



For Immediate Release

## **Building Resilience: New report says more needs to be done to improve the quality of education and life for First Nations students in Northern Ontario**

**November 24, 2016** – A new commentary published by Northern Policy Institute, *After the Healing: Safeguarding Northern Nishnawbe First Nations High School Education* proposes immediate action be taken to ensure a brighter future for First Nations students attending First Nations band-operated high schools.

A Thunder Bay coroner's inquest report into the deaths of seven First Nations students, issued on June 28, 2016, has motivated new public calls for concrete, meaningful changes in Indigenous education, particularly in Northern Ontario.

The new report by Paul W. Bennett, takes a look at the history of First Nations education and analyzes and assesses the impact of First Nations-controlled high schools on the educational progress, well-being, and life chances of youth in the Nishnawbe Aski Nation.

By taking a closer look at the real challenges and hard-won successes of two Northern Nishnawbe Education Council (NNEC) schools, Dennis Franklin Cromarty High School (DFCHS) in Thunder Bay, and its sister school, Pelican Lake First Nations High School (PFFNHS) near Sioux Lookout, Bennett makes several policy recommendations, including the call for a full transition to First Nations control of education through Community- School Based Management, entrusted in Indigenous education authorities such as NNEC.

"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.

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."

Bennett offers a public policy response, urging policy-makers to:



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

The complete commentary, including all recommendations is available on our website at [www.northernpolicy.ca](http://www.northernpolicy.ca)

**Media Interviews:** Author Paul W. Bennett and NPI President & CEO Charles Cirtwill are available for comment.

To arrange an interview, please contact:

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**About Northern Policy Institute:**

*Northern Policy Institute is Northern Ontario's independent think tank. We perform research, collect and disseminate evidence, and identify policy opportunities to support the growth of sustainable Northern communities. Our operations are located in Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Sudbury, and Kenora. We seek to enhance Northern Ontario's capacity to take the lead position on socio-economic policy that impacts Northern Ontario, Ontario, and Canada as a whole.*

**About the Lead Author and Research Associate:**

**Lead Author and Researcher**

**Paul W. Bennett**, Ed.D. (OISE/Toronto), author, policy analyst and professor, is Senior Education Policy Fellow with the Northern Policy Institute. Together with Jonathan Anuk, he co-authored the September 2014 NPI policy research report, *Picking Up the Pieces: A Community School-Based Approach to First Nations Education Renewal*. He is also Founding Director of Schoolhouse Consulting and Adjunct Professor of Education at Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia. Dr. Bennett has written or co-authored eight books, including **Canada: A North American Nation** (1998 and 1995), **Vanishing Schools, Threatened Communities; The Contested Schoolhouse in Maritime Canada, 1850 -2010** (2011), and **The Last Stand: Schools, Communities and the Future of Rural Nova Scotia** (2013). His education commentaries have appeared regularly in a wide range of daily and weekly newspapers, including *The Globe and Mail*, *The Chronicle Herald (Halifax)*, *The Telegraph Journal (St. John)*, *The Charlottetown*



*Guardian, The National Post, and Post Media papers across the country.*

Over the past five years, he has produced major policy papers for the Northern Policy Institute, the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies, the Society for Quality Education, and the Canadian Accredited Independent Schools Association. He specializes in K-12 educational policy, education history, educational standards, school governance, teacher education, and special education services. He is currently Chair of the Board of Halifax Public Libraries and Vice-Chair of the Board at Churchill Academy, a Dartmouth school for students with severe learning disabilities.

### **Research Associate**

**Rick Garrick**, is a News Reporter and freelance writer- photographer, based in Thunder Bay, Ontario. Since graduating from the Print Journalism program at Cambrian College in Sudbury in 2002, Rick has produced more than 2,000 articles about northern Ontario's Indigenous peoples for a number of publications, including *Wawatay News*, *Anishinabek News*, *Sagatay inflight Magazine*, *Great Lakes Powwow Guide*, and *Aboriginal Ontario- Open for Business*. Over the past fifteen years, he has covered First Nations issues and events all over Nishnawbe Aski Nation and won awards for his enterprise reporting.