

# Taking Stock and Paving the Way Forward to Support First Nations Elementary and Secondary Education Success

AFN Education Forum, February 2025



Indigenous Services  
Canada

Services aux  
Autochtones Canada

Canada

# Supporting First Nations Elementary and Secondary Education Success

- In 2019, ISC implemented a co-developed transformed Elementary and Secondary policy and funding approach which moved from outdated proposal-based education programs to funding models aimed at providing more stable, predictable and transparent core funding.

## Workshop Goals

- ✓ outline factors that led to the transformed approach and new interim regional funding models
- ✓ take stock of what has been achieved, what has been transformed, and barriers and challenges that remain
- ✓ Identify where we can go next, how we can work together collectively to effectively focus resources and effort where they will have the most impact
- ✓ review recommendations put forward in the AFN's First Nations Elementary and Secondary Education Transformation Review and Costing Analysis report

*The land we gather on today is the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit, and the Williams Treaties signed with multiple Mississaugas and Chippewa bands.*

# Federal Role in Elementary and Secondary Education

## Jurisdiction

- Elementary and secondary education is under the jurisdiction of provinces and territories. The federal government is responsible for funding elementary and secondary education for First Nations ordinarily resident on-reserve.
- For First Nations students in the Yukon and Northwest Territories, as well as First Nations ordinarily resident off-reserve, elementary and secondary education is provided by the respective province or territory.

## Drivers of Federal Responsibility

- The ***Department of Indigenous Services Act (2019)*** outlines the Minister's responsibility to provide education services to eligible individuals as well as to advance the gradual transfer of departmental responsibilities to Indigenous communities, governments and organizations
- Since 1972, the Government of Canada has committed to a policy of **First Nations control of First Nations Education**
- Some First Nations have assumed jurisdiction over education through **self-government arrangements which fall under the responsibilities of CIRNAC**
- Canada has committed to implementing the **Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action (CTAs 6-12)**
- **Bill C-15** to implement the **United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples** received Royal Assent in June 2021, and provides a road map for the Government and Indigenous peoples to work together to fully implement the Declaration (**UNDRIP, article 14**)

# First Nations Elementary and Secondary Education On Reserve (*Pre-2016*)

- **Persistent intergenerational trauma** resulting from residential schools, child welfare and criminal justice systems.
- High School attainment for First Nations on Reserve **43% compared to 88.4%** for non-Indigenous population (2016).
- **Outdated patchwork of fragmented core and proposal-based programs:** funding for the Elementary and Secondary Education program suite was not evenly distributed between Regions or among recipients within individual Regions. Spending growth for core programs was capped at 2% annually from 1996 to 2016 while population grew by almost 10% and inflation was 44%.
- **Vocal public criticism of education** conditions for First Nations, including national advocacy campaigns, media investigations, and multiple reports
- First Nation partners had been identifying **gaps and challenges** for decades:
  - Inadequate funding that was not comparable to funding provided for education by provinces;
  - Lack of transparency in calculating core funding, and inequities created by burdensome application-based program;
  - The administrative burden of reporting tied to the funding, which did not create value for partners.

# Commitments to Elementary and Secondary transformation made through Budget 2016

- Budget 2016 announced \$2.6 billion over five years starting in 2016–17 to address the critical need to improve education outcomes, and an engagement process to transform the Government’s funding approach, building on the Calls to Action in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada Report.
- Recognized that improving the education outcomes of First Nations children living on reserve is critical to improve their quality of life and contribute to stronger communities.



Image Source: Assembly of First Nations, 2017

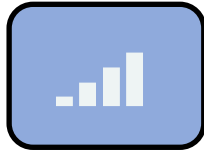
# Elementary and Secondary Education Transformation: A co-developed approach

## Co-development

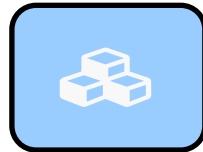
- Extensive engagement (2016-2018) included community-level discussions, online surveys, joint thematic task teams, leadership dialogues, regional technical discussions, and co-development of a policy proposal
- ISC continues to work with First Nations across the country to improve results and best meet evolving needs of students



**Provincial  
comparability (+)**



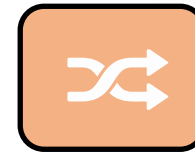
**Predictability**



**Stability**



**Transparency**



**Flexibility in  
how funding  
can be spent**



**Locally and  
regionally-specific**

## 1. Interim Regional Funding Formulas

Predictable core funding comparable to funding in provincial education systems, plus national **investments** to meet First Nations' specific needs, such as additional funding for language and culture, full-day kindergarten for children aged four and five, and before- and after-school programming.

