

Legislative
Assembly of
Ontario



Assemblée
législative de
l'Ontario

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

EDUCATION OF ABORIGINAL STUDENTS

(Section 4.05, 2014 Annual Report of the Auditor General of Ontario)

1st Session, 41st Parliament
65 Elizabeth II

ISBN 978-1-4606-7488-8 (Print)
ISBN 978-1-4606-7490-1 [English] (PDF)
ISBN 978-1-4606-7492-5 [French] (PDF)
ISBN 978-1-4606-7489-5 [English] (HTML)
ISBN 978-1-4606-7491-8 [French] (HTML)

Legislative
Assembly of
Ontario



Assemblée
législative de
l'Ontario

The Honourable Dave Levac, MPP
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly

Sir,

Your Standing Committee on Public Accounts has the honour to present its Report and commends it to the House.

Ernie Hardeman, MPP
Chair of the Committee

Queen's Park
March 2016

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS
COMITÉ PERMANENT DES COMPTES PUBLICS
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1A2

STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

MEMBERSHIP LIST

1st Session, 41st Parliament

ERNIE HARDEMAN
Chair

LISA MACLEOD
Vice-Chair

HAN DONG

PERCY HATFIELD

JULIA MUNRO

LOU RINALDI

JOHN FRASER

HARINDER MALHI

ARTHUR POTTS

FRANCE GÉLINAS regularly served as a substitute member of the Committee.

VALERIE QUIOC LIM
Clerk of the Committee

IAN MORRIS
Research Officer

Contents

PREAMBLE	1
Acknowledgments	1
OVERVIEW	1
2014 Follow-up	3
Status of Actions Taken on Auditor's Recommendations: Summary	3
ISSUES RAISED IN THE 2014 FOLLOW-UP AND BEFORE THE COMMITTEE	3
Policy Goals, Implementation Plans, and Performance Measures	3
Voluntary, Confidential Self-identification	5
Data Collection and Analysis	5
Funding	7
First Nation Students Living on Reserves	8
CONSOLIDATED LIST OF COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS	11

PREAMBLE

On November 25, 2015, the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (the Committee) held public hearings on the follow-up on Education of Aboriginal Students, Section 4.05 of the *2014 Annual Report* of the Auditor General of Ontario (the Auditor). Senior officials from the Ministry of Education (the Ministry), the Algoma District School Board, the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board, and the Lakehead District School Board participated in the hearings. (For a transcript of the Committee proceedings, please see Committee Hansard, November 25, 2015.)

The Committee endorses the Auditor's findings and recommendations and presents its own findings, views, and recommendations in this report. The Committee requests that the Ministry provide the Committee Clerk with written responses to the recommendations within 120 calendar days of the tabling of this report with the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, unless otherwise specified in a recommendation.

Acknowledgments

The Committee extends its appreciation to officials from the Ministry of Education, the Algoma District School Board, the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board, and the Lakehead District School Board for their attendance at the hearings. The Committee also acknowledges the assistance provided during the hearings and report writing deliberations by the Auditor, the Clerk of the Committee, and staff in the Legislative Research Service.

OVERVIEW

According to the 2006 census, there were 242,000 Aboriginal people living in Ontario comprising three distinct groups: First Nation (158,000), Métis (74,000), and Inuit (2,000). The census also identified that approximately 47,000 First Nation people live on reserves in Ontario. The federal government is financially responsible for the education of First Nation students living on reserve, whether these students attend First Nation or provincially operated schools.

As shown in Figure 1, the 2006 census identified that only 62% of Aboriginal adults had graduated from high school as compared to 78% of the general population, a gap of 16%. This gap widens when focusing on First Nation people living on reserve and particularly on the young adult population (aged 20-24). Only 39% of the First Nation people in this age group had graduated from high school.

