

# Cultural Inclusion Standards in all Schools

As Defined by the First Nation Education  
Commission  
(Reviewed by FNEC on April 20, 2016)



**COUNCIL OF YUKON FIRST NATIONS**  
E . D . U . C . A . T . I . O . N



**FNEC**  
*"Holding up our dreams"*

# Why foster cultural inclusiveness in Yukon Schools?

These Cultural Inclusion Standards were developed at the 2016 Yukon First Nation Education Summit, a working forum that brings together all 14 First Nations in the territory to assist with the implementation of the Joint Education Action Plan (JEAP). The Action Plan itself was born out of the Memorandum of Understanding on Education Partnerships, signed off by Canada, Yukon Government, Council of Yukon First Nations and now all 14 Yukon First Nations, committing the parties to work together to close the education achievement gap between First Nation and non-First Nation Students.

Yukon First Nation students make up approximately 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the student body across the territory, with higher concentrations of First Nation students in rural schools. As the descendants of the original inhabitants, this important sector of Yukon students bring with them cultural wealth, unique worldviews and ways of understanding and learning that have long been undermined by a colonial system. This system has had its worst effects during the Residential School era which today manifests in deep social problems and lower success rates among First Nation students. Today, despite much progress, the education system continues to remain non-responsive to the learning needs and supports required by First Nation students, parents and communities.

Yukon Government and Yukon First Nations have been working in partnership to discuss what needs to be done to improve the learning outcomes for Yukon First Nation students. Out of these discussions, what has become one of four main pillars in the JEAP addresses the need for culturally and linguistically relevant programming and culturally inclusive schools.

As teachers and administrators entrusted to provide K-12 educational programs and services in Yukon, it is important to understand the history and the cultural demographic of the individuals you serve. It is hoped, that with all the current shifts in educational teaching and learning approaches, the reconciliation work to address the impacts of the Residential School system and build a better and inclusive system for all, and in recognition of the lands and waters as the traditional territories of Yukon First Nations, that you, as teachers and administrators take the initiative to embark on a learning journey as deep as your teaching journey. We encourage you to learn about and build into your classroom and schools, not only cultural recognition, but an honouring of the worldview and community practices your students bring to the learning environment.

Across Canada and specific to Yukon, there are a number of legal and political instruments that enshrine or defend Yukon First Nation rights to culturally and linguistically relevant educational programming. These include the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People, Truth and Reconciliation Recommendations and the Yukon Education Act. Moreover, 11 of 14 First Nations are self-governing. The Umbrella Final Agreement and individual agreements set out obligations for the provision of educational programming related to: *native studies; culture and language programs; composition of teaching staff; early childhood, special and adult education curriculum; kindergarten through grade 12 curriculum; the evaluation of teachers, administrators and other employees; and the right to establish schools....*

## What we hope to achieve.

### Addressing systemic racism

The Residential School era was a tragic time in Canadian history that will have lasting consequences. Many students come from families and communities with much healing work ahead. This history often manifests itself in the classroom today in the form of systemic racism, bullying and segregation that sets First Nation students at a disadvantage. We seek to address these school and classroom dynamics by turning racism into cultural validation and celebration and by providing culturally appropriate student supports. We seek to address behavioural issues with restorative cultural approaches and practices, building confidence and strengthening identity.

### Celebrating culture, pedagogies and the unique gifts of every child

We believe that by changing how our schools approach teaching and by adapting to how First Nation students learn will lead to deepened student engagement and higher participation and success rates among students. First Nation people are traditionally experiential, land-based learners with a wealth of cultural knowledge and teachings based on relationships with the land. Teachers can help bridge the cultural divide by providing land-based or tactile learning opportunities and validating the cultural knowledge First Nation students bring to the classroom.

### Language

First Nation languages are central to First Nation cultures. These languages are highly threatened with the loss of fluent speakers, Elders. It is acknowledged that the languages are in a state of crisis and perhaps even on the verge of extinction. We seek to redress this language loss through more rigorous language programming in our schools. The practise and use of the traditional languages should be in conjunction with cultural programming as well as in the class when possible.

### Respect

Respect for others, for one's self and for the land, the water and all life is a value held by all First Nations. This is evident in schools, in the way that students and staff are treated, and by the ways they interact. A school needs to be a place where students feel safe to be themselves, where they know that adults care about them and where kindness is the norm.

Towards these ends, the First Nation Education Commission has developed the following minimum standards expected from Yukon Public Schools. It is hoped that by meeting these minimum standards, we can expect better learning environments that all students can appreciate, and higher achievement rates.

## 1. Cultural Awareness

- a) All school staff will take mandatory cultural awareness training. First Nations 101 through Yukon College is required.
- b) All school staff will participate in a mandatory annual orientation developed and provided by the local First Nation prior to the start of the school year.
- c) School Councils will also participate in mandatory cultural awareness training and local orientation sessions.

## 2. Access to Knowledge

- a) Schools will utilize local subject matter experts as directed by the local YFN. In the case where this information is not available the Department and FNEC would be expected to create/maintain this list.
- b) Schools will have a Yukon indigenous land based activity – minimum of one each season.
- c) Regular Elder participation in every school.
- d) FN Heritage/Ancstral Technology territorial event. This could be annually or bi-annually just like the Heritage and Science fairs, bridge-building or other regional competitions.
- e) Each Yukon school will work with the First Nation to identify ways of celebrating the local clan system within their school culture (events, ceremony, visual representation).

## 3. Relationships

- a) Established relationship with the local FN Education/Capacity Department and staff.
- b) Establish and support an effective working relationship with ESWs/CELCs.
- c) Each school will host a minimum of one community cultural event per year.
- d) Use traditional mediation, restorative or conflict resolution process.
- e) Have an identified space for ESWs/CELCs.
- f) Designated Elders spaces at all schools including parking and seating.

- g) School staff and school council members will take a proactive approach to engage with individual parents/caregivers (outside of school visits, potlatches, community events).

#### 4. Languages

- a) Visual representation of the local language throughout the school and on school grounds.
- b) Extracurricular language opportunities like language clubs.
- c) Encouragement of staff learning and using First Nation languages in the classrooms.
- d) Support students to learn and sing O Canada or any school song, in the local language.

\*\*\* Special consideration will be required for Whitehorse schools.