Conseils/ce/interieur/pdf/affiche\\_ecoles\\_f.pdf](http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/Conseils/ce/interieur/pdf/affiche_ecoles_f.pdf)

- It approves the utilization of school premises or buildings and is consulted on the needs of the school as regards goods and services, school premises and buildings.
- It adopts the annual budget of the school.
- It can solicit and receive a donation or a contribution.
- It can organize extracurricular activities.
- It decides with the School Board, on supervision measures at noon and on day care services at school.

### **Disadvantages or obstacles to the implementation of a GB in a First Nations school**

#### Recruitment

- Difficulty for a Band-operated school to recruit the required number of representatives as per the GB Terms of Reference. According to provincial law, only schools with 60 students or less can derogate to the obligation of having 20 representatives.
- Moreover, within the candidate pool, a significant number of applicants are, at the same time, parents and teachers or personnel members.

#### A GB per school

- The FNEC member communities tend, in most cases, to establish a “community” parental structure, for their schools.

#### Organizational structure

- In a GB, the tasks and duties of the school principal are clearly defined. To adapt this structure to Band-operated schools, it is possible that the communities have to establish within this structure, the place of the school principal, education counsellors, etc.

#### Legal framework

- The Law on public education as well as on School Boards regulate the duties and responsibilities of Governing Boards. This legal framework facilitates operations (arrangement and production of framework papers, conflict resolution, daily operations, etc.). Concerning the communities, legal aspects framing the GB have to be determined and locally reinforced.

#### Adoption of the school’s annual budget

- The financial crisis of Band-operated schools and the current mode of funding can make it difficult for the school principal in terms of presentation and accountability of the GB.

#### Obligation to elect members in September

- This obligation as well as the non flexibility of the legal framework of Governing Boards in several different matters can pointlessly render burdensome the GB management in a First Nations school.

### **Advantages to the implementation of a GB in a First Nations school**

#### Participation of grandparents

- A grandparent can get elected as a student's parent if he/she possesses the parental authority over the ward or has custody of the latter.

#### Right to inspection over the major orientations in education

- Structure allowing parents to decide on the major orientations taken by the school. The authority conferred to parents via the legal framework of the GB may incite attendance.

#### Donations and contributions

- The GB can solicit and receive a donation or a contribution and supervise the management of funds. The GB of a First Nations school, can, in theory, perform funding research for the school and administer the funds received.

#### **Conclusion**

The Governing Board is a way to ensure parental involvement in important decisions pertaining to the school (budget, pedagogical approach, subject-time allocation, school calendar, etc.). To effectively act upon the involvement of parents in the learning process of their children, other structures have to be established in parallel, such as : the parents committee, parental involvement organizations and any other committee mandated to contribute to the school's mission (for example: embellishment of school premises, promotion of culture, self-financing, support to extracurricular activities, etc.).

The model of GB developed by the MELS seems adaptable to the needs of the communities provided that the community is able to:

- equip itself with operating and management tools similar to those of provincial schools (educational project, success plan);
- identify local mechanisms to compensate for the absence of legal obligations;
- ensure a professional development plan for the school principal, as well as for the GB members;
- support the principal or the school management as well as the GB members in their tasks and duties.

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Source: Ministère de l'Éducation du Loisir et du Sport. (s.d.). Consulted on April 20, 2009, The Governing Boards  
<http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/Conseils/ce/interieur/apropos.html>

## ANALYSIS

Research in First Nations education confirms the importance of parental involvement in their children's education.

*Throughout all the literature dealing with First Nations Education, the concept of parental/community involvement is advocated and reinforced. In the major position papers and studies published since the 1970's, parental involvement forms a central feature underlying First Nations control. Parental and community control is the basic tenet of the 1973 document "Indian Control of Indian Education" produced by the National Indian Brotherhood. This concept is reiterated throughout the essays that comprise the 1987 Indian Education in Canada Volume II, the Assembly of First Nations' Tradition and Education in 1988, the 1996 Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and the 2002 "Final Report of the Minister's National Working Group on Education" in addition to a multiplicity of other major studies and websites. In Ontario, the Chiefs in Assembly recognize the importance of parental influence as a factor in school participation by First Nations students:*