## 2. Regional Education Agreements (REAs)

Support First Nation-designed education systems to improve student success through the vision and goals set by First Nations for elementary and secondary education. These agreements outline First Nations' design, implementation and management plans of their education systems and may include additional funding beyond the interim regional funding formulas to support the achievement of the education systems outcomes.



# Signed Regional Education Agreements

As of June 2024, ten regional education agreements have been signed covering approximately 25,000 students.

## British Columbia

### British Columbia Tripartite Education Agreement (2018)

- Covers 153 First Nations
- Serves 11,154 students

## Saskatchewan

### Athabasca Denesuline Education Authority (2019)

- Covers 3 First Nations
- Serves 1,231 students

### Peter Ballantyne Cree Nation Education Authority (2020)

- Covers 1 First Nation
- Serves 2,291 students

### Whitecap Dakota Tripartite REA (2020 - 2023)

- Covers 1 First Nation
- Serves 172 students

### Treaty Education Alliance (2021)

- Covers 4 First Nations
- Serves 747 students

### East Central First Nation Education Authority (2023)

- Covers 1 First Nation
- Serves 390 students

## Alberta

### Kee Tas Kee Now Tribal Education Authority (2019)

- Covers 5 First Nations
- Serves 1,241 students

### Sunchild First Nation Regional Education Agreement (2019 - 2024)

- Covers 1 First Nation
- Serves 350 students

## Quebec

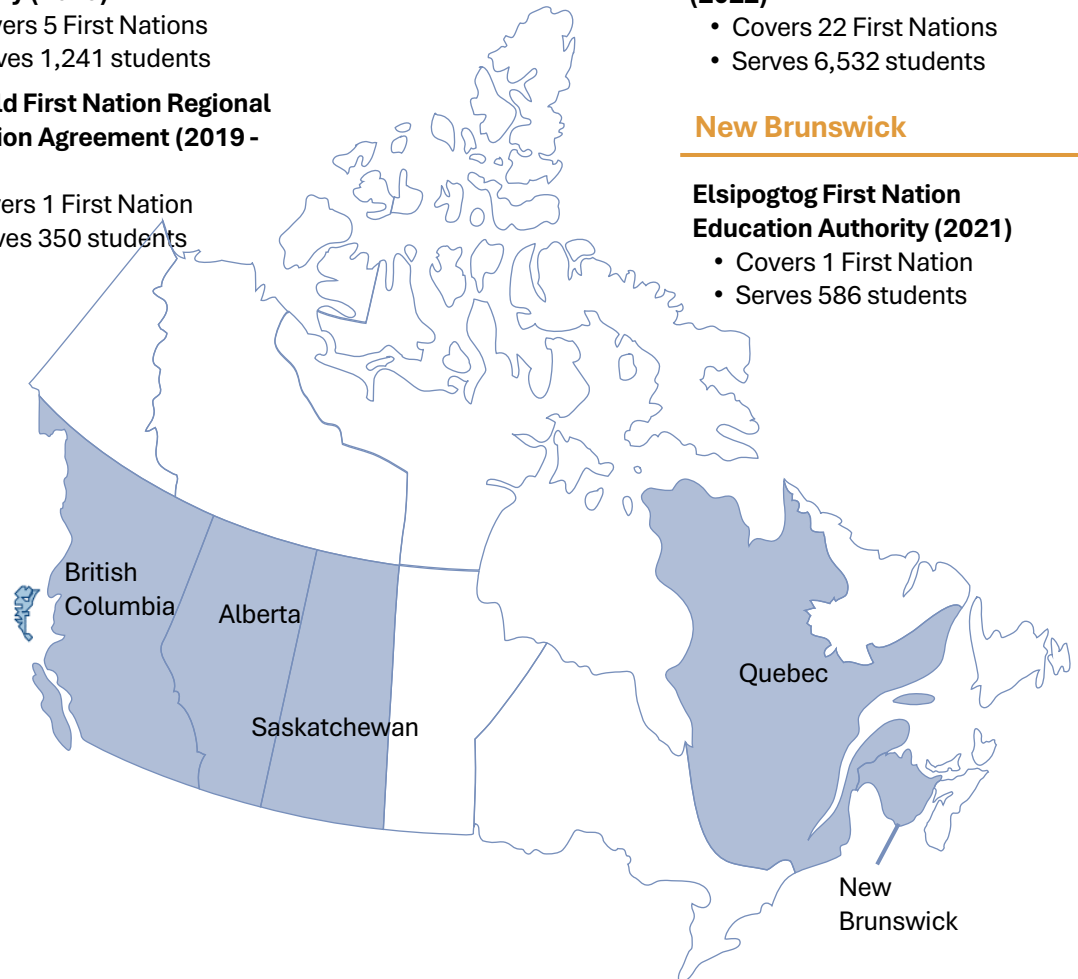
### First Nations Education Council (2022)

