



# K-12 FACT SHEET

August, 2023

This fact sheet is intended to provide an overview of First Nations elementary-secondary education in Canada. Note that there are several data limitations that prevent a full understanding of the successes and supports needed for First Nations students, schools, and communities.

## First Nations Education Transformation

- First Nations have long advocated for collaborative policy and program reform to education funding, calling for core funding directly to First Nations, education organizations and schools to ensure First Nations control of First Nations education. As a result, First Nations worked with the federal government to reform the way that First Nations elementary and secondary education is funded on reserve.
- In 2019, in co-development with the Assembly of First Nations, the federal government transformed First Nations education and replaced its outdated, inefficient, and inadequate proposal-based education programs with regional education approaches and funding models that provide more sufficient, predictable, and sustainable core funding.
- Regional Education Agreements (REAs) ensure base education funding is comparable to provincial systems across the country while working towards additional funding agreements based on need to better account for factors such as remoteness, school size, language, and socio-economic conditions.
- It is through these REAs that First Nations are now developing their own local, regional and/or Treaty based education agreements that identify the funding required to implement their vision of First Nations control over education.
- In 2023, 10 REAs are signed and concluded, and several are underway. These figures are expected to grow with an estimated 50 First Nations currently engaging in activities to develop a REA.

Figure 1: Proportion of First Nations currently under a REA

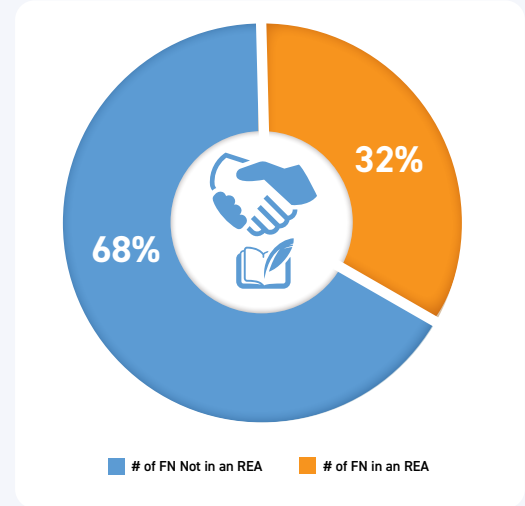
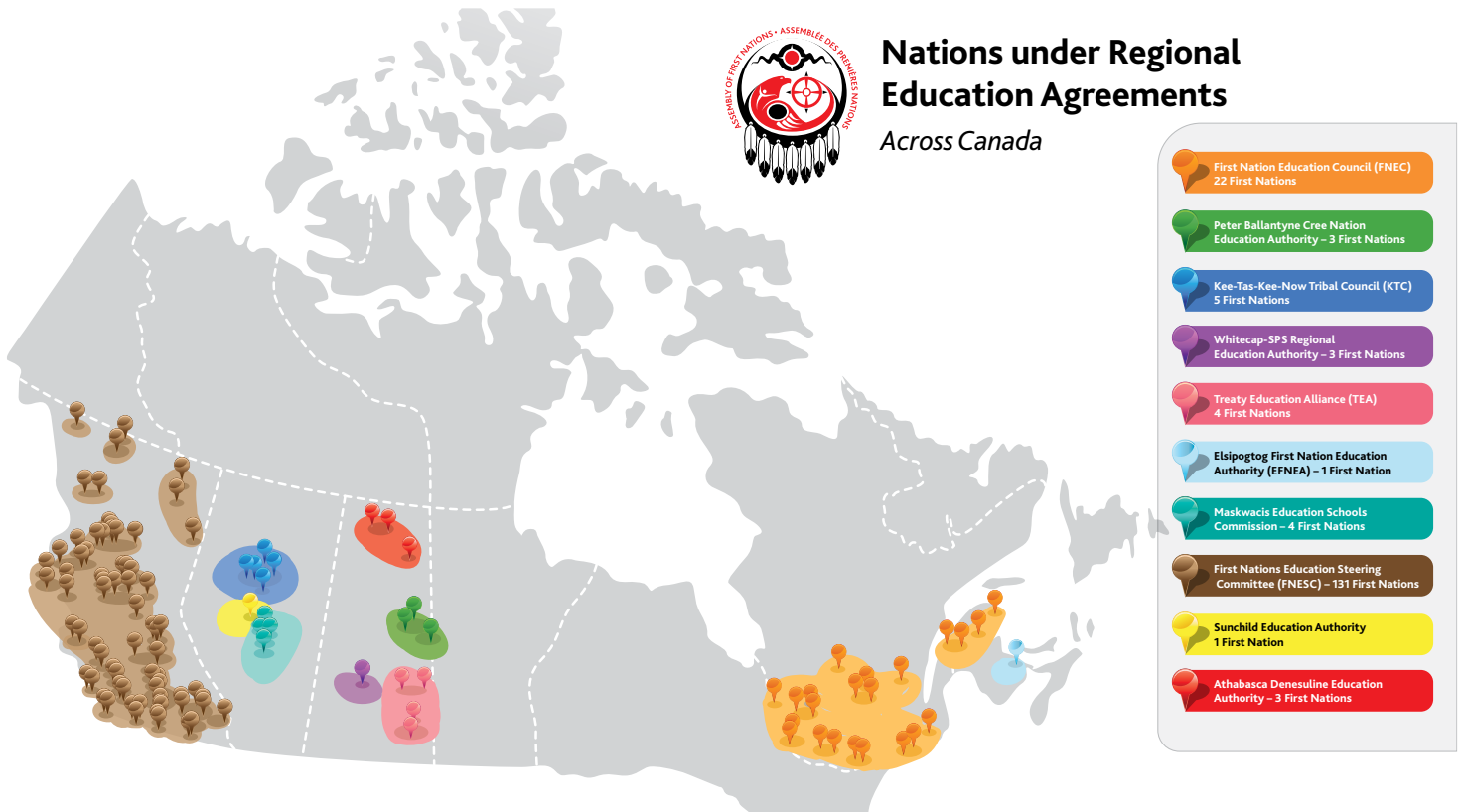