Figure 1: The Gap in Aboriginal High School Graduation Rates for Adults and Young Adults

Population Group	All Adults (2006)		Age 20–24 (2006)		# Enrolled in Provincial Schools (2010/11)
	% Graduated	Gap	% Graduated	Gap	
All Ontario	78	–	89	–	–
First Nations—on reserve	44	34	39	50	5,690
First Nations—off reserve	64	14	66	23	27,765
Inuit	59	19	66	23	700
Métis	70	8	81	8	18,245
All Aboriginal	62	16	66	23	52,400

Note: The percentage graduated is the percentage of the population group with a high school diploma. The gap in graduation rates equals the percentage of all people graduated in Ontario minus the percentage graduated in the Aboriginal group.

Source: 2012 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario

In 2006 the Ministry identified Aboriginal education as one of its key priorities, with a focus on closing the gap in academic achievement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students by the year 2016. Since 2006, to meet this challenge, the Ministry has

- created the Aboriginal Education Office (AEO), which collaborates with Aboriginal communities and organizations, school boards, other ministries, and the federal government to provide coordination and leadership on Aboriginal education initiatives;
- provided \$279.5 million (\$170 million in 2012) in funding to support programs for Aboriginal students; and
- released various policy documents—such as the 2007 *First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (the Framework)—aimed at improving academic achievement levels for Aboriginal students and increasing awareness of Aboriginal cultures for all students.

The original value-for-money audit was contained in the Auditor's 2012 Annual Report. The 2012 audit assessed whether the Ministry and selected school boards had adequate procedures in place to identify and implement initiatives to improve Aboriginal student achievement, to measure and report on the effectiveness of those initiatives, and to ensure that transfer payments for such initiatives were spent as intended and on the basis of student need.

Audit work was conducted at the Ministry's head office, primarily in the AEO. Audit staff also conducted audit work at selected school boards and at a sample of elementary and secondary schools in these boards. The three boards visited were the Algoma District School Board (Sault Ste. Marie), the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board (Peterborough), and the Lakehead District School Board (Thunder Bay). A follow-up to the audit was published in the 2014 Annual Report.

2014 Follow-up

Status of Actions Taken on Auditor's Recommendations: Summary

As shown in Figure 2, the Ministry and school boards have made some progress in implementing all of the Auditor's recommendations.

Figure 2: Recommendation Status Overview (2014 Follow-up)

RECOMMENDATION STATUS OVERVIEW					
	# of Actions Recommended	Status of Actions Recommended			
		Fully Implemented	In Process of Being Implemented	Little or No Progress	Will Not Be Implemented
Recommendation 1	2		2		
Recommendation 2	3		3		
Recommendation 3	2		2		
Recommendation 4	3	1	2		
Recommendation 5	4		4		
Total	14	1	13	0	0
%	100	7	93	0	0

Source: 2014 Annual Report of the Office of the Auditor General of Ontario

ISSUES RAISED IN THE 2014 FOLLOW-UP AND BEFORE THE COMMITTEE

Policy Goals, Implementation Plans, and Performance Measures

The Auditor recommended the Ministry and school boards develop implementation plans that identify and address the key obstacles faced by Aboriginal students and include specific goals and performance measures, and to review and report on the aggregate results.

In 2013 the Ministry released *A Solid Foundation: Second Progress Report on the Implementation of the Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework* (the Second Progress Report). This report includes Ontario's first baseline data on Aboriginal student achievement and uses student self-identification data for the 2011-12 school year. The Ministry has stated that Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) results for self-identified Aboriginal students have improved since the 2011-12 school year. Highlights from these results are as follows:

- **Self-identified First Nation students:** For five of the nine EQAO assessment indicators, results have improved.
- **Self-identified Métis students:** For six of the nine EQAO assessment indicators, results have improved.
- **Self-identified Inuit students:** For seven of the nine EQAO assessment indicators, results have improved.

In 2014 the Ministry released the *Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework Implementation Plan* (the Implementation Plan) to build on the Aboriginal Education Strategy. The Implementation Plan is organized around the 10 performance measures included in the 2007 Framework. The Ministry has indicated that these performance measures will continue to be used as key indicators to monitor and track progress.

