



Indigenous Education Position Statement

I. Introduction

The Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) is committed to providing all learners with an engaging, culturally relevant and quality education. We commit to enhancing the achievement and well-being of Indigenous youth while recognizing and dismantling colonial policies and systems. The Manitoba Association of School Superintendents is also committed to advancing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action by prioritizing and creating space for Indigenous Ways of Knowing, Learning and Being. Indigenous knowledge, lived experiences and language will be included across the curriculum so that all Manitoba students and teachers will learn about our collective Canadian History. This document is intended to advance and support Indigenous Education and pedagogy by ensuring educators and school leaders deepen their understanding and sense of responsibility as they engage in the work of reconciliation.

II. Rationale

Every Canadian has the right and responsibility to understand the layers of complex relationships that exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Education systems have been complicit in the oppression of Indigenous peoples and in producing the present-day realities that Indigenous peoples face. As educational leaders, it is our role to repair the harms caused by past eras of educational institutions; this includes addressing the social and educational gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners, ensuring that accurate knowledges are shared in our schools, and prioritizing decolonization and anti-racism in our governing structures and policies.

The impacts of colonization have been devastating for Indigenous peoples, and we continue to see the impacts in our classrooms and in society as a whole. To support our students to thrive in our communities, we are committed to interrupting and dismantling colonialism in all the ways it continues to impact our learners and school communities and to fostering learning environments that centre Indigenous Education. This includes addressing the needs of those students who require trauma informed pedagogical practices to support their recovery and learning.

In order to contribute to social transformation, it is critical that we uphold the directives of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal People*, *The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission/94 Calls to Action*, *Mamahtawisiwin: The Path to an Indigenous Inclusive Education System* and *MMIWG2S+ Calls to Justice* in ways that are conducive to Indigenous ways of knowing and being. We understand that accountability, transparency, inclusion, equity and anti-racist policy practices will facilitate the changes that are needed in our schools and that the time to act for repairing relationships is now.

We are committed to elevating and empowering Indigenous voices and knowledges within all facets of the education system. All education systems must be inclusive, supportive and intent on breaking down barriers. Our schools must be environments where equity reigns and where Indigenous voices are valued and affirmed so that every child is supported to flourish.

III. Principles

MASS proposes the following principles to ensure that we are upholding the spirit and intent of this living document and ensuring that Indigenous Education is honoured as foundational in providing quality education to our learners.

A. Foster and support Indigenous languages and cultures to thrive as they are embedded in the ancient landscapes across this country now called Canada.

Much of our region's history is held within Indigenous languages and cultures. Embedded within Indigenous languages and oral traditions are specific place-based knowledges and cultural teachings. These words and structures provide the oldest pathways into understanding particular geographies, and how the ties within them operate and exist. This unique and meaningful information is a central reason why Indigenous Elders, community advocates and parents are so adamant in their desire to protect and revitalize their ancestral languages. Dr. M. Battiste recognizes "the nature of language as meaning-making from within a particular racial location that is always sliding and changing, floating in a sea of signifiers." This extends to traditional practices, ceremonies and ties to specific places, some of which have been renamed through the colonial experience.

B. Find ways to live in harmony and balance in all aspects of one's being and with the universe itself through sustainable and generative relationships.

Students are encouraged to examine the intricate details of their relationship to the natural world which includes our natural world and all life forms, animate and inanimate. Sustainable lives and healthy communities should be the goals of all Manitobans. A central message is that everything is related and a dynamic part of a larger whole. Each individual life form, from the smallest organism to the universe itself, carries histories with and responsibilities to one another. Through participating in the processes of

communication, sharing and equal exchange, human beings can learn how to make decisions, interact with one another and play a part in the interdependent circle of existence. Learning how to take responsibility and action is key to contributing to a sustainable future for successive generations.

C. Create and maintain healthy and diverse learning communities by providing authentic learning contexts for all of our students.

First-hand knowledge gained by experiences and interactions with the natural world are crucial, but so are many other processes such as dreaming, hypothesizing, feeling or artistic expression. Through performance, dialogue and reflection, a community of learners is formed and the deepest meaning of any information can be found, leading to things such as laws and values. This principle is as true for all school communities.