Figure 2: A landscape of First Nations under a Regional Education Agreement





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## First Nations Schools and Education Organizations

- There are over 543 First Nations-operated elementary-secondary programs with the highest proportion found in Ontario (23%), British Columbia (21%) and Saskatchewan (16%).
- This means that 82% of the 634 First Nations have access to elementary and/or secondary school programming in their community. This leaves more than 14,000 First Nations students without access to education programming in their community.
- Most First Nations schools\* are funded through an annual contribution agreement with the federal government, but there are some self-government and education legislation efforts that have ensured First Nations control of First Nations education. For example: Anishinabek Education System (ON), Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (NS), the Cree School Board (QC) and the First Nations Jurisdiction over Education in BC.
- A total of 450 school buildings are present in First Nations communities across Canada. Of these, 402 are band operated, 24 are self-governing, 2 are private, 7 are federal and 15 are provincial schools.

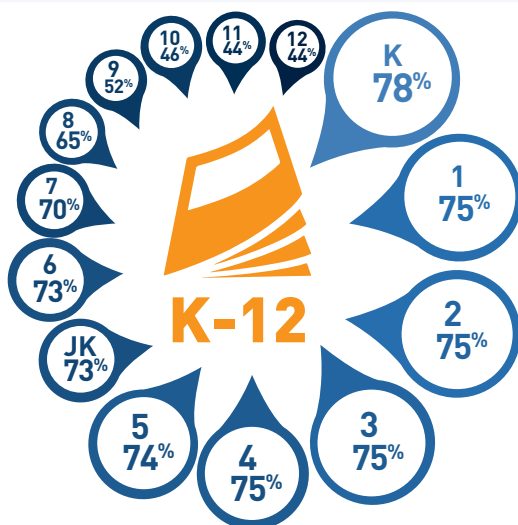
**Figure 3: Distribution of First Nations-operated elementary secondary programs by province, 2021**



Source: Indigenous Services Canada, Nominal Roll, 2020-2021, Education Information System. The number schools under MK, AES, and the Cree School Board are included in the chart above.  
 \* Indigenous Services Canada's Education Information System (EIS) tracks all "school" programs regardless of having a physical asset, this number includes virtual schools, Kindergarten program(s), elementary, secondary programs etc.)

## Grades offered in First Nations schools

**Figure 4: Percentage of elementary secondary schools that offer grades K-12, 2019**



Source: Indigenous Services Canada, Nominal Roll, 2019-20  
 \*AES and MK schools included

- In 2019, among those First Nations that have elementary and secondary schools on-reserve, less than half have access to high-school programming.
- This means that nearly 54% of First Nations students need to leave their First Nation to achieve a high school diploma.
- The highest proportion of First Nations-operated high schools are in Alberta (84%) and lowest proportion of First Nations-operated high schools are in the Atlantic (9%).

