THE FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION JOURNEY IN YUKON

1960 - 2021

Yukon First Nations have long been passionate about the value of education for their children and for the future of society in Yukon. In the seminal 1973 document, Together Today for our Children Tomorrow, their aspiration is succinctly stated:

We believe that all education must have its two main goals, the stimulation of pride in one's culture and background and the development of those skills and that knowledge which is necessary to compete in today's world."

Yukon Native Brotherhood Conference

OBSERVATIONS: High dropout rates, significant absenteeism, low numbers of First Nations teachers, and limited cultural inclusion spoke to the need for systemic improvements. Participants called for the government to improve the communication with stakeholders, revive and re-establish language and cultural teachings, and improve both quality and relevancy of instruction

IMPACTS: The government's response was limited and there were few documented improvements for First Nations students.

Canadian Charter of Rights and

OBSERVATIONS: Canadians' rights and privileges are formally enshrined within the Canadian Constitution. IMPACTS: Equal opportunity and guaranteed rights

> were broadly interpreted by the Yukon governme as issues of "access," rather than as substantiv guarantees. This meant that the intervention needed to fully support Yukon First Nations education were not put into place.

Assembly of First Nations Declaration of First Nations Jurisdiction over Education

OBSERVATIONS: Raised concerns regarding the federal government's attempts to extinguish Aboriginal Rights. Explicitly stated that or territories is not "acceptable as a substitute for aboriginal First Nations jurisdiction."

IMPACTS: The AFN report reiterated many of the Yukon First Nations' longstanding concerns, highlighting the underlying issues of paternalism and loss of sovereignty.

MacPherson Report

OBSERVATIONS: As community concern over achievement levels and demand for much needed reform grew, th MacPherson Report recommended that serious and substantive talks needed to take place to discuss how Firs Nations' jurisdiction of education would be recognized

IMPACTS: While the report focused on constitutional amendments, concerns were raised about the ability to find a solution within the Indian Act, given its paternalistic and control-based approaches

Auditor General's Report on the State of Yukon First Nations Education

OBSERVATIONS: While the performance gap continued to widen and more neede to be done, considerable confusion surrounded the roles/responsibilities of the federal government, impeding the

entire process.

IMPACTS: Recommended changes to jurisdictional oversights were poorly implemented and a 2004 follow up found that the federal government had made little progress in the intervening years.

Na-Cho Nyak Dun Report: Two Trails One Vision

OBSERVATIONS: An assessment of a local community school determined that a range of issues contributed to poor student performance including racism, alienation, bias, etc. contributed to poor student performance.

IMPACTS: Despite requests to improve community relationships, update and support new teaching approaches, and incorporate more cultural knowledge, the report was rejected and there were few changes or improvements.

IMPACTS: The program was felt to be

ineffective and little progress was made.

Education Reform Final Report

OBSERVATIONS: A community-based evaluation took over three years to review the Education Act. Of concern was the performance gap in First Nations communities. Participants made recommendations for adaptations to both the school system and the Education Act.

IMPACTS: The inability to narrow the achievement gap between First Nations and non-First Nations students indicated the approach was not effective.

Government of Yukon's New Horizons

OBSERVATIONS: Government of Yukon began a consultative proce intending to find strategies to support First Nations learners and develop appropriate curriculum.

IMPACTS: Yukon First Nations found the process laden with bureaucrae and committee meetings ineffective and off-target

Assembly of First Nations First Nation – Elementary and Secondary Education: A Discussion Guide

OBSERVATIONS: The AFN, from a national perspective, identified several key components that effective Indigenous education practices should include.

IMPACTS: Yukon First Nations were unable to implement or mirror the educational successes of othe Canadian First Nations.

Assembly of First Nations Jurisdiction Principles in Firs Nations Education

OBSERVATIONS: AFN noted that trust and collaboration would be key factors in any effective partnership. IMPACTS: Yukon First Nations felt that the

central value of "trust" upon which the progress would be based, was not upheld.