- Covers 22 First Nations
- Serves 6,532 students

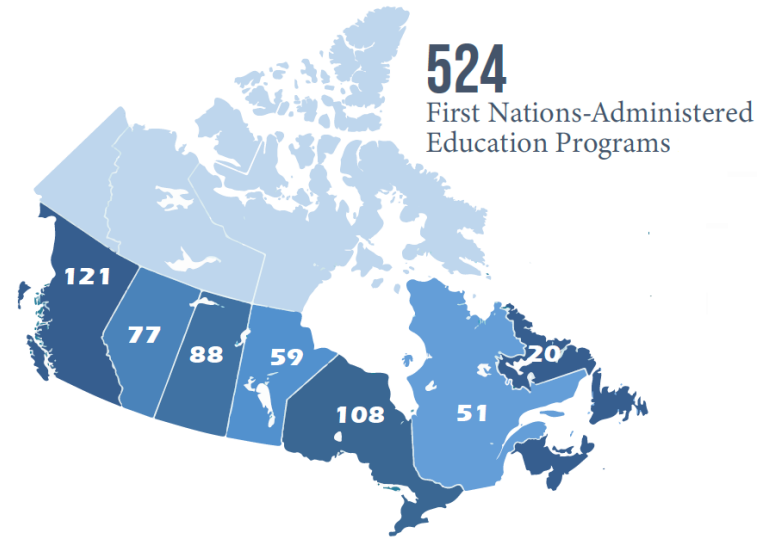
## New Brunswick

### Elsipogtog First Nation Education Authority (2021)

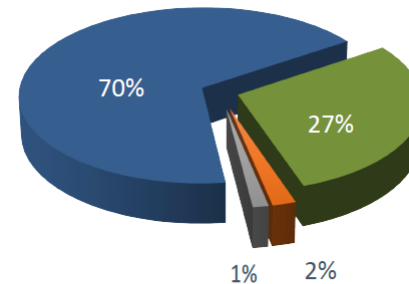
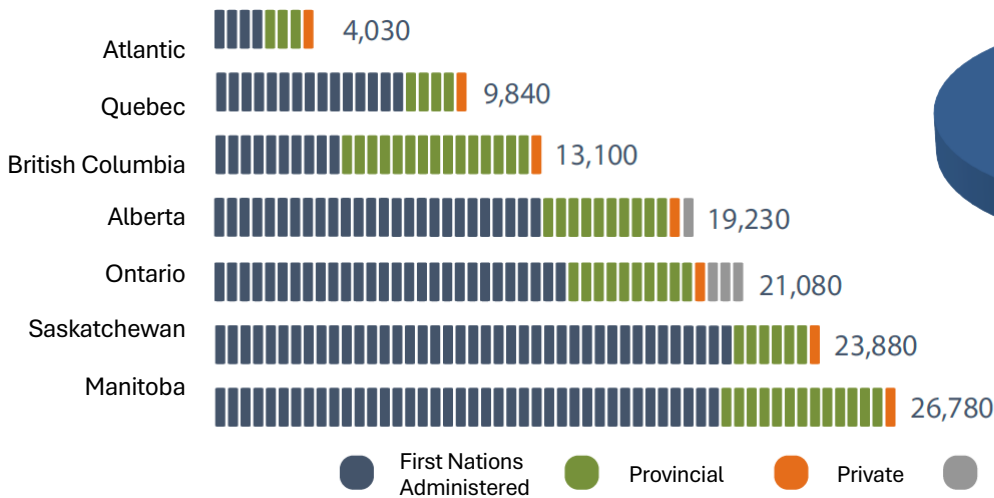
- Covers 1 First Nation
- Serves 586 students