*"... a communication strategy should be undertaken to reach out to parents and families and to encourage our students to stay in school, study math and sciences, attend science fairs and camps and to pursue health care studies"*

*(Resolution 03/22 – Strategy for Increasing First Nations Health Professionals, Chiefs of Ontario, June 2003)<sup>28</sup>*

Parental partnerships with First Nation schools need to go beyond mere partnerships. Schools need to be interconnected with the community. The research is clear on this point:

- ENGAGEMENT of the community is the most important factor. We need to make education a part of each community; it cannot be abstracted.
- Elders and the community leaders must be involved in an open dialogue .... We need more direct control over education.<sup>29</sup>

The *Royal Commission on Learning* (an Ontario Government initiative taken in the 1990's) refers specifically to parental engagement in its report.

*"...aboriginal parents also want to have more input into the schools their children attend. Some Native people feel this might be achieved by having more*

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<sup>28</sup> Chabot, L. (n.d.). *Engaging First Nations Parents in Education: An Examination of Best Practices*. Canada: p. 2.

<sup>29</sup> Chabot, L. (n.d.). *Engaging First Nations Parents in Education: An Examination of Best Practices*. Canada: pp. 25-27.

*trustees on provincial school boards, or by being able to vote in school board elections, and others are looking for more direct involvement with their local schools. Still others are more concerned about achieving full self-government and controlling their own education system from early childhood to post-secondary and adult education and training” (Government of Ontario).<sup>30</sup>*

### Principles of Parental Involvement

In the Ontario model of parental involvement in schools general principles that support parental participation are highlighted. The following illustrates some general current practices schools can undertake:

- Parents should be partners in the educational process;
- Teacher training about parent involvement is essential;
- Parent involvement is a process that evolves over time;
- Educators should ask parents how they want to be involved in their children’s education;
- Policies should clearly define involvement and should be developed together; and,
- Resources should be provided to schools to develop parent involvement programs.<sup>31</sup>

Involvement of parents needs to be flexible and multi-dimensional in its approach. Parents and school administrators must collaborate and become creators of their own programs. The lessons learned include:

**There is no "one size fits all" approach to partnerships.** Build on what works well locally. Begin the school-family partnership by identifying with families, the strengths, interests, and needs of families, students and school staff. Then design strategies that respond to identified strengths, interests and needs.

**Flexibility and diversity are key.** Recognize that effective parent involvement takes many forms that may not necessarily require parents' presence at a workshop, meeting or school. The emphasis should be on parents helping children learn, and this can happen in schools, homes, or elsewhere in a community. (Institute for Responsive Education – responsiveeducation.org)

**Every First Nation has its own needs;** they need to be addressed specifically and locally (Wesley-Esquimaux, Kenora)<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Chabot, L. (n.d.). *Engaging First Nations Parents in Education: An Examination of Best Practices*. Canada: p. 5-8

<sup>31</sup> Chabot, L. (n.d.). *Engaging First Nations Parents in Education: An Examination of Best Practices*. Canada: p. 5-8.

<sup>32</sup> Chabot, L. (n.d.). *Engaging First Nations Parents in Education: An Examination of Best Practices*. Canada: p. 5-8.

Outcomes of Parental Involvement

Research underscores the valuable impact of parental and community involvement in the education process:

Certain kinds of parental involvement pay handsome dividends: Higher student achievement, higher aspirations, better attendance, improved classroom and school climate, and more positive relationships between parents and teachers.

One-half to two-thirds of the variance in student achievement can be accounted for by home rather than school variables

At risk students, parent and family involvement in learning has been identified as the single most important determiner of success

High school students whose parents remain involved maintain their quality of the work, develop realistic plans for the future and are less likely to drop out of school

Students with involved parents are more likely to:

- Earn higher grades and test scores, and enroll in higher level programs,
- Be promoted, pass their classes and earn credits,
- Attend school regularly,
- Have better social skills, show improved behaviour and adapt well to school, and
- Graduate and go on to post-secondary education.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Chabot, L. (n.d.). *Engaging First Nations Parents in Education: An Examination of Best Practices*. Canada: p. 5-8.

