



Increasing the Effectiveness of Service Delivery to Mi'kmaw Learners

*Minister's Response to the Project Report on the
Mi'kmaq Services Division Dialogue Sessions*

February 2008

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Message from the Minister

Thank you to the many educators and administrators from the Mi'kmaq community who gave of their time and energy to participate in the Mi'kmaq Services Division Dialogue Sessions.

The Mi'kmaq Services Division was established in 1997 in response to the recommendation of the Task Force on Mi'kmaq Education. It is clear to me that the Mi'kmaq Services Division was instrumental in improving the department's service delivery to the community.

However, the