# Today: Elementary and Secondary Education Program 2023-24



Percentage of students funded by the Elementary and Secondary Education Program by School Type



Approximately **117,940** students

**82,870** attending First Nations schools

**31,430** attending Provincial schools

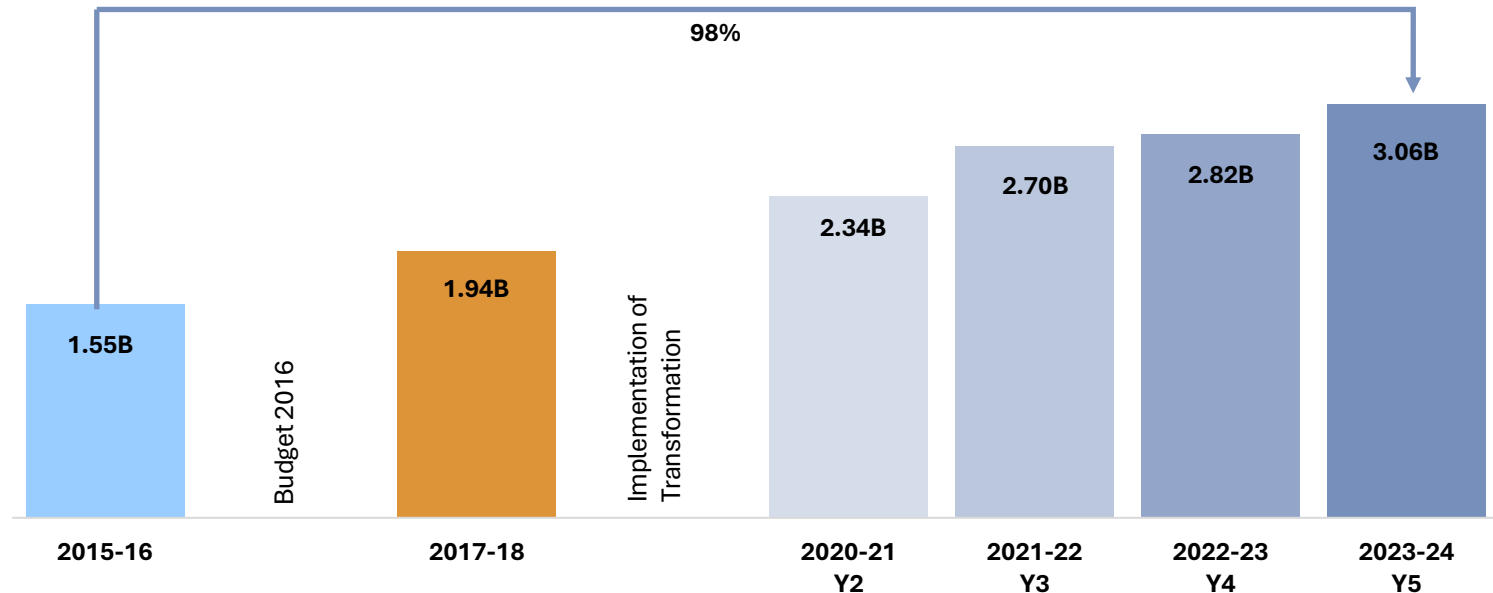
**2,070** attending Private schools

**1,570** attending Federal schools

Source: EIS, March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024. Values are rounded.