## CURRENT PRACTICES

### Based on our models analysis and research we found that:

1. Community responsibility for educational programs is essential.
2. Local control appears to be a major factor in the success of schools.
3. The community challenge of the “status quo” resulted in control of school outcomes and ensuring needs are met from a community perspective.
4. The school fosters a supportive environment. Open and accepting climates are illustrated through the presence of large numbers of First Nations teachers and administrative staff.
5. Strong political and administrative leadership is a strong contributing factor for school and community partnerships success. Input on the part of the Band Council, elders and administration contributes significantly towards the strength of the ongoing partnership between parent, school and community.<sup>34</sup>
6. Community members and researchers need to be in partnership in all aspects of projects and programs.
7. Agendas must be flexible and responsive to community needs.
8. Projects must allow for learning opportunities for all involved.
9. The integration of intervention and evaluation components is required over time to measure success.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Fulford, George. Sharing our Success: More Case Studies in Aboriginal Schooling: Band-Operated Schools. (n.d.) Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education: pp. 95.

<sup>35</sup> *Implementing participatory intervention and research in communities: lessons from the Kahnawake Schools Diabetes Prevention Project in Canada*. Retrieved March 22, 2009 from [http://www.sciencedirect.com/science?\\_ob=ArticleURL&\\_udi=B6VBF-45TTJJF-3&\\_user=10&\\_rdoc=1&\\_fmt=&\\_orig=search&\\_sort=d&\\_view=c&\\_acct=C000050221&\\_version=1&\\_urlVersion=0&\\_userid=10&md5=85836e1cee231e4202a759607d3e797a](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science?_ob=ArticleURL&_udi=B6VBF-45TTJJF-3&_user=10&_rdoc=1&_fmt=&_orig=search&_sort=d&_view=c&_acct=C000050221&_version=1&_urlVersion=0&_userid=10&md5=85836e1cee231e4202a759607d3e797a)



## RECOMMENDATIONS

Parent and community strategies need to encompass the following elements in order to be effective.<sup>36</sup>

- Needs assessments and parent consultations – parents and school staff must working collaboratively to develop strategies and programs that are mutually beneficial
- Building relationships – fostering environments of trust and welcome for First Nation students and parents are required.
- Cultural awareness – there must be respect for First Nations culture, traditions and language.
- Measurement and the tracking success of partnerships – First Nations communities must become partners in the decision-making process with respect to First Nation programs and services. Furthermore, assessment must be a component of any good strategy or plan put into action. Measurable targets need to be put into place to assess strategy effectiveness.
- Information sharing – regional differences must be shared. The input from community members must be sought after. Relationships through information sharing must be built on mutual trust and respect between parents and the school community.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the research suggests that there are challenges when it comes to building parent and school partnerships, however, it is essential that First Nations communities and parents work together in partnerships to ensuring student success and an effective education process.

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<sup>36</sup> R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd. Parent and Education Engagement Partnership Project: A Discussion Paper. (2002). R.A. Malatest & Associates Ltd: 29

# **ADDENDUM**

## **Regional Models for Parent Committees**

## MODEL 1 - BRITISH COLUMBIA

### GRASSROOTS – BOTTOM UP APPROACH

#### FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION STEERING COMMITTEE (FNESC)

The mandate of the FNESC parent and community initiative is as follows:

*The Parental & Community Engagement Program funding to First Nations Schools and Communities supports activities related to raising the awareness of parents and community members of their valuable role in their children's education and to provide the supports necessary to ensure that they can be active in that role.<sup>37</sup>*

Activities recommended by the Parental & Community Engagement Program (PCE) include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Organizing meetings for parents, including workshops with guest speakers for specific training for parents. The sponsorship may include food for participating parents, facilitator expenses and materials for parents, and childcare costs
- Hiring a trained individual to make home visits to support parents
- Accessing parenting programs/resources related to parenting skills, home reading support, and parental contributions to educational development
- Providing training for parents with low literacy skills to help them understand how to provide reading and homework support
- Implementing programs to involve parents in school activities, including parental participation in cultural activities, in school decision-making, and in one-on-one support for children who require assistance
- Sponsoring joint parent and student activities to increase their comfort in the school environment, including games nights, social activities, children and adult First Nations culture and language learning programs, and parent-led extra curricular activities
- Facilitating presentations on the importance of regular health check-ups, nutrition, healthy lifestyles, and safety issues
- Providing information for parents on career and education planning<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> First Nations Education Steering Committee. Retrieved March 24, 2009 from [http://www.fnesc.ca/programs/program\\_parental.php](http://www.fnesc.ca/programs/program_parental.php)

<sup>38</sup> British Columbia. (2008/09). *Parental & Community Engagement Program*. Funding Document.