D. Instill and fulfill the beliefs of individual and community responsibility in every classroom in the province in the interests of the universal good.

Communities are only sustainable if they are built upon relationships of ethical and equal responsibility to ensure mutual benefit. The good of the one therefore is predominantly meaningful in the context of the many. This encourages all learners to be grounded in their local cultural contexts, to respect the rights and beliefs of others, and to share cultural contexts with others to promote awareness, understanding and appreciation for similarities and differences. Another way of fulfilling this outcome is to gain competency and respect in an individual's specific traditions and histories and for others to recognize these as valuable and relevant. Educators have to actively demonstrate that they value these traditions and histories so that Indigenous students see that they are valued.

IV. A Call to Action

MASS affirms and values the contribution of Indigenous knowledges and calls on all Manitoba educational organizations to:

- Ensure that the mandated Indigenous perspectives and outcomes in the provincial curriculum are addressed in the classroom in a meaningful and culturally respectful way for all students.
- Infuse existing curricula with Indigenous content.
- Ensure sufficient resources for the teaching of the mandatory outcomes in the provincial curriculum concerning Manitoba Treaty education and the history of residential schools.
- Offer and promote specific courses in Indigenous studies and languages.
- Continue to actively support the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 Calls to Action.
- Promptly address stereotypical images of Indigenous people in texts, media and in the general school environment.

MASS believes that Indigenous Education is a vehicle for the cultural, political and economic renewal of Manitoba. We call on all educational organizations to:

- Affirm Indigenous cultural knowledge and experiential learning systems in all aspects of the educational experience.
- Promote Indigenous student success by creating opportunities for Indigenous leadership in all educational settings.
- Incorporate experiential and land-based educational initiatives in all environments to promote adaptability and resilience.
- Promote Indigenous student success by valuing achievements through scholarships, bursaries and partnerships with employers.
- Share the successes of existing Indigenous Education initiatives.

MASS is committed to developing partnerships in order to create a system that is culturally responsive and engaging for all learners in Manitoba, at all levels. MASS calls on all Manitoba educational organizations to:

- Lobby the federal government to bring First Nations Education funding to par with public schools funding levels.
- Work collaboratively with Indigenous education leaders/educators to develop Indigenous Education policy and promote research into Indigenous Education and program development.
- Support and assist in the development of teacher education programs, educational assistant training and leadership training responsive to Indigenous populations.
- Develop targets for hiring Indigenous teachers, administrators and educational assistants.
- Develop strategies that encourage Indigenous youth to consider future careers in education.
- Work with Indigenous education leaders/educators to examine governance models that more fully involve Indigenous communities and knowledge Keepers.

V. A Vision of the Future Towards a Fully Inclusive Manitoba Education System

MASS is committed to creating an educational environment where the principles described in this paper enrich the experience of all learners, while supporting the ongoing development of Indigenous learners. This commitment acknowledges the importance of stakeholders from a variety of communities, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, in the governance of schools, development of curricula and collaboration in pathways to a shared educational future. All citizens of Manitoba must be actively contributing to the process. Indigenous peoples should have a say, much more than they have in the past, in defining the outcomes of success and achievement of all learners. The Manitoba education system is responsible for becoming a place where all are welcomed and our collective history is recognized.

Indigenous Education is greater than any one best practice or any one learning community. It is a system of education for all Manitobans. Healthy communities require the respectful participation of all stakeholders to co-create communities where all can benefit. Part of this is listening to and learning from knowledge systems embedded in the languages and practices of cultures and communities that have been here for a very long time. It is the hope of MASS that the Manitoba education system can become a sharing circle where all are welcomed, accepted and acknowledged as integral parts of the whole.

We must take this opportunity to produce critical thinkers, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, in an atmosphere of intellectual, spiritual, emotional, and physical respect. Learning from one another in a system where all stakeholders are welcomed and acknowledged as valuable contributors will produce the most inclusive community Manitoba can be.

References

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