

Assembly of First Nations

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SPECIAL CHIEFS ASSEMBLY
December 2-3-4, 2025, Ottawa, ON

Resolution no. 44/2025

TITLE: Restoring and Enhancing First Nations Elementary and Secondary Education Funding

SUBJECT: Education

MOVED BY: Chief Don Smoke, Dakota Plains First Nation, MB

SECONDED BY: Tyrone McNeil, Proxy, Sq'ewlets (Scowlitz) First Nation, BC

DECISION: Carried by consensus

WHEREAS:

A. The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UN Declaration) states:

- i. Article 4: Indigenous peoples, in exercising their right to self-determination, have the right to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to their internal and local affairs, as well as ways and means for financing their autonomous functions.
- ii. Article 14(1): Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.
- iii. Article 14(2): Indigenous individuals, particularly children, have the right to all levels and forms of education of the State without discrimination.
- iv. Article 14(3): States shall, in conjunction with Indigenous peoples, take effective measures, in order for Indigenous individuals, particularly children, including those living outside their communities, to have access, when possible, to an education in their own culture and provided in their own language.
- v. Article 19: States shall consult and cooperate in good faith with the Indigenous peoples concerned through their own representative institutions in order to obtain their free, prior and informed consent before adopting and implementing legislative or administrative measures that may affect them.

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- B.** Education is a fundamental human right. For First Nations, this right is uniquely situated within a framework of Inherent Rights that are constitutionally protected under Section 35 of the *Constitution Act, 1982*.
- C.** From 1996 to 2015, the federal government maintained a 2 percent (%) annual cap on the national funding formula for all programs and services for First Nations. This restrictive measure exacerbated the chronic underfunding of First Nations education systems, despite the rapid demographic growth of communities.
- D.** The decades of educational inequities have had lasting impacts on the socio-economic conditions of First Nations. Education remains a critical investment to close these historical gaps and stimulate economic development. Equitable access to education and training for First Nations would, according to the 2022 National Indigenous Peoples Economic Development Strategy, generate an additional \$8.5 billion in annual revenues and increase Canada's gross domestic product by \$27.7 billion annually, confirming that education is a lever for sustainable growth.
- E.** The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Call to Action #7 calls upon Canada to "develop with Aboriginal groups a joint strategy to eliminate educational and employment gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians."
- F.** The TRC Call to Action #8 calls upon Canada to "eliminate the discrepancy in federal education funding for First Nations children being educated on reserves and those First Nations children being educated off reserves."
- G.** The Government of Canada implemented First Nations K-12 Transformation in 2019 according to the principles outlined in the *Policy Proposal: Transforming First Nations Elementary and Secondary Education*, 2017, which was co-developed between the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) and the Government of Canada. The first phase was to implement the Interim Regional Funding Formula (IRFF), which ensured First Nations receive core funding for K-12 education on a similar cost basis as provincial schools, with adaptations. The second phase is for First Nations to negotiate Regional Education Agreements (REAs) based on their unique programming needs and designed to be flexible and responsive to communities' specific realities.
- H.** In accordance with AFN Resolution 65/2017, *New Interim Funding Approach for First Nations Education*, AFN Resolution 20/2021, *First Nations Control of Federal Funding* and, the *Policy Proposal: Transforming First Nations Elementary and Secondary Education*, 2017, the Government of Canada is required to work directly with First Nations to ensure that regional education funding approaches are agreed upon and reflect the diverse needs and circumstances of First Nations learners, schools, communities, and education organizations.
- I.** Since 2022, the Government of Canada has failed to allocate an adequate amount of money toward signing and implementing new REAs, resulting in a growing backlog of fully negotiated but unimplemented REAs. Consequently, only 10 REAs have been signed to date, while the Government of Canada had initially committed to signing 20 agreements by 2023.
- J.** Indigenous Services Canada's (ISC) ongoing inability to organize and sustain the REAs tables is further reflected by the withdrawal of 10 groups from the process of signing REAs and the disengagement of 29 others, underscoring the urgent need for renewed commitment and coordination from ISC.

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- K.** In nearly seven years, ISC has failed to take the necessary steps to update its IRFF to reflect a real needs-based funding approach, as demonstrated in signed REAs. This inaction has prevented the IRFF from meeting the unique needs of First Nations and achieving the minimum provincial comparability required to meaningfully improve First Nations education systems.
- L.** In July 2025, Prime Minister Carney announced plans to reduce departmental operational spending by up to 15 percent by 2029. The Government has committed that these reductions will not apply to provincial and territorial transfer payments, citing that transfer payments are necessary to support essential health, education, and child welfare services. However, despite their role in funding the same essential services for First Nations, ISC is set to face a 2% cut.
- M.** ISC communicated to First Nations that both funding protection for communities whose education budgets decreased post-Transformation and targeted ancillary student supports would be terminated immediately, weeks after the 2025-26 school year had already begun.
- N.** ISC has halted several REA negotiation tables after years of work.
- O.** These recent developments regarding education funding cuts directly affect the educational success of First Nations students and further exacerbates regional inequities by compromising equitable access to quality education for all First Nations youth, regardless of where they live.
- P.** The 2025 AFN *First Nations K-12 Education Transformation Review and Costing Analysis* demonstrates that existing funding enhancements to the IRFF underestimate the true costs of delivering education for First Nations by more than \$10,000 per student, with larger gaps in remote fly-in communities.
- Q.** The AFN 2025 Pre-Budget Submission identifies that an investment of \$4.23 billion is needed to implement REAs that meet the actual funding and program needs of First Nations education systems.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the First Nations-in-Assembly:

1. Reaffirm that jurisdiction over First Nations education remains with each First Nation.
2. Call on the Government of Canada to:
 - a. Support existing regional educational models/approaches;
 - b. Restore support for all Regional Education Agreements (REA) negotiation tables;
 - c. Provide the necessary funding to finalize and implement education agreements that reflect First Nations' unique circumstances and needs;
 - d. Ensure no further reductions are made to First Nations' education funding in subsequent years; and
 - e. Support needs-based models, including but not limited to funding approaches.
3. Call on the Government of Canada to maintain previous commitments for 'funding protection' policies, including the 1.5 percent annual reduction.

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4. Call on the Government of Canada to reinstate the targeted student ancillary support for all students at the \$500 (in 2021 dollars) per student funding level for the 2025-26 school year to help students access essential materials.
5. Call on the Government of Canada to continue working with regional technical tables to ensure the Interim Regional Funding Formulas are updated to capture the true costs of First Nations education.
6. Call on the Minister of Indigenous Services Canada to meet with the Chiefs Committee on Education to discuss and co-develop decision-making protocols by August 2026 on any changes to Indigenous Services Canada education program funding.
7. Affirm that nothing in this resolution is meant or shall be interpreted to diminish, limit, impact or supersede the ability of a First Nation or Region to exercise their inherent jurisdictions, to exercise and fulfill their rights and authorities under Treaties, or to engage in their unique relationship with Canada.
8. Call upon the Government of Canada to immediately revise and enhance the First Nations education funding formula to fully recognize and reflect the realities of remote and fly-in First Nations, including: significantly higher operational costs, northern transportation challenges, staffing shortages, specialized learning needs, and the urgent requirement for increased funding to support students living with disabilities, development syndrome, learning differences, and other special needs, and to provide sustained resources to hire qualified educational assistants, mental-health workers, therapists, and support staff necessary to ensure our students receive needs-based, sustainable, and adequate funding.

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