## PARENT AND EDUCATION ENGAGEMENT PARTNERSHIP PROJECT BC PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND ABORIGINAL EDUCATION

Some of the challenging issues surrounding Aboriginal Parent-School Partnerships in BC include the following:

- Negative educational experiences of Aboriginal parents,
- Barriers to communication,
- Lack of understanding by schools,
- Cultural awareness,
- Poverty and illness in Aboriginal families,
- Lack of engagement strategies by schools,
- Intimidation,
- Negative parental contact, and
- Segregation of Aboriginal students<sup>39</sup>

There have been attempts to overcome some of the barriers to parent-school involvement and buy-in. Some of the most current engagement strategies in BC are as follows:

1. **Governance strategies/initiatives**: Many regions have created an Aboriginal Education Committee to guide/lead or to have control concerning Aboriginal education programs and services.
2. **Aboriginal support services**: There are a number of Aboriginal support services that serve to complement and facilitate parent-school communication. Support services vary across the province of B.C. but can generally be attached to one of the following categories: home/school liaison activities; cultural/Aboriginal education support services; and other support functions.
3. **School orientation activities**: Strategies used by many schools that have met with success include an orientation day for new Aboriginal students and their parents one week prior to the first day of class; organizing one-on-one meetings with the parents, support staff and teacher early in the school year; and creation of a parent handbook that plainly outlines school policies, programs, supports and expectations for parents.
4. **Cultural awareness/culturally inclusive activities**: Schools that use these strategies have the most success in attracting parents. Specific activities include support in Aboriginal culture/traditional activities, Aboriginal parents as resources/assistants in the classroom, and the establishment of aboriginal “space” for students/parents.
5. Other strategies include using the school as a community resource (dances, receptions, etc) for parents to become more comfortable with the environment and

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<sup>39</sup> Malatest, R.A. & Associates Ltd. (2002). *Parent and Education Engagement Partnership Project*. BC: 10

the accommodation of seminars/workshops for parents (specific programs and services tailored to the individualized needs of parents).<sup>40</sup>

## Analysis

Current practices derived from this model include:

- Engaging parents in the decision making process,
- Communication,
- Creative ways of thinking other than the traditional ways,
- Recognizing and addressing barriers,
- Aboriginal role models, and
- Other current practices.<sup>41</sup>

The research done in BC suggests that there is no single strategy or approach to use in building home-school partnership in First Nation communities. The research clearly points out, however, that the effective strategies must be developed *by* First Nation parents not *for* First Nation parents. In addition, effective strategies must address:

### **Needs assessment/parent consultation**

At the grassroots level strategies need to directly apply to the needs, values and perceptions of First Nation parents. First Nations need to be part of that process and even directing that process.

### **Building relationships**

Building relationships take place at a variety of different levels. At the school level there needs to be processes in place to facilitate parents visiting the school. This can take place through orientation meetings for parents to the promotion of the school for cultural and social activities to the creation of First Nation spaces in schools. At the district level, relationship building can occur through funding parent education activities and reviewing policies governing school use for community activities. At the community level this can take place through working closely with the schools to promote school facilities for events and providing parents with evidence of the value of their participation to their child and educational success. Other activities can include First Nation representation on school planning councils and Aboriginal parent involvement in planning.

### **Cultural and awareness strategies**

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<sup>40</sup> Malatest, R.A. & Associates Ltd. (2002). *Parent and Education Engagement Partnership Project*. BC: 15-21.

<sup>41</sup> Malatest, R.A. & Associates Ltd. (2002). *Parent and Education Engagement Partnership Project*. BC: 22

Ultimately, schools must become more inclusive in their use of First Nation culture. First Nation students and families must be made to feel that their culture is valued and respected in the context of the school.

### **Measuring and tracking success of partnerships**

A framework must be developed in schools to actively evaluate how they are doing in terms of the First Nation parent partnerships. Frameworks should be developed with this partnership as a key objective.