Since 2014-15 the Ministry has allocated funding to boards to support the development of Board Action Plans on First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education that include programs and initiatives to address the 16 strategies and actions identified in the Implementation Plan. All 76 district school boards and school authorities implemented a Board Action Plan in 2014-15. The Ministry indicated that it is working with school boards to finalize and review the 2015-16 Board Action Plans. Also, a Board Assessment Tool was developed to assist boards with examining their progress and identifying key priority areas moving forward.

In 2016-17 the Ministry is expected to release a second implementation plan to guide the work moving forward. Strategies and initiatives will align with the assessment of outcomes and progress made against the 10 performance measures included in the Framework.

The Ministry also expects to release a third progress report on Framework implementation in 2017 which will assess progress made against the 10 performance measures. The report will also focus on progress made in reducing gaps in student achievement, as measured against the 2011-12 baseline data and on the development of indicators of Aboriginal student self-esteem and well-being.

The Committee welcomes the efforts made by the Ministry and school boards with respect to improving education for Aboriginal students across the province. The Committee looks forward to the publication of future progress reports that track progress in closing the Aboriginal student achievement gap.

Committee Recommendation

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts recommends that:

1. **The Ministry provide the Committee with its most recent results of the Aboriginal student achievement gap.**

Voluntary, Confidential Self-identification

The Auditor recommended the Ministry develop standard communication tools and disseminate best practices to assist boards in implementing a student self-identification process. The Auditor also recommended the Ministry develop a policy guide for self-identification by Aboriginal teaching and non-teaching staff and oversee the effective implementation of the policy.

As an update to the 2014 follow-up, the Ministry stated preliminary October 2014 data show approximately 59%, or 38,038 of the estimated 64,000 Aboriginal students attending provincially-funded schools in Ontario, have self-identified as First Nation, Métis or Inuit. This is an increase from the 52%, or 33,509 students, who self-identified in October 2013. As of October 2014, 74 out of 76 boards and authorities were reporting voluntary, confidential Aboriginal student self-identification data to the Ministry through the Ontario School Information System (OnSIS).

The Ministry continues to support the development of board-specific strategies on the implementation of voluntary, confidential Aboriginal student self-identification policies. Beginning in 2014 the Ministry has provided Aboriginal Education Analytical Profiles to each of Ontario's 76 district school boards and school authorities. To further support the analysis of data, board-specific and provincial-level Aboriginal Education Analytical Profiles, along with a guide, have been developed for boards. This approach was shared with Aboriginal partners via the Minister's Advisory Council Working Group.

In 2016-17 the Ministry intends to calculate a provincial five-year baseline graduation rate for self-identified Aboriginal students and monitor progress against this baseline in future years.

The Ministry, in collaboration with First Nation, Métis and Inuit partners and key education stakeholders, is exploring indicators for Aboriginal student well-being and self-esteem to support the measurement and reporting of related performance measures. The Ministry also provided the opportunity for boards, through the Ministry-led annual regional symposium in fall 2014, to share effective self-identification best practices.

The Ministry has developed an inventory of school board staff self-identification policies to assess school board progress in policy development and identify best practices. The Ministry has also begun preliminary discussions regarding the development of a guideline for voluntary staff self-identification through the Minister's Advisory Council (MAC) on First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education and the MAC Working Group.

Data Collection and Analysis

The Auditor recommended the Ministry and school boards establish a baseline with respect to the goals and performance measures identified in the Framework and set measurable, realistic targets. The Auditor also recommended the Ministry and school boards periodically review progress made in closing the Aboriginal student achievement gap to allow for the adjustment of strategies where necessary.

As noted earlier, the Ministry released the Second Progress Report in 2013, which includes Ontario's first baseline data on First Nation, Métis and Inuit student achievement. This data is based on voluntary, confidential Aboriginal student self-identification for the 2011-12 school year.

The Ministry intends to calculate a provincial five-year baseline graduation rate for self-identified Aboriginal students in 2016-17 (using the Grade 9 cohort of self-identified Aboriginal students in 2011-12) and monitor progress against this baseline in future years. As indicators are developed for additional performance measures (e.g., student well-being and self-esteem) and relevant baseline data becomes available, the Ministry will develop a multi-year work plan to continue engagement with Aboriginal partners and education stakeholders to share data, and publicly report and establish targets for improvement.