Joint Education Action Plan (JEAP) Tripartite Education Partnership agreement between Government of Yukon, **Government of Canada, Council of Yukon First Nations** and all 14 Yukon First Nations.

partnerships, a reallocation of funding, and a OBSERVATIONS: With a common thread of community, family, and fundamental shift in mindsets are needed to parent and student engagement, the priorities in the plan were to support begin repairing the damage of colonization and First Nations as they took on more authority, control and responsibility the residential school system. for education. This included a focus on improving culture and language, sustainability, and support and success, as well as closing the achievement ga IMPACTS: The report highlighted historical

IMPACTS: A 2019 review noted several significant concerns, most specifically:

- Limited funding
- Questionable data collection
- Top down implementation by Yukon government with limited
- Few real changes in the responsibility and accountability sought by Yukon First Nations
- Two-year meeting hiatus (2016 -2018)

AFN: Yukon Indigenous Language Discussion Paper

Truth and Reconciliation Final Report

OBSERVATIONS: It noted that wide-ranging

and longstanding concerns. It is unclear what

actions Yukon government had taken or will

take, or overall effectiveness to address the

Yukon government recognized that language

offering of language revitalization programs since 1981, objective measures indicate there had been little improvement in language fluency. Changes

in the status quo needed to be made.

First Nation School Board Framework Agreement

IMPACTS: After a series of Yukon-wide referenda, the First Nation School Board was established in February 2022 with 8 public schools under their authority commencing with the 2022-23 school year.

Master Tuition Agreement

attending Territorial schools."

OBSERVATIONS: The Yukon government was

into local schools and "provide Indian children

with the same educational opportunities and

instruction as is provided non-Indian children

to further integrate First Nations students

The 2019 Auditor General's Report).

Yukon Committee on Education

OBSERVATIONS: Management issues, alongside an inability to "integrate" First Nations students effectively, led the federal government to download the responsibility for "Indian" education to the provinces/ territories, expecting First Nations students to be better incorporated into the local

education system.

IMPACTS: No change to curriculum, provision of additional resources, or inclusion of culture and language were considered.



OBSERVATIONS: Mainstream education modernized, adapted and improved upon its

IMPACTS: The federal government transferred funds and responsibility to Yukon for the education of "Indian students" without the participation of First Nations governments Further research determined the Yukon government had failed to meet its obligations (1987 KWIYA Report, 2012 Tripartite MOL

Children Tomorrow

methodologies, but these improvements were not passed on to First Nations students. The *Together* Today for Our Children Tomorrow report highlighted the need to improve outcomes and bring both the

modern and the traditional worlds closer together IMPACTS: Despite common findings shared by these reports, the federal and territorial governments failed to adapt or make the necessary improvements, leaving First Nations students further isolated.

OBSERVATIONS: The Kwiya report determined that successive governments had failed to support First Nations learners, track

IMPACTS: Proposed solutions involved the

The Kwiya Final Report

outcomes, or provide necessary supports.

need to significantly improve community relationships and shift more control of education to First Nations. It also recommended legislative and judicial changes, such as a renegotiation of the 1964 Master Tuition Agreement. Federal and territorial governments were largely

Yukon Education Act

OBSERVATIONS: The Act outlined the responsibilities, powers and rights of Yukon stakeholders. Particular attention was paid to the role of First Nations' sovereignty and the increasing potential

unresponsive and few changes were made.

for local control (school councils). IMPACTS: Despite plans for decentralization and increased community control, the Act failed to clearly identify how First Nations would influence policy or exercise any of these powers as the Minister of Education

maintained ultimate control.

Royal Commission on

viable solution.

Aboriginal People

OBSERVATIONS: Indigenous Canadians

stated the obvious: they wanted their

children to be schooled so they could

same time, they needed to develop an

thrive in a modern society. At the

OBSERVATIONS: After protracted negotiations, the UFA was signed and Yukon First Nations assumed a wide array of administrative powers. Sections 17 and 24 enabled Yukon First Nations to direct and manage their local education system.

Umbrella Final Agreement

IMPACTS: A lack of progress and persistently poor educational outcomes led a number of First Nations to revisit Section 17 in a search for new solutions. As no First Nation had fully "pulled down" their responsibility for education,

the Minister is still responsible for First

Nations education.