Source: Indigenous Services Canada, Nominal Roll, 2019-20



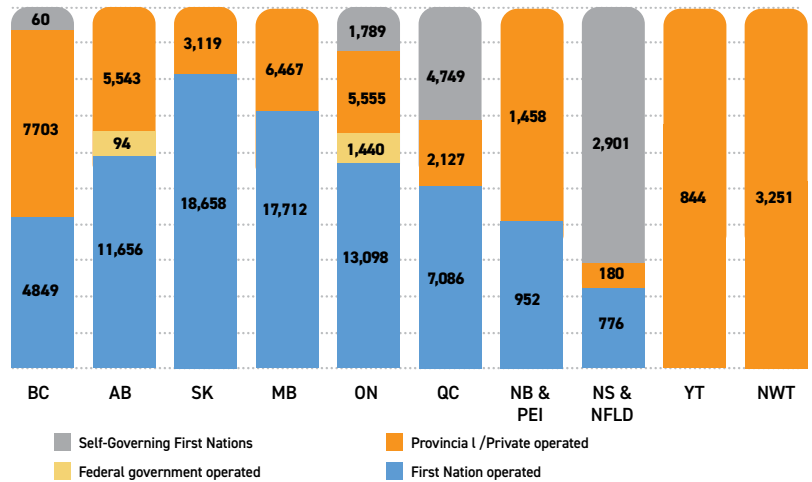
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## First Nation Students

- There are over 120,000 First Nations elementary and secondary students living on reserve.
- In 2021, approximately 32% of First Nations students attended a school in the provincial school system, while 65% of First Nations attended a First Nations operated school—an increase from 62% in 2015.
- According to the 2021 Census, a 2% decline in enrolments in public schools was seen among First Nations student enrolment from the previous school year.
- Regions with highest proportion of students enrolled in a First Nations school are in Saskatchewan (25%), Manitoba (24%), Ontario (18%), and Alberta (16%).

Figure 5: Distribution of First Nations student enrolment, by type of school, 2021

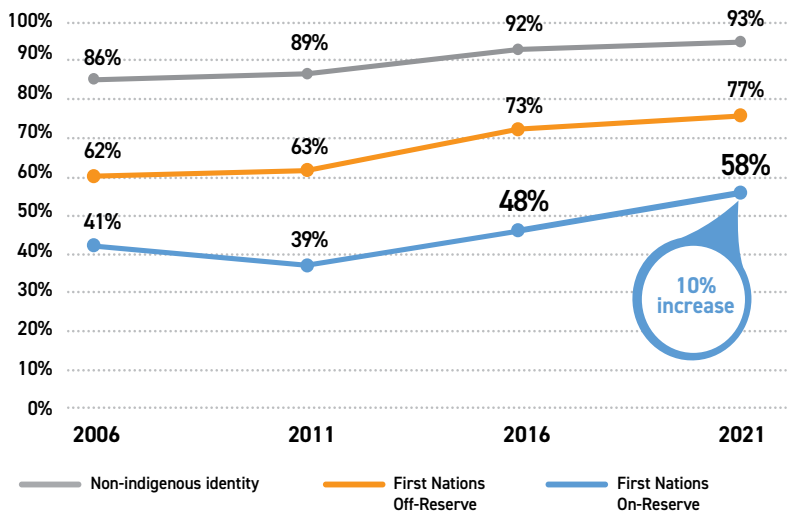


Source: Indigenous Services Canada, Nominal Roll, 2021-22. Self Government student number are from 2019-20. Student numbers from MK, AES, and the Cree School Board are included

## High-School Attainment

- Measuring First Nations graduation rates from coast-to-coast-to-coast provides examples of both exemplary First Nations led education systems but even more that are seeking to assert control and address the impacts of colonization and poor government supports. Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (MK), which represents 12 of the 13 Mi'kmaw communities in Nova Scotia through an education self-government agreement, is an example of a leader in First Nations and non-Indigenous high school attainment with a consistent 90% average graduation rate.
- Since the implementation of REAs and as First Nations gain greater control over their education systems, First Nations on-reserve have seen improvements in high school attainment. According to the 2021 Census, in the past five years, there has been a 10% increase in high school attainment\* on-reserve since 2016. In addition, First Nations students living off reserve saw a 4% increase in high-school attainment since 2016.
- Despite these increases, when comparing high-school or equivalent attainment rates between First Nations young adults aged 20 to 24 living on-reserve (58%) and non-Indigenous Canadians (93%), a clear gap remains.