# Funding increases since pre-Transformation



Funding Amounts for Elementary and Secondary envelope based on actual expenditures

*Funding for elementary and secondary education for First Nations students ordinarily resident on-reserve grew by **98%** between 2015-16 and 2023-24*

# Other Federal Programs Supporting First Nations Education

<b>Infrastructure</b>	Education-related needs for <b>infrastructure assets</b> (e.g., school buildings, teacherages)
<b>Jordan's Principle</b>	<b>Responds to First Nations individual and group requests</b> for supports and services such as adaptive technology (e.g., soft/hardware for children with autism), tutoring, & psycho-educational assessments
<b>Indigenous Early Learning and Childcare</b>	Supports the <b>learning and developmental needs of young children</b> (including under age 4) living in First Nations communities
<b>Health and Mental Health Programming</b>	<b>Health and mental health supports provided to young people</b> (e.g., mental wellness rapid response teams can work with schools to reach students)
<b>National School Food Program</b>	Supports the implementation and expansion of access to <b>school food programs</b> across Canada, including First Nations students of all ages and grades.
<b>First Nations and Inuit Youth Employment Strategy</b>	Supports youth aged 15-30 and <b>co-operative education</b> placements for students in grades 7 to 12 on-reserve, and activities such as national <b>science camp and career days</b> which can include youth younger than 15
<b>Child and Family Services Community Wellbeing &amp; Jurisdiction Initiatives</b>	Supports positive relationships and <b>promotes family and community wellbeing</b> , including preventative funding supporting school-age children

# Progress since Transformation

- Full time enrollment of students in First Nations-administered programs increased by 11%.
- The number of students in full-day kindergarten has **grown by 58.1%** from the 2016-17 to 2023-2024 school year, with a **107% increase** in the percentage of students enrolled in First Nations-administered Kindergarten programs over this same period.
- In 2023-24 over 94% of students attending First Nations-administered schools learned **at least one subject in a First Nations language**
- The percentage of students attending First Nations-administered schools provided with **Culturally-based Curriculum or Land-based Learning Services** has increased to almost 95% in 2023-24
- While secondary school attainment rates have increased, the gap with non-Indigenous students is not narrowing quickly and persistent barriers remain.

# Changes in Landscape since Transformation



## Investments in Core Elementary and Secondary Education Programming

- Budget 2021: **\$1.6 million over five years, and \$300 million ongoing**, to enhance funding formulas; support before- and after-school programming on reserve, and support adult education.
- Budget 2024: **\$649.4 million over two years** for improve elementary and secondary education on reserve, and **\$1 billion over five years** to expand access to school food programs.



## Impact of COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing climate related disasters

- Learning shortfalls and losses, including long-term absenteeism and limited ability to access remote learning and increasing challenges in teacher recruitment, resulting in declines in academic achievement and credit attainment.



## Increasing mental health challenges and complex learning needs

- Mental health challenges have been exacerbated by broader social factors, toxic drug and opioid crisis, isolation and forced social connection via on-line interaction during the pandemic. Additionally students are presenting with more complex and compound learning needs.



## Current fiscal/geo-political climate

- Challenging economic and political landscape, heightened by threat of tariffs imposed by the United States, and the potential impact on the Canadian economy.

# Recommendations:

## First Nations' Elementary and Secondary Education Transformation Review and Costing Analysis Report

Theme	Description	Rec #
<b>Better Information Sharing</b>	Work with First Nations and funding experts to improve the format and readability of the existing funding information package(s), i.e., side-by-sides.	1
	Develop training sessions in consultation with First Nations organizations, geared to regional office staff, First Nations, education directors, service providers, boards, and chiefs and councils. Topics could include IRFF changes, REA negotiations, education agreements, and ISC's role.	7
<b>Regional Education Agreements</b>	Develop a formal framework for the development, renewal, and negotiation of REAs, including fiscal and policy parameters for future agreement negotiations and an approach to REAs based on First Nations-developed funding formulas.	5
	Develop and publish a formal REA guidebook, that could include REA development process, budget ask submission, sample outcome reporting framework, description of the annual budget cycle, sample agreements and best practices.	6
	Explore an incremental funding approach for needs-based budget submissions, where First Nations can access an increasing portion of agreed-upon, needs-based funding negotiated through an REA.	10

