

Inspiring Approaches: Change Makers Summit

Inspiring Approaches to First Nation, Metis and Inuit Learning

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The Métis are one of the three constitutionally recognized Aboriginal Peoples in Canada.

The Métis National Council represents the historic Métis Nation at the national and international levels.

It continues the struggle for self-determination of our people in the tradition of Louis Riel's Métis Provisional Governments that negotiated the entry of Manitoba into Confederation in 1870 and in 1885 waged the Northwest Resistance in Saskatchewan.

Education is an essential part of our quest for self-determination and the right to pursue our own social, cultural and economic development.

In this pursuit, the Métis have faced formidable challenges in the field of education since our military defeat at Batoche in 1885, the execution of Louis Riel, and the dispossession and displacement of the Métis people.

Many Métis people were placed in Church-run residential schools and day schools that scarred our nation.

To this day, we are still affected by the devastating impact these schools had on the successive generations that passed through them.

I myself attended the Métis residential school in Ile-a-la-Crosse, Saskatchewan, and can attest to the horrors and abuses of that system.

To this day there has been no recognition, or compensation for the Métis who attended these schools. In fact, we are excluded from the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, Canada's apology and the mandate of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

The failure of the federal government to act on this is a direct result of its overall position of jurisdiction for Métis or lack thereof. It asserts that the Métis and Métis education fall within the jurisdiction of the provinces.

It excludes the Métis from federal Aboriginal education programs and financial assistance including that for post-secondary education.

Métis have not shared equitably in the allocation of early childhood development resources that the federal government has transferred to the provinces through the Canada Social Transfer.

The jurisdictional barrier compounded the problem of social and economic disparities including poverty, poor health, and inadequate housing that produced lower than average education and employment levels for Métis.

Despite these barriers, our people have managed to improve their social and economic conditions, including educational attainment, through political organization.

The Métis National Council consists of five Governing Members or provincial affiliated organizations in the historic Métis homeland from northwestern Ontario to British Columbia.

Their leaders are elected in province-wide ballot box elections.

Our Governing Members have over the years established an impressive infrastructure for the delivery of social and economic programs through professionally managed, arms-length development institutions or principles.

Through their ASETS programs, they are recognized leaders in Aboriginal skills and employment training and the Métis labor force participation rate is approaching that of the general population.

They have established education and training institutions such as the Louis Riel Institute in Manitoba, the Gabriel Dumont Institute in Saskatchewan and the Rupertsland Institute in Alberta.

Although the gap in high school graduation rates between our students and the general population has been significantly reduced, there is still a large gap in the number of graduates going on to university.

The Métis National Council's Governing Members have tried to address this gap with endowment funds that provide scholarships for post-secondary education.

Through the Métis National Council, the Governing Members have articulated broad goals for Métis education that take into account the link between educational achievement and economic potential.

Education is one of the pillars of the Métis Nation Economic Development Strategy.

We seek to strengthen our education and training institutions so they can address early childhood learning needs, develop innovative learning and cultural approaches for improving learning methods, expand their role in curriculum development for the school system, and develop means of measuring results.

We seek to strengthen our endowment funds that are able to leverage matching funds from universities and provide scholarships for Métis to pursue post-secondary education.

A recent study of Saskatchewan's only Métis professional degree program—the SUNTEP program for urban teachers offered by the Gabriel Dumont Institute – clearly demonstrates the high return on investment in our post-secondary education.

With its more than one thousand graduates since 1984, SUNTEP has increased the provincial GDP by \$2.5 billion and provincial government revenue by \$1.0 billion.

There is a definite advantage to the federal and provincial governments to be engaged with us in strengthening these institutions that CMEC has recognized as being educational leaders.

At the current time, the main impediment to engaging the federal and provincial governments on Métis education is the lack of a Métis-specific multilateral process.

The 2008 Métis Nation Protocol between the federal government and the Métis National Council identifies priorities for bilateral work between the two parties as well as for multilateral work where there is support from the five westernmost provinces.

The federal government took the lead on economic development and brought the five Provinces and the Métis Nation into a Métis-specific process.

That work at the ministerial and officials levels started in 2009 and is building toward the development of a Métis Economic Development Strategy by 2013.

It has been accompanied by significant federal and provincial investments

in Métis Nation loan and equity capital institutions.

We believe that process is yielding good results and something similar is needed in the field of education.

The problem is that the federal government, while indicating that it would participate, wants the provinces to take the lead, given Ottawa's position that off-reserve education is provincial jurisdiction.

At the provincial level, the Métis National Council and other National Aboriginal Organizations work with the provincial premiers on a number of issues including education at their Council of the Federation meetings and, between these annual meetings, through the ministerial-level Aboriginal Affairs Working Group .

In these forums, the MNC has pressed the Premiers and their ministers to join with the federal government and the Métis Nation in a collaborative process and strategy on education.

Their position is that they will participate if invited to do so by the federal government.

So we are in a Mexican stand-off type situation, with jurisdiction once again blocking progress to the detriment of Métis people.

Nonetheless, we will continue to use our relationship with the federal government under the Métis Nation Protocol and our relationship with the provinces through the Aboriginal Affairs Working Group to advance this process.

Today marks the 30th anniversary of the Constitution Act 1982 coming into force. The province of Quebec feels left out; and certainly the Métis Nation, if not left out, is certainly marginalized.

If Ottawa and the Provinces are truly committed to improving the living conditions of all Aboriginal peoples, it makes eminent sense for them to abandon excuses for not working with us and instead build on our successful track record in delivering results.

Thank you/Marsi.