### **Information sharing**

Schools, educators, administrators and First Nation parents need to have an established current practices resource to access information on effective partnership processes between the school and First Nation parents. Resources may include such things as handbooks, conferences, logs of current practices, data warehouse systems...anything to use as a distribution channel of information.<sup>42</sup>

## **SCHOOL PLANNING COUNCIL IN BRITISH COLUMBIA**

The School Planning Council in BC (2004) made the following recommendations for Planning Councils:

1. Develop a more comprehensive explanation of the purpose and role of School Planning Councils and their value in children's education. Basic questions to be answered are:
  - a. Can the School Planning Council really make a difference to student achievement in the school?
  - b. Do our decisions matter to the school board?
2. Develop a method of communication for SPC members to learn from and dialogue with other SPCs. This could take the form of meetings and conferences and a website.
3. Develop guidelines for SPC operation to encourage and make it possible for a broader pool of parents to be available to participate in SPCs.
4. Develop guidelines on the kinds of data of value to SPCs. The use of fraudulent, excessive, or extraneous data should be discouraged.
5. Develop templates and tools for data gathering to assist SPCs in collecting useful data.

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<sup>42</sup> Malatest, R.A. & Associates Ltd. (2002). *Parent and Education Engagement Partnership Project*. BC: 31-35.

6. Continue training SPC members, with emphasis on SPC mandate, roles, and process data collection and analysis.
7. Provide adequate resources for developing and implementing school plans.
8. Examine ways to encourage full participation of teachers in the work of SPCs.
9. Explore ways to improve the relationship between SPCs and their school board.<sup>43</sup>

On July 1, 2002, the provincial government passed legislation that requires each Public school in the province to establish a School Planning Council. The goal of this initiative is to formally recognize the importance of parental involvement in improving student achievement. School Planning Councils provide advice to School Boards in the areas of allocating school resources, creating accountability contracts, and making decisions about education programs.

The Councils are supposed to consult with the school community in developing, monitoring, and reviewing school plans for improving student achievement. The school community means all parents, students, administrators, teachers, support staff, and other people interested in student success. School Planning Councils consist of the school principal, one teacher representative, and three people elected by the school's Parent Advisory Council. The Councils are meant to be pro-active in reaching out to all members of the school community. School Boards must ensure that a School Planning Council is in place for each school.

School principals provide leadership for the School Planning Council, and are required to notify the community about its formation. The principal also gathers together information about student achievement to share with the school community.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education. (2004). *A Survey of School Planning Councils in British Columbia*. BC: 42

<sup>44</sup> Kavanagh, B. (2009). *First Nations Parents Club: A Handbook for Parents*. FNEC and First Nations School Association: 34-36

## MODEL 2 – ONTARIO MODEL

### A LEGISLATIVE - TOP-DOWN APPROACH

The vision inherent in the following model is based on the Research Framework for the Chiefs of Ontario Education manifesto project. Key concepts in this vision include:

- Community involvement and participation.
- Life-long learning.
- Integrated services.
- Easing up the process of transition into the mainstream.
- First Nations representation on school councils and school boards.<sup>45</sup>

According to this model the school-parent partnership takes on a whole new dimension. Right from the start, the key principles on which to build an education system are as follows:

- First Nations inherent rights to jurisdiction in education shall be fully recognized by provincial and federal governments, and realized by a complete transfer of administrative power to First Nations.
- First Nation communities (on and off reserve) shall be given full autonomy to decide how their children are to be educated, and how the money is being spent to guarantee a high quality education for First Nations' students.
- Self-determined, culturally appropriate educational processes in which First Nation history, culture, languages, philosophies of life and social organization shall be given an utmost priority as important parts of the curriculum.
- Active participation of everybody in the community, including parents, grandparents, elders, and decision makers; sharing of knowledge.
- Children shall always be at the center of the learning circle.
- Communal well-being must be emphasized, with careful attention given to improving social condition for Aboriginal people on and off reserve.<sup>46</sup>

The circle is at the heart of this model of education, where the community-parent school partnership becomes relevant as it is inherently part of the model.

*The symbolism of a circle and its inherent meanings are very important in all North American Aboriginal cultures. As Black Elk once said, "the sky*

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<sup>45</sup> Wesley-Esquimaux, C. (2004). *Report on First Nations' Governance over Education: Reclaiming the Circle of Learning*. Ontario: 2.

