



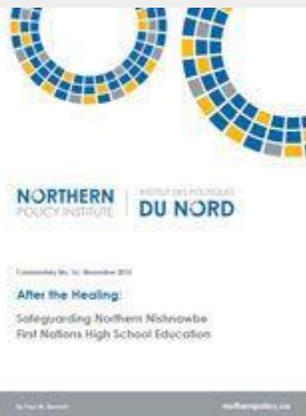
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NEWS LOCAL

Report recommends changes to improve quality of education for native students

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In a new report, the Northern Policy Institute contends governments need to do more to improve the quality of education and life for First Nations students in Northern Ontario.

After the Healing: Safeguarding Northern Nishnawbe First Nations High School Education, recommends immediate action to ensure a brighter future for First Nations students attending First Nations band-operated high schools.

The institute commissioned Schoolhouse Consulting education policy analyst Dr. Paul W. Bennet to generate the commentary following a Thunder Bay coroner's inquest report into the deaths of seven First Nations students. The results of the inquest issued in June 2016 motivated public calls for meaningful changes in Indigenous education, particularly in Northern Ontario.

Bennett's recommends a full transition to First Nations control of education take place through Community School Based Management, entrusted in Indigenous education authorities such as Northern Nishnawbe Education Council.

"Investing in NNEC high schools remains the best way to capture the true "Learning Spirit," to embrace a more holistic, community-based philosophy of lifelong learning, to raise student performance levels, and prepare graduates for healthier, more satisfying and productive lives," states Bennett.

His recommendations follow his research into the challenges and hard-won successes of two Northern Nishnawbe Education Council schools, Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School in Thunder Bay, and its sister school, Pelican Lake First Nations High School near Sioux Lookout.

The report also sheds light current funding disparities, and recommends policy makers proceed immediately to address the funding gap facing First Nations schools, specifically the severe financial challenges facing the two NNEC high schools in Northern Ontario.

"Given a funding gap of 25 to 30 per cent per student and the adverse media attention, the label of "failing" schools does not seem to square with the facts," states Bennett. "Closing the funding gap is imperative if we are ever to achieve equity in education and better outcomes for First Nations students."

Among his recommendations, Bennett urges public policy-makers to:

- Close the funding gap for NNEC and NAN schools;
- Design, fund and build Dennis Franklin Cromarty transition lodgings to be known as the Student Living Centre;
- Re-build and expand student support services to smooth the transition to city/town life;
- Establish a Race Relations Commissioner and officers in cities and larger towns with sizable populations of First Nations youth and students; and
- Expand and fortify 'Student Success' curriculum initiatives based upon Indigenous ways of knowing and learning.

The complete commentary, including all recommendations is available on the institute's website at www.northernpolicy.ca