Jurisdiction National Background Paper (A literature review fron 1972–2000)

understanding of their cultural traditions.

IMPACTS: As numerous reports and studies have shown, the present system accomplished none of these goals. In an effort to avoid the biases and paternalism built into the system, Indigenous control was put forward as

Federal Action Plan OBSERVATIONS: The federal

government implemented an Action **Assembly of First Nations** Plan that focused on accountability and data management. A First Nations education policy was developed to determine a vision and direction for a federal Indigenous education policy

OBSERVATIONS: Repeated calls for education reform and changes to Aboriginal educational jurisdiction were noted Canada-wide.

IMPACTS: The report noted that it is unlikely that such demands will decrease or go away. A growing sense of frustration at the misdirection and mistreatment of First Nations student will likely only inspire further effort.

Setting our Course:

governing agreements.

Yukon First Nations (v

OBSERVATIONS: Yukon First Nations

their motivation to improve their self-

produced a backgrounder video about

IMPACTS: Participants made it clear that

sovereignty, self-control, and effective

cultural integration were the keys to

improving student outcomes

One Vision Multiple Pathways Secondary School Reform OBSERVATIONS: Failings in the

secondary school system led to a number of recommendations, such as the development of a student-focused approach that is flexible and adaptable and supports First Nations learners.

IMPACTS: While changes to the system were made, many of the recommendations have yet to be fully implemented.

Helping Students Succeed:

Vision, Goals and Priorities for **Yukon First Nations Education** (Yukon First Nation Educati Advisory Committee)

OBSERVATIONS: To improve community relationships and educational outcomes, YFNEAC identified five specific goals.

IMPACTS: Most First Nations governments were underwhelmed by the Department of Education's ability to implement the goals.

Auditor General's Report

on Education in Yukon **OBSERVATIONS:** The Department of

Education was deemed to be significantly under-performing and not meeting the needs of its First Nations students. IMPACTS: Despite a similar finding

in the KWIYA report 22 years earlier the Department of Education offered to adapt and improve its approach to Indigenous education – but the achievement gap remained and many recommendations were not addressed.

MOU on Education with Yukon First Nations, and Federal and

Territorial Governments OBSERVATIONS: The MOU sought to refocus government attention on basic obligations

the interim, no action was taken by either

the federal or territorial governments.

that had been agreed to under the Yukon First Nations self-government agreements. **IMPACTS:** An implementation plan was required – but not completed until 2014. In

OBSERVATIONS: Yukon First Nations

wanted to adopt a negotiating position to improve educational outcomes for First Nations learners by focusing on language and culture.

IMPACTS: The adoption of a "new" approach reflected the growing frustration with both the speed and the overall lack system was felt to be one of the few

David Joe Options Paper

jurisdiction, improving academic outcomes, and strengthening the use of First Nations

effective alternatives.

Yukon First Nations: A 360 Perspective

OBSERVATIONS: Participants highlighted the need for a holistic approach to the social, health, economic, and political challenges facing Yukon schools. Particular attention was paid to the concept of the "whole child" and their readiness to participate in society.

IMPACTS: The ongoing issues of attendance, poor academic performance, and postsecondary participation highlighted the limited success of the government supports.

Auditor General's Report on Education in Yukon

OBSERVATIONS: In a follow up to the 2009 Auditor General's report, the Yukon Department of Education is found to have made few improvements or structural change to the outcomes of First Nations students IMPACTS: Despite concerns with systemic

inequality being first identified 32 years ago, a failure to act continued to devastat generations of First Nations youth. As a result of this report and the decades of those preceding it, the Chiefs Committee on Education was re-established and they formed the Yukon First Nation Education Directorate

Photo: Rebecca Bradford-Andrew

OBSERVATIONS: Both Yukon First Nations and

preservation and instruction are vital, but were unable to agree on what steps were necessary. IMPACTS: Despite the Department of Education's

OBSERVATIONS: Signed by 10 Yukon First Nations and the Minister of Education, the Framework Agreement laid out the process to establish a First Nation School Board under the Education Act that would allow Yukon First Nations and Government of Yukon to enter into true legal partnership to run Yukon public schools.