<sup>46</sup> Wesley-Esquimaux, C. (2004). *Report on First Nations' Governance over Education: Reclaiming the Circle of Learning*. Ontario: 3.



*is round, the earth is round and so are all the stars, the wind whirls in a circle, birds make nests in circles, the sun and the moon rise and set in a circle, and both are round, the seasons occur in a circular pattern as they change from spring, summer to fall to winter and back to spring again, and the life of an individual is a cycle from childhood to adulthood". Everything in life proceeds in circles. This is also how people learn, share knowledge and educate their children in a never-ending process of giving and receiving, accepting and renouncing. At the center of the circle of learning are the children – "the sacred gifts that are the heart of our communities". Radiating from the center are all the forces and all the structures to help the children find the right knowledge and the right path in life.<sup>47</sup>*

In this model, education is viewed as an inter-related facet of life in the community rather than as an outside entity on its own, where the community needs to have a link. Rather, in this model the entire community is part of the school and conversely the school is part of the entire community. The model is symbolized by the circle and the inherent meanings of that circle in all North American indigenous cultures. Education is viewed in terms of the whole community involving all parts from children to parents to grandparents to elders.

In this type of system the entire community is involved and responsible for their education. Caring and sharing initiatives are part of this model, as are cultural activities, elder and grandparent teachings and the like. Everyone in the community becomes involved in the education process, becoming the radii that connect students to the community, to their learning, to their dreams and aspirations.

This community education model in the context of First Nations education is incredibly powerful.

*Our respondents agree that a community education model has powerful symbolic value, illustrating and displaying the importance of lifelong learning (a 'cradle-to-grave' model mentioned during the meetings). They also agree that there is particular power in enabling children to observe adults involved with learning, and this understanding is also supported by mainstream research initiatives. Brisebois (1986, quoted by Leavitt, 1993) mentions a teacher from Kahnawake, Quebec, who contrasts the English way of learning – "if at first you don't succeed, try, try again" with the Mohawk version - "watch and listen and do it right, watch and listen and do it right".*

*In engaging an entire community in the education process, First Nations people are also taking aim at the integration of various child and family-*

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<sup>47</sup> Wesley-Esquimaux, C. (2004). *Report on First Nations' Governance over Education: Reclaiming the Circle of Learning*. Ontario: 3.

*related services to secure a range of community services, many of which have traditionally been delivered in First Nations communities. They are exploring ways to coordinate and integrate such services with education services. The physical co-location of services and schooling would bring more parents and family members into contact with the school (as it already does in some communities). This would increase the sense of community ownership and potentially help to lower barriers in attendance by increasing community familiarity with an engaging education system.<sup>48</sup>*

In order to begin fostering a stronger community involvement in this model there are some areas that must be further developed in building the education system element:

**School Councils:** involvement in school councils give parents/grandparents/guardians the opportunity to strengthen ties between parents, schools, boards, government and the community. This helps to ensure a high-quality system for First Nation students. There is a need to get First Nations parents/grandparents more involved in local student councils.<sup>49</sup>

**School Boards:** There is a need to get more First Nation involvement and influence in the Ontario education system. One way to accomplish this is to get more representatives on the school boards.<sup>50</sup>

Ultimately to accomplish the vision of a successful education system and integration of the school and community as per the model the following steps must be taken according to the Ontario model presented:

1. The transfer of the exercise of jurisdiction from the federal government to First Nations governments, which will ensure that First Nations people will be able to “educate their children in any way, by any means, for whatever purpose they so choose” (McCue, 1999:4).
2. Fundamental changes to the existing funding formulas, including tuition agreements and on reserve school funding based on enrollment and attendance (eliminate nominal roll).
3. Full participation of First Nations people in decision-making processes on all levels, from school councils, to school boards, boards of trustees or any appropriate Provincial and Federal Ministries responsible for providing support for First Nations education.
4. An education system (both on and off reserve), which will facilitate cultural maintenance and reinforce cultural competence.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Wesley-Esquimaux, C. (2004). *Report on First Nations’ Governance over Education: Reclaiming the Circle of Learning*. Ontario: 5.

<sup>49</sup> Wesley-Esquimaux, C. (2004). *Report on First Nations’ Governance over Education: Reclaiming the Circle of Learning*. Ontario: 5-8.

<sup>50</sup> Wesley-Esquimaux, C. (2004). *Report on First Nations’ Governance over Education: Reclaiming the Circle of Learning*. Ontario: 5-8.

The model breaks down into a further structure of governance at all levels. Breaking it down into its component parts follow:

a. Community Level

At the centre of learning are of course the students. Radiating (staying with the concept of the circle of this model) from the centre are the community structures who oversee the operations and management of the school as a component part of the socio-cultural fabric (as opposed to the traditional view of school being a distinct entity separate from the community). In this model the entire community is involved in the education process directly and indirectly. Some of the activities that would occur at the community level are:

- Articulating a vision of education for First Nations at the local level,
- Community planning and short term financial planning,
- Information forums held regularly,
- Everyday school activities, including extracurricular programs and services,
- Liaison between parents and teachers, schools and elders (grandparents),
- Alignment of community educational projects,
- Implementation of the (culturally revised) assessment tools,
- Consistent and timely input to the regional educational body in regard to students' progress, funds utilized and funds needed, and the implementation of regional policies and programs.
- Designing 'Sharing and Caring' programs and other school-centered activities that would involve the entire community<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Wesley-Esquimaux, C. (2004). *Report on First Nations' Governance over Education: Reclaiming the Circle of Learning*. Ontario: 8.

<sup>52</sup> Wesley-Esquimaux, C. (2004). *Report on First Nations' Governance over Education: Reclaiming the Circle of Learning*. Ontario: 14-16.

b. Regional Level

At the next level of the circle is the regional body (Education Body or Board of Education) working with indigenous Education Councils. The regional body governs more of the issues that are beyond the scope of local issues. Some of the responsibilities at this level might include:

- Articulating a vision of education for First Nations at the regional level.
- Setting the standards for education.
- Designing appropriate assessment tools.
- Development of culturally appropriate curriculum.
- Schools and teachers evaluation.
- Disposition of available funds.
- Education and financial long term planning.
- Providing access and funds for teachers' education.
- Organizing conferences and workshops for local educators.
- Creating and sustaining networks of information.<sup>53</sup>

c. Provincial level

At the provincial level, yet another level of the concentric circle, responsibilities would include:

- Articulating a First Nations vision of education for the entire Province.
- Setting province-wide direction through legislation, regulations and policy memoranda.
- Determining the funding for regional school boards.
- Conducting comprehensive research on education planning, curriculum design, teachers' training and pedagogical strategies relevant to a First Nations' engaged education process.
- Liaison and information sharing with non-Aboriginal educational bodies and institutions.
- Long term strategic financial planning.
- Monitoring mainstream political processes and policies implementation.<sup>54</sup>

d. National Level

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<sup>53</sup> Wesley-Esquimaux, C. (2004). *Report on First Nations' Governance over Education: Reclaiming the Circle of Learning*. Ontario: 14-16.

<sup>54</sup> Wesley-Esquimaux, C. (2004). *Report on First Nations' Governance over Education: Reclaiming the Circle of Learning*. Ontario: 14-16.

The national level operates on the circumference of the circle and is a system of governing First Nations education from a national perspective and at a national level. A national vision of education specific to First Nations prevails and the responsibility of this body would be to represent First Nations interests by the creation of national policies and education strategies. This structure is:

- Responsible to parents and leaders;
- Responsible to each other;
- Required to defend their decisions and policies;
- Required to account for failures or inadequacies of any aspect of First Nations education under its jurisdiction.”<sup>55</sup>

Furthermore, an Act must be developed for First Nations education. A critical component of this Act must be parental engagement in all legislation and policy that affects First Nation students. The following types of legislation are mandatory:

- Legislation that requires that tuition agreements include adequate First Nations representation at the Board level without any criteria related to property tax.
- Legislation that requires all school boards to host and resource First Nations parent/community advisory committees.
- Policy that requires and resources the creation of parent-school liaison positions at all provincial schools educating First Nations students.
- Policy that facilitates the integration of services geared to the individual needs of First Nations students and their families.
- Policy that requires and supports the involvement of parents, Elders and communities in the creation of curriculum, as instructors, as advisors, as educational staff, administrative staff, board staff and volunteers in provincial schools, whatever their level.
- Policies that support First Nations parental involvement through the provision of support and resources to all educational institutions, teachers, administrators and boards, from pre-school to post-secondary. This can include training and support of teachers/administrators in seeking parental involvement, the establishment of liaison staff, the creation of First Nations-school advisory committees, and the integration of services.
- Legislation that requires the identification of adequate financial resources, outside of standard tuition agreement transfer monies, to support new policies and programs related to parental/community involvement. This should include resources to address on-going strategic planning exercises conducted with First Nations involvement.<sup>56</sup>

e. Federal Government

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<sup>55</sup> Wesley-Esquimaux, C. (2004). *Report on First Nations' Governance over Education: Reclaiming the Circle of Learning*. Ontario: 14-16.

<sup>56</sup> Wesley-Esquimaux, C. (2004). *Report on First Nations' Governance over Education: Reclaiming the Circle of Learning*. Ontario: 14-16.

At the federal level, the Government must take an active role in changing First Nations education and promote parental involvement. Parental involvement in their children's education is key to the success of First Nations education programs. Some key initiatives that need to happen from the Federal Government include:

- Recognize the importance of parental involvement as a key feature of First Nations control. As part of this recognition, Canada must ensure that sufficient, sustainable resources are available to both locally controlled First Nations schools and in tuition agreements to realize the goals that First Nations may have with respect to parental engagement. This must include resources to address personnel costs, equipment, materials and physical space requirements. The transfer of such resources should not add unnecessary administrative burden to First Nations.
- In developing policy to support parental engagement, Canada must acknowledge the diversity of circumstances in First Nations communities and that this will result in a diversity of programs to support parental engagement.
- Recognize the holistic approach to First Nations education by addressing parental engagement as a facet of programs ranging from pre-kindergarten to post-secondary.
- Require First Nations representation on provincial school boards, advisory bodies and parent councils as part of tuition agreements. Communications with First Nations, consultations regarding curriculum and other Aboriginal program development must also form part of Tuition Agreements in addition to target-setting and monitoring provisions.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Chabot, L. (n.d.). *Engaging First Nations Parents in Education: An Examination of Best Practices*. Canada: pp. 25-27.

### MODEL 3 – CREE SCHOOL BOARD

The Cree School Board, located in Mistissini, is the responsible body for the administration and funding of schools in nine communities under the Quebec Education Act. The Board receives its 25% of its funding through the Province of Quebec and 75% of its funding through the Federal Government.<sup>58</sup>

There are nine School Committees in the Cree School Board structure. The Committees consult with the administration of the schools and the Council of Commissioners. Basically the School Committee is the voice of the parents. They are comprised of one member appointed by the Band Council and 4-10 additional members (size is contingent on the population of the community). There are nine members on the Waskaganish School Committee which meets once every 6 weeks during the school year. The principal, CEA and parents are expected to attend School Committee meetings and together they make recommendations to the Council of Commissioners regarding the management and administration of the schools, including staffing. In addition, the committee actively promotes Cree language and culture in the schools.

Parents involvement with the School Committees consists of public meetings and a consultation process. However, within the current structure sometimes grassroots community involvement is limited. One of the disadvantages of this type of system is that the Board can appear to lack transparency. The issue of communication back into the community also has the appearance of being inadequate.

Parents have suggested ideas on how to remedy the communication gap in order to enhance transparency and information sharing. Some of their solutions include:

- Regular regional phone-in talk shows on the radio involving the Director and Deputy Director General and the Supervisor of Schools.
- Broadcasting meetings of the Council of Commissioners on broadband and local cable TV channels.
- Reporting of school events in local media.
- PowerPoint presentations at School Committee meetings on school budgets and trends in student attendance, achievement on provincial tests, and secondary and postsecondary graduation completion rates; these could also be posted on school websites.
- Regular newsletters available both in hard copy and electronically via school websites.
- Annual parent questionnaires with results presented by the School Committee and posted on school websites.
- Regular updating of the Cree School Board and local school websites which are usually at least one year out of date.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Fulford, George. Sharing our Success: More Case Studies in Aboriginal Schooling: Band-Operated Schools. (n.d.) Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education: pp. 97-100.

<sup>59</sup> Fulford, George. Sharing our Success: More Case Studies in Aboriginal Schooling: Band-Operated Schools. (n.d.) Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education: pp. 97-100.

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