With the release of Ontario's first baseline data for academic achievement results among self-identified Aboriginal students in the Second Progress Report, the Ministry and school boards now review progress in student achievement annually using EQAO scores and continue to refine strategies and develop new initiatives to close the Aboriginal student achievement gap.

The Ministry indicated that it supports school boards and engages its Aboriginal partners to develop targeted student achievement activities, including the following:

- First Nation, Métis and Inuit-focused collaborative inquiry in 44 school boards;
- First Nation, Métis and Inuit-focused student work study teachers in 13 boards;
- summer learning programs in 19 boards (summer 2015);
- First Nation, Métis and Inuit leadership and learning programs in five regions across the province;
- Aboriginal Youth Entrepreneurship Program in 11 school boards;
- 19 boards are participating in the Joint School Support and Re-engagement Initiative for First Nation, Métis and Inuit students and five additional boards are participating in the First Nation, Métis and Inuit Student Re-engagement Initiative;
- two pilots for Aboriginal children and youth in care; and
- 19 First Nation, Métis and Inuit-focused dual credit programs.

The Ministry provides funding to support the annual provincial Aboriginal Education Leads Gathering for the purposes of professional learning. In addition, regional Aboriginal Leads meetings are held three times a year to engage with school boards to provide direct support and to share promising practices and resources.

Committee Recommendation

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts recommends that:

- 2. The Ministry provide the Committee with an update on its discussions with Aboriginal partners and other education stakeholders aimed at setting measurable student achievement targets.**

Funding

The Auditor recommended the Ministry consider basing per-pupil funding on more current Aboriginal student enrolment data. Where funding is allocated in response to board proposals, the Auditor recommended the Ministry document the rationale for funding and communicate to boards the justification for the acceptance or rejection of the proposals. The Auditor also recommended the Ministry implement report-back processes to ensure funds are spent for the intended purposes and to obtain information on the success of different types of support programs undertaken by the school boards.

The Ministry has established a working group to examine the feasibility of remodelling the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Supplement based on available Aboriginal student self-identification data.

The working group considered implications of remodelling the First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Grants for Students Needs Supplement, including the impact of

- utilizing the National Household Survey 2011 to potentially inform the First Nation, Métis and Inuit Supplement allocations (currently based on the 2006 Census data);
- basing per-pupil funding on self-identification data;
- enhancing the proposal template for district school boards for 2013-14 board project funding to support an objective and needs-based approach to funding; and
- revising the board reporting template to obtain evidence-based data from boards on the success of each project and to better assess the overall impact on First Nation, Métis and Inuit student achievement.

In the 2016-17 Grants for Student Needs (GSN) consultation guide, the First Nation, Métis and Inuit Supplement has been identified as a key topic for discussion. Representatives from district school boards, the Minister's Advisory Council on First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education, the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, the First Nation Trustees Council, and the Chiefs of Ontario's First Nation Education Coordination Unit, have been invited to share their views related to the Supplement and Education Services (tuition) Agreements.

For the past two years, Education Programs—Other (EPO) funding to boards has been allocated based on total board population and self-identified Aboriginal student population. Funding has been allocated as follows:

- 60% – total student population size [by range];
- 20% – self-identification total population (2014-15 October preliminary self-identification data) [per-pupil]; and
- 20% – self-identification percentage (2014-15 October preliminary self-identification data) of total population [by range].

The Ministry stated that it will continue to develop options regarding funding mechanisms and reporting procedures to support increased Aboriginal student achievement levels.

Beginning in 2014 all boards have been asked to develop a Board Action Plan on First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education. The Plan identifies activities boards will undertake to support the strategies and actions identified in the Implementation Plan. Each board is expected to develop its Board Action Plan in collaboration with First Nation, Métis, and Inuit parents, community members, and organizations in its region. Boards receive EPO funding to support the initiatives and activities in the Board Action Plans based on an allocation that includes self-identification data.