# Recommendations:

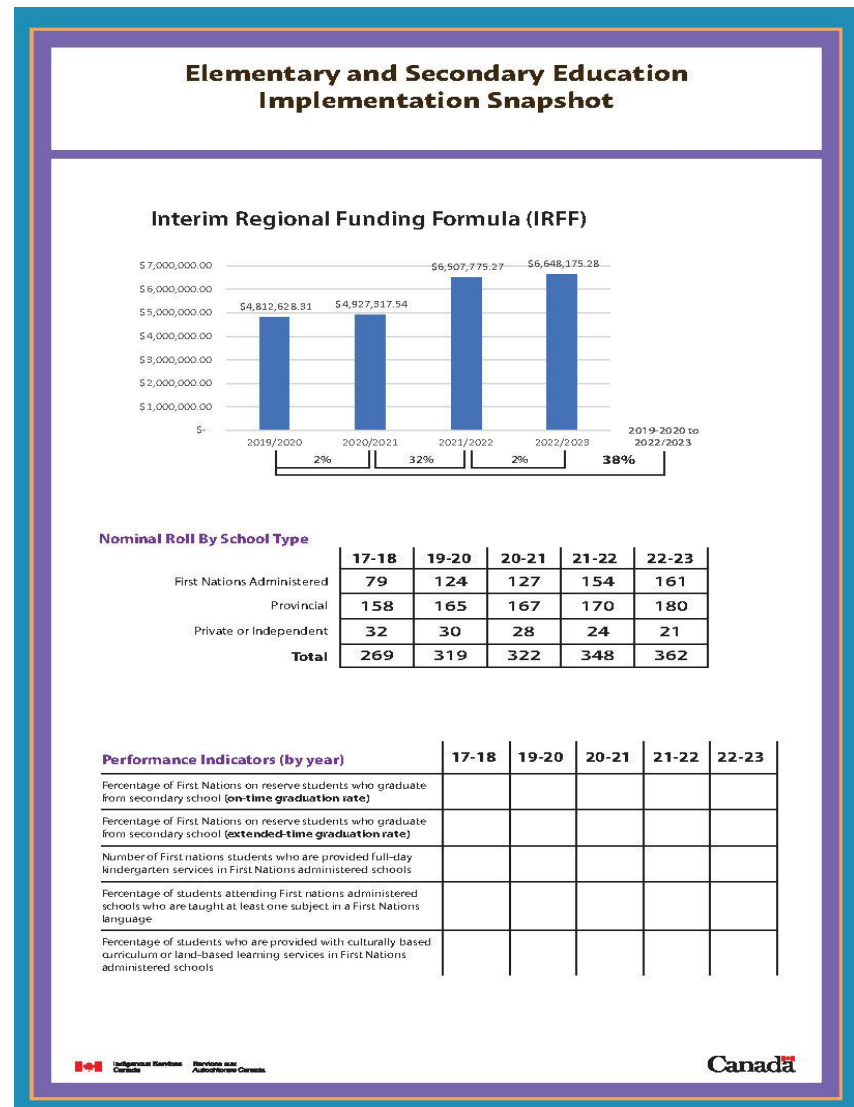
## First Nations' Elementary and Secondary Education Transformation Review and Costing Analysis Report

Theme	Description	Rec #
Funding	Create funding manual with detailed background/calculations, in addition to the IRFF.	2
	Distribute funding information in advance of the new fiscal year, recognizing that formula elements are subject to change based on budget allocations/announcements.	3
	Engage with First Nations to better understand nominal roll trends and develop accurate enrolment projections.	4
	Implement funding enhancements in key gap areas regardless of whether the REA is in place or not.	8
	Incorporate recurring expenses currently covered by Jordan's Principle into core funding.	19

# Addressing Recommendations: Improving information and data access

## Elementary and Secondary Education Implementation Snapshot:

- Simplified one-page document for each community to show nominal roll recipient-level funding and "base" indicators to support understanding, analysis and community-level decision-making.





# Addressing Recommendations:

## Going forward together



1. *What information or tools would help you in your planning?*
2. *Do you have key data needs, such as understanding nominal roll trends or developing enrolment projections?*
3. *Are there new areas of focus or changes in your community that you need to respond to through your education program?*
4. *What issues are educators seeing in schools that are affecting student wellbeing and learning (e.g. mental and physical health, childhood and family issues, the impact of opioids)?*
5. *What engagement would you like to see on elementary and secondary education?*