

Four BC First Nations conclude self-government agreements regarding education ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

In a celebration at Seabird Island today, four First Nations - Cowichan Tribes, Lil'wat Nation, Ɂaq'am, and Seabird Island - were recognized and celebrated for concluding self-government agreements regarding education on their lands. Through their signed education jurisdiction agreements with Canada, the four First Nations now have recognized law-making authority over their Kindergarten-Grade 12 education systems, including authority over teacher certification, school certification, graduation requirements, curriculum, and course approvals.

The event is also a celebration of the establishment of the First Nations Education Authority (FNEA), which will assist Participating First Nations in developing the capacity to provide education on First Nation land. The board of the newly established FNEA will be comprised of two directors appointed by each of the Participating First Nations.

This achievement is a significant milestone towards realizing First Nations' right to establish and control their education system and institutions, as affirmed by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and as recognized under section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982.

The completed education jurisdiction agreements are landmark agreements that set the foundation for the four Participating First Nations to make decisions and pass laws in the best interests of their learners. This will support them in exercising control over their education on their lands instead of being subject to changes in federal policy.

First Nations in British Columbia have been working collectively for over two decades to advance First Nations control over education through the education jurisdiction initiative. The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC), a policy and advocacy organization that represents and works on behalf of First Nations in BC, has provided a broad range of supports to First Nations pursuing education jurisdiction.

Quotes

"It has been a long journey to assert our own governance in education. With the achievement of education jurisdiction and our new law-making authority, we are fundamentally changing the system and taking an important step to asserting our rights as Indigenous peoples." - Stephanie Atleo, President of the First Nations Education Authority

"Education jurisdiction is about providing a culturally relevant and excellent education to ensure our youth graduate with the knowledge, skills and credentials to thrive in any opportunity they choose for higher learning, employment and life choices. I commend all of the First Nations who have been involved in the education jurisdiction process for their strength of vision and perseverance." - Tyrone McNeil, President of the First Nations Education Steering Committee and member of Seabird Island First Nation

"The recognition of First Nations education jurisdiction will have long-lasting and meaningful benefits for youth in First Nations schools. I thank the four Participating First Nations for their ground-breaking work and I look forward to working with the newly established First Nations Education Authority." - Aaron Burgess, President of the First Nations Schools Association

"All First Nations learners deserve every opportunity to achieve their best. Through education

jurisdiction, we've worked in partnership with the First Nations Education Steering Committee, and the Government of Canada to formally recognize and support First Nations communities in educating and empowering their children and youth through the creation of their own community-led learning. This landmark change in education will enable participating First Nations to certify teachers and schools, approve courses and set graduation requirements." - The Honourable Jennifer Whiteside, Minister of Education and Child Care

"Today is a historic day for First Nation learners in British Columbia, and for the ʔaqʔam, Cowichan Tribes, Lil'wat Nation and Seabird Island communities. Control over Indigenous education, led by Indigenous Peoples, is critical to ensuring they have the tools they need to succeed, and remain connected to their culture and language. Congratulations on this achievement in strengthening your identities, culture, languages and heritage through delivery of culturally relevant primary and secondary education." - The Honourable Marc Miller, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations

"The signing of these Education Jurisdiction Agreements will transform the way First Nations students learn, helping them to reach their goals and full potential. The ʔaqʔam, Cowichan Tribes, Lil'wat Nation and Seabird Island and the First Nations Education Steering Committee are leading the way, and they have reached this place of self-determination through their unwavering vision. Congratulations to everyone involved!" - The Honourable Patty Hajdu, Minister of Indigenous Services

Quick Facts

- In 1972 First Nations in Canada endorsed the policy of Indian Control of Indian Education, advancing an education approach premised on parental responsibility and local control. This was updated in 2010 by the Assembly of First Nations in its First Nations Control of First Nations Education policy position paper. First Nations in BC continue to consistently work toward full First Nations control of First Nations education.
- Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational system and institutions as an aspect of their inherent rights of self-determination and self-government, as affirmed in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and also as recognized and affirmed under section 35 of the Constitution Act, 1982.
- In 2006 FNESE, British Columbia and Canada signed the Education Jurisdiction Framework Agreement which recognized BC First Nations' right to establish and control their own education systems. Canada subsequently passed legislation in 2006, and British Columbia did the same in 2007, codifying that recognition and setting out the path for First Nations to assume jurisdiction.
- The education jurisdiction initiative is designed to support First Nations' exercise of self-government over education with enabling legislation and a suite of tripartite and bilateral agreements – including the overarching tripartite Education Jurisdiction Framework Agreement, model agreements to be signed by Canada and Participating First Nations, and further agreements between British Columbia and the FNEA, FNESE, and Participating First Nations.
- A Participating First Nation (PFN) is a First Nation that has jurisdiction over its education system, which includes the authority to:
 - Make education laws for education on its land through its Chief and Council
 - Establish a governance structure either through its Chief and Council or another governing authority that they establish (e.g. a Community Education Authority)
- In 2021, British Columbia passed legislation to enable cooperation and assistance between the Ministry of Education and Child Care and the FNEA over teacher regulation. Agreements are expected to be finalized this summer.
- The FNEA, established July 1, 2022, will assist Participating First Nations in developing the capacity to provide education on First Nation land. The FNEA will exercise authority delegated by PFNs in the following areas:
 - Teacher certification
 - School certification
 - Graduation requirements and course approvals

Region: British Columbia ^[3]

Tags: child care ^[4]

Aboriginal (indigenous) ^[5]

education ^[6]

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