



The Honourable Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0A2

SUBJECT: Equity in Education Funding for First Nations Students

February 27, 2017

Dear Mr. Prime Minister,

The Canadian School Boards Association (CSBA) is the national body of provincial school board associations representing over 250 school boards and more than three million elementary and secondary students across Canada. CSBA calls upon all elected officials in Canada to join with our members in achieving the goal of equity in education funding that will ensure that First Nation students living in First Nation communities, where education is federally-funded, receive at least the same levels of education funding as are enjoyed by all other students in Canada.

We are living in a new and promising era. From coast to coast to coast, federal, provincial and territorial governments have increased their efforts to renew relationship and achieve reconciliation with Canada's Indigenous Peoples. A vital component of these efforts must be equity in education funding. The Canadian School Boards Association, building on our longstanding advocacy for the advancement of quality public education opportunities for all Indigenous Peoples, therefore issues this present statement, which calls upon each level of government to take action to address the longstanding inequity in education funding between First Nations students living on reserves and all other students in Canada.

CSBA Advocacy

CSBA has, for the past several years, worked across federal, provincial and territorial jurisdictions, in a concerted effort to support First Nations in addressing the funding requirements of First Nations students. In 2011, our submission to the National Panel on First Nation Elementary and Secondary Education highlighted our concern that per pupil funding in many First Nations communities is reported to be on average \$2,000 to \$3,000 below the per pupil funding for students attending provincial schools. Based on the most recent data published by Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada, this trend regrettably continues to persist as the reality for many First Nations communities.



In 2011, our association expressed a further concern that opportunities for First Nation students are too often limited by inadequate resources, services, and facilities, things that are taken for granted in provincial and territorial schools. Some of these include adequate, safe and comfortable school buildings; strong levels of curriculum resources, curriculum leadership and professional development for teachers; access to social, emotional and psychological services to support students at risk; and a well-funded governance system that has overall responsibility for leading the system and ensuring the conditions are in place to support student success. One of the most important factors however, especially in consideration of the many remote locations of First Nation communities across Canada, is the requirement for appropriate resources that will better promote recruitment, compensation and retention of qualified staff to serve the needs of First Nations students, their families and communities.

Context for Action

In June 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada issued its Summary Report and Findings which included many significant calls to action in respect of education. While many of these calls to action were specifically directed towards Canada's Federal Government as a key partner in funding education for First Nations students, the Canadian School Boards Association believes that embracing truth and achieving lasting reconciliation across Canada will mean acknowledging shared responsibilities for educational mandates at the provincial, territorial and local levels of governance. As the head of the TRC, Justice Murray Sinclair reminds us, the issues addressed in the Report are not a First Nations problem– these issues are a Canadian problem.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's calls to action, numbered 7 through 12, call upon governments to invest funding toward a more equitable education system. Calls to action 13 through 17, focused upon the revitalization of Aboriginal languages by way of protecting cultural autonomy and independence, also come with implications for both the public and First Nations education systems across Canada, in terms of ensuring sufficient resources to promote Indigenous language instruction and learning.

These calls to action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission must be embraced as our shared moral duties and responsibilities. Each of us is called to focus on supporting First Nations in achieving a more equal, responsive and appropriate educational system, thereby achieving meaningful and enduring reconciliation.

The March 2016 Federal budget announcements on improving primary and secondary education for First Nations children and fostering better learning environments by investing in First Nations schools will help to lay important foundations for future action. Many provincial and territorial partners have also recently committed significant new resources in support of greater equity and parity. By continuing to work together to build upon these foundations and to support the aspirations that First Nations communities have for their children, we can contribute to changing the future so that all Indigenous students experience the very best that education has to offer.



Partnership in Action

In closing, we therefore call upon all levels of government, federal, provincial and territorial, at this critical time of budget development and finalization, to partner with us, your national and local school board associations, as we take up our responsibility for truth and reconciliation through our priority on achieving equity and parity of funding for all Canadian students. Together, we can ensure that all students in Canada have the resources needed for their success and well-being. We look forward to partnering with you as we jointly provide the funding, resources and supports necessary for achieving a lasting reconciliation across Canada.

Floyd Martens

**President
Canadian School Boards Association**