



NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2020EDUC0031-001014
June 4, 2020

Ministry of Education
Ministry of Children and Family Development
Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training
First Nations Education Steering Committee
First Nations Leadership Council

Improving outcomes for First Nations children in care

VICTORIA - Indigenous children and youth in government care and former youth in care are entitled to consistent and reliable support at school, home and in their communities, to ensure they get the most out of their school years and are set up for success in life.

The First Nations Children and Youth in Care Protocol, signed May 26, 2020, commits the Province and First Nations to work together to engage in dialogue and joint action on specific issues and initiatives, seeking to improve the educational outcomes and well-being of Indigenous children and youth in care, and former youth in care through legislative, policy and practice reform.

"Indigenous children in government care deserve to have consistent, culturally relevant support and a close connection to their communities," said Rob Fleming, Minister of Education. "We know that kids thrive when they feel a sense of belonging, and that's why it's so important for First Nations communities to be involved in how their children are educated and in what services they receive in school."

Work will include easing transitions into the school system, from grade to grade, and out of the school system to post-secondary or the workforce. The protocol is also intended to ensure supports and services are tailored to the needs of each child and their specific circumstances, in a way that connects them to their language and culture.

"This protocol is a key milestone and we are confident that it will provide a strong foundation for our collaborative work to support improved education outcomes for current and former First Nation children and youth in care," said Tyrone McNeil, president, First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC). "We look forward to working with First Nations leadership and the Province to create systemic shifts to achieve this."

While approximately 12% of the student population in B.C. is Indigenous, about 67% of youth in care identify as Indigenous. Indigenous children and youth in government care experience poorer education outcomes than students in the general population. For example, the 2016-17 six-year public school completion rate for Indigenous students in government care in B.C. was 44.1%, while the public school completion rate for all students in B.C. was 83.7%.

"Our government is dedicated to providing Indigenous children and youth with the supports they need to succeed," said Katrine Conroy, Minister of Children and Family Development. "That's why we are working to improve their educational outcomes and well-being and to

better address the over-representation of Indigenous youth in care."

This builds on broader government efforts to prioritize children and youth in care throughout their lives, including the post-secondary Tuition Waiver Program, a new K-12 education supplement, supporting Indigenous communities to exercise jurisdiction over Indigenous child welfare, and an increase this year of \$5 million in funding to help children and youth in care connect to their culture and heritage as part of Budget 2020.

"Indigenous children who have aged out of care now have the opportunity to attend any of the 25 public post-secondary institutions, Native Education College or 10 union trades-training providers tuition-free through the Provincial Tuition Waiver Program," said Melanie Mark, Minister of Advanced Education, Skills and Training. "This was a call to action from many Indigenous leaders and advocates. This new protocol recognizes that reconciliation is a key pillar to our government and that by working together we can create more positive conditions for Indigenous children and youth to successfully graduate from high school and pursue their dreams and aspirations through the skilled trades or post-secondary education. Supporting youth in and from care to cross the finish line lifts up our families and communities. As the saying goes, 'A rising tide lifts all canoes.'"

The new protocol commits all signatories to develop a strategic plan and meet twice a year to review progress toward the common goal of addressing systemic barriers facing Indigenous students who are either currently in care and or who have aged out of care.

Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs, said: "The education and child welfare systems have historically harmed our children and families in devastating ways. We are in a time of change and opportunity, with First Nations exercising self-determination in choosing the path forward and creating the systemic shifts that are necessary. Through the signing of this protocol, the Province has agreed to support that work moving forward. Now it is time to put talk into action."

To ensure programs and supports are reaching the children who need them, an information sharing agreement has also been signed between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Children and Family Development to track the outcomes of children and youth in care. The information agreement will ensure school districts are able to identify children and youth in care who would benefit from additional supports in a way that respects their privacy and confidentiality.

"This protocol presents an incredible opportunity for us to create meaningful changes in the lives of our children and youth and to breathe life into the UN Declaration by having Indigenous peoples guide and lead these changes", said Lydia Hwitsum, First Nations Summit Task Group member. "This is long overdue, and I look forward to working together to ensure that our children are provided the best possible opportunity to grow and to succeed."

Two backgrounders follow.

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BACKGROUND 1

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What people are saying about the protocol

Regional Chief Terry Teegee, BCAFN –

"We need to take every necessary action for our children and youth in care to succeed in the education system and in their lives. As First Nations people, we have called for these types of changes for many years and I am grateful for the commitment of the Province that is represented within this protocol to advance these changes in partnership with First Nations leadership."

Scott Fraser, B.C.'s Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation –

"As part of our shared journey to true and lasting reconciliation, the Province is working in collaboration to create better outcomes and brighter futures for Indigenous children. This new protocol supports the collective work being done to implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in our province, building an even stronger, more inclusive and more just B.C."

Jennifer Charlesworth, representative for children and youth –

"This protocol between the provincial government, FNEC and FNLC should help ensure that a greater focus is placed on closing the long-standing gaps in educational outcomes for Indigenous children and youth, something that the auditor general has called for and that we have echoed, most recently in our 2017 report Room for Improvement: Toward Better Education Outcomes For Children In Care."

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BACKGROUND 2

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Facts about improving education for First Nations children in care

- In 2019, B.C. became the first jurisdiction in Canada to pass legislation to implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples into all laws and policies. The B.C. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act sets out a process to align BC laws with the UN Declaration and guide the Province's work with First Nations through the recognition of the inherent right of self-determination, including jurisdiction over education and child welfare.
- The Province has a mandate to move forward on the implementation of the Calls to Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, including to ensure that Indigenous children are provided with equitable services and support to those of non-Indigenous children.
- In 2018, the Province of B.C., the Government of Canada, and FNESC entered into the five-year BC Tripartite Education Agreement, which commits the parties to work together to make systemic shifts (i.e. legislative, policy, and practice reforms) to support successful educational outcomes of all First Nations students, no matter where they live in the province.
- The Ministry of Children and Family Development is also investing \$30 million over three years to help cover monthly living expenses while children and youth in care finish high school or attend post-secondary, life skills and/or rehabilitation programs up to their 27th birthday.
- To support educators in responding to situations of trauma, the ministry has created resources available at erase.gov.bc.ca.
- A new professional standard was introduced in 2019 that requires all K-12 teachers in B.C. to commit to truth, reconciliation and healing and to integrate Indigenous worldviews and perspectives into learning environments.

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