Figure 6: Highest level of education, certificate, diploma, or degree, First Nations with Registered or Treaty Indian Status, Non-Indigenous, On-Reserve, Off-Reserve, Age 20-24, 2006-2021



1. This chart includes individuals with a postsecondary certificate, diploma, degree.

Sources:

Statistics Canada, 2006 Census of Population, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 97-560-XCB2006032 & Catalogue no. 97-560-XCB2006038.  
 Statistics Canada, 2011 National Household Survey, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 99-012-X2011044 and Catalogue no. 99-012-X2011046.  
 Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-400-X2016264 and Catalogue no. 98-400-X2016243.  
 Statistics Canada, 2021. Highest level of education by Indigenous identity, Indigenous geography, and labour force status: Canada, provinces, and territories Table 98-10-0423-01.

\* Attainment refers to those who have reported having a high school diploma or equivalent within a specific age range and does not represent the graduation rate.



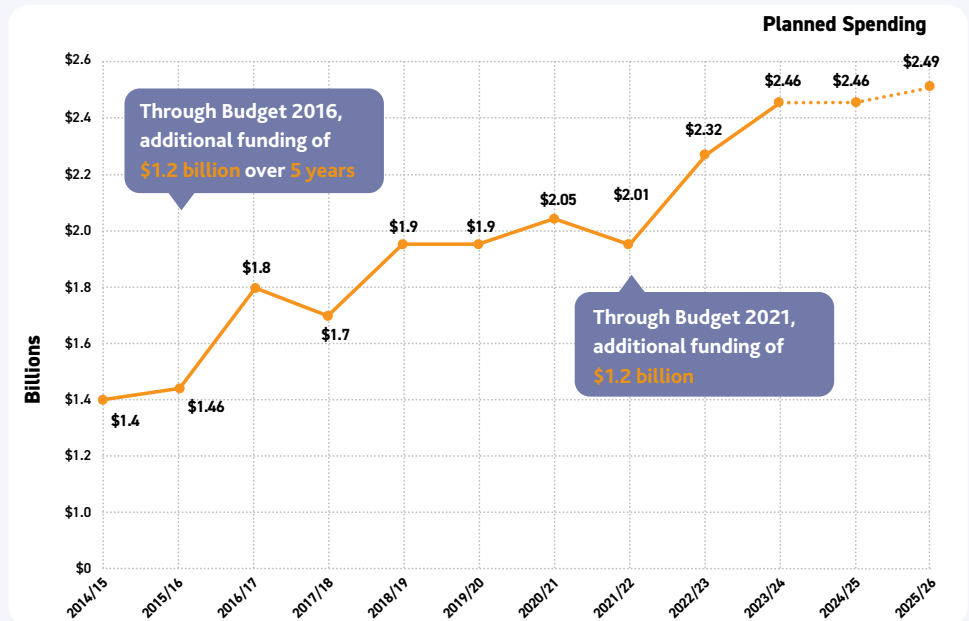
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## First Nations Elementary-Secondary Funding

- In 2016, the federal government lifted the 19-year 2% cap on First Nations funding, a limit Indigenous Services Canada placed on annual increases to First Nations' budgets.
- Since 2016, the federal government has increased investments in First Nations elementary secondary education by 60%.
- In 2023, \$780 million is required to conclude several pending Regional Education Agreements. In addition, it is anticipated that an additional \$168 million will be required to conclude multiple Regional Education Agreements nearing completion.
- The AFN is advocating for Indigenous Services Canada to invest **\$3.52 billion** in the next five years in First Nations kindergarten to Grade 12 Education to support First Nations to conclude several Regional Education Agreements based on their real education needs.

Figure 7: Indigenous Services Canada's Annual Investments and Planned Spending on First Nations Elementary and Secondary Educational Advancement



Source: The source of the data for 2014-2015 to 2021-2022 is [Public Accounts Canada](#).  
The source of the data for 2022-2023 to 2025-2026 is the [Indigenous Services Canada 2023-24 Departmental Plan](#).