

NWAC STATEMENT

ONTARIO INDIGENOUS CURRICULUM AND RECONCILIATION

JULY 12, 2018 OTTAWA, ON



Native Women's
Association of Canada

L'Association des
femmes autochtones
du Canada



Monday, July 9th 2018, the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) was shocked at actions by the newly elected provincial government in Ontario. The Ontario Ministry of Education has cancelled a project at the last minute that aims to update the Ontario school curriculum to include the history of Residential Schools and to bring Indigenous perspectives into the classroom. Additions to the curriculum are part of the path to reconciliation and is part of the eleven Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. It is important to note, this is one of the few items that requires work outside of federal jurisdiction.

Indigenous educators and Elders were to travel to Toronto to revise curriculum over the next two weeks, but team members received emails late on Friday afternoon instructing them to cancel all travel arrangements and that non-refundable costs would be reimbursed. The Progressive Conservative (PC) Government denies cancelling this project, but the decision to implement an across-the-board austerity push is an admission these curriculum updates are not a political priority of this new Government.

The legacy of colonialism continues to impact Indigenous communities in Canada, and with this decision NWAC is concerned about the future needs and interests of Indigenous children in Ontario. Treaties were established to share the land and its resources, including the sharing of knowledge and education that is part of that treaty right. Indigenous communities understand education as a life-long pursuit and take a holistic approach to education. Canada and provincial/territorial governments have a fiduciary responsibility to ensure treaty obligations are fulfilled, including funding the process of indigenizing Ontario's curriculum. Culturally relevant education for Indigenous peoples is a treaty right that is recognized nationally and internationally.

One very common concern that holds up across Canada is a lack of culturally relevant educational resources. Many Indigenous students who are attending provincial/territorial schools in Canada report experiencing racism in the school system. Racism stems from peers, teachers and other school staff, textbooks and learning materials, and parents of other students. Students and parents alike frequently request experiential and on-the-land learning for Indigenous students, however this type of learning is still unrecognized in most formal education systems. In order to address these concerns, re-writing the current curriculum is necessary.

The TRC's Call to Action, specifically, number ten calls upon governments to develop "culturally appropriate curricula" with "the full participation and informed consent" of Indigenous peoples "including a commitment to sufficient funding." The decision to put austerity before the needs of Indigenous children is deeply political. Asking Indigenous educators and Elders to cancel plans to work on this curriculum means that there will not be the full participation and informed consent of Indigenous peoples. Once again, this demonstrates that insufficient funding by this government is the barrier to creating culturally appropriate curricula.

Moving forward, NWAC would like to see the current government re-evaluate this decision to put politics before the rights and needs of children. Reconciliation is a community-driven process, and to achieve it, everyone in Canada must take part, including the Ontario Government. The Ontario government must reverse this decision, put the education of children first and political agendas second, respect the TRC Calls to Action, and together we will walk the path towards reconciliation.

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1. Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC), (2015). Calls to Action.
 2. Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network, "Urban Aboriginal Education in Canada" (2015).
 3. Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network, "Fostering Educational Success of Off-Reservation Aboriginal Learners on Prince Edward Island" (2014).
 4. Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres, "Response to Community-Connected Experiential Learning" (2016).
 5. Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC), (2015). Calls to Action.