



16 First Nation Trustees: Leading in Two Worlds

VOLUNTARY, CONFIDENTIAL SELF-IDENTIFICATION

Voluntary, confidential student self-identification remains a priority for the Ministry of Education. To assess Ontario's progress in helping more First Nation, Métis and Inuit students reach their full potential, it is necessary to have accurate and reliable data. This information assists school boards in improving programs and supports for First Nation, Métis and Inuit students, and will enable boards to focus their efforts on effective student achievement strategies. The Ministry will continue to develop tools to assist school boards in the implementation of their policies.

PURPOSE OF BOARD SELF- IDENTIFICATION POLICIES

As of April 2013, all 76 Ontario school boards and school authorities have implemented self-identification policies. Effective implementation of these policies by Ontario school boards is a significant step toward ensuring that First Nation, Métis and Inuit students receive the highest possible quality education, and that all Ontario students benefit from an appreciation of the richness of First Nation, Métis and Inuit cultures and the important contributions of First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities to Ontario's cultural, economic and social future.

In 2014-2015, boards received funding to support the development of *Board Action Plans on First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education*. This investment supports boards in implementing strategies and actions identified in the *Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework Implementation Plan (2014)*. Allocating funding based on the self-identified First Nation, Métis and Inuit student population enables the Ministry and boards to target resources to directly impact and improve First Nation, Métis and Inuit student achievement and well-being and close achievement gaps.

School boards use voluntary self-identification policies at the local level to plan and develop programs that support student achievement, and communicate results to local communities. The Ministry uses the data reported by school boards at an aggregate level to develop policies and programs that better support student achievement across the province. Data is also used to report on results achieved, and to identify areas for improvement.

SUCCESS FACTORS FOR IMPLEMENTING SELF- IDENTIFICATION POLICIES

- Working through the regional Provincial Territorial Organizations and/or Tribal Councils to seek their support and facilitate communication with their member First Nation communities; working through other Aboriginal organizations within the local community, e.g., Métis Nation of Ontario.
- Engaging with First Nation, Métis and Inuit parents and other members of the community about the collection and use of self-identification data. Developing resources for parents and educators to help explain this process and encouraging parents to share this information with other parents through take-away communications such as brochures or fliers.
- Training front-line staff, including secretaries and other administrative staff who field questions from parents (e.g., about the school registration forms).
- Establishing a First Nation, Métis and Inuit Advisory Committee that reports to the board.
- Using a range of outreach approaches to communicate the purpose of the initiative, and to seek feedback on questions used during the data-gathering process. For example: full-day community sessions open to all community members, including families and representatives of service delivery agencies.
- Information sessions in different locations including Aboriginal community centres and schools.
- Board collaborations with various Aboriginal organizations (e.g., PTO, Métis Nation of Ontario, Native Child and Family Services, Friendship Centres) to engage a broad range of organizations and service delivery providers.

Support for ongoing implementation of self-identification policies is found in the document *Building Bridges to Success for First Nation, Métis and Inuit Students*, available on-line at www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/aboriginal/buildBridges.pdf.

The second progress report on the implementation of the Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework (2013) (<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/aboriginal/ASolidFoundation.pdf>) reported that all 76 of Ontario's school boards and school authorities had established voluntary, confidential self-identification Aboriginal student policies. Preliminary data submitted through the Ontario School Information System (OnSIS) in 2013 indicates that approximately 52% of the estimated First Nation, Métis and Inuit student population has self-identified.