Committee Recommendation

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts recommends that:

- 3. The Ministry provide the Committee with a summary of its report-back processes that ensure funds are spent for their intended purposes.**

First Nation Students Living on Reserves

The Auditor recommended the Ministry—and where applicable, school boards—develop standardized template tuition agreements and guidelines that can be used by all boards and periodically monitor whether valid tuition agreements are in place with all bands. The Auditor also recommended the Ministry more proactively encourage boards to share best practices to assist with the transition of students from on-reserve schools to the provincial education system and separately measure the unique challenges faced by students attending provincially funded schools. Additionally, the Auditor recommended the Ministry

more proactively engage in tripartite agreement discussions with the federal government and First Nation organizations.

In 2013 the Ministry released an *Education Services (Tuition) Agreement Guide* in collaboration with the Chiefs of Ontario, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, and the Ontario Public School Boards' Association. Regional information sessions were held to support the rollout of the guide.

Beginning in 2014, boards have been asked to develop and implement a Board Action Plan on First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education. Within Board Action Plans, boards are asked to identify strategies supporting successful transitions for First Nation, Métis and Inuit students. Some examples of board-reported strategies include

- dedicated staff positions to support transitioning students;
- working with community partners to provide a school readiness experience for students beginning kindergarten in the fall;
- visits to postsecondary institutions and career fair opportunities;
- Aboriginal support workers/counsellors within boards; and
- board meetings with First Nation communities to develop transition plans.

The Ministry has collaborated with First Nation partners through the Education Partnerships Program (EPP) to finalize and implement tripartite agreements. The EPP supports First Nation student achievement in First Nation/federal schools and provincially-funded schools through the development of partnership arrangements, sharing of expertise and services, and coordination of learning initiatives to assist First Nation students.

Committee Recommendation

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts recommends that:

- 4. The Ministry provide a briefing note to the Committee highlighting what they believe is the funding gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students that includes both qualitative and quantitative data.**

In November 2009 the Ontario Government and the Anishinabek Nation signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), confirming bilateral collaboration on educational issues relating to the establishment and implementation of the Anishinabek Nation Education System.

From 2010 to 2013 the Ministry engaged in three separate EPP tables with Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC) and the following First Nation organizations:

- Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN);
- the Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians (AIAI) / Indigenous Education Coalition (IEC); and
- Grand Council Treaty No. 3.

In April 2013 the Government of Canada, the Government of Ontario, and the Nishnawbe Aski Nation (NAN) signed an historic MOU on First Nation education, committing the parties to work together to improve educational outcomes for First Nation students in First Nation-operated and provincially-funded schools.

Committee Recommendation

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts recommends that:

- 5. The Ministry provide the Committee with an update on its tripartite agreement discussions.**

The Committee is encouraged by steps taken by the Ministry with respect to engaging in tripartite agreement discussions with the federal government and First Nation organizations. The Committee believes that better coordination with the federal government and First Nation organizations can leverage the Province's expertise in the field of providing education services to students that should lead to better outcomes in student achievement.

Committee Recommendation

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts recommends that:

- 6. The Ministry provide the Committee with a summary of how the various board strategies collected by the Ministry are being used to improve educational outcomes for First Nation students transitioning to the provincial education system.**

CONSOLIDATED LIST OF COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Standing Committee on Public Accounts recommends that:

- 1. The Ministry provide the Committee with its most recent results of the Aboriginal student achievement gap.**

- 2. The Ministry provide the Committee with an update on its discussions with Aboriginal partners and other education stakeholders aimed at setting measurable student achievement targets.**

- 3. The Ministry provide the Committee with a summary of its report-back processes that ensure funds are spent for their intended purposes.**

- 4. The Ministry provide a briefing note to the Committee highlighting what they believe is the funding gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students that includes both qualitative and quantitative data.**

- 5. The Ministry provide the Committee with an update on its tripartite agreement discussions.**

- 6. The Ministry provide the Committee with a summary of how the various board strategies collected by the Ministry are being used to improve educational outcomes for First Nation students transitioning to the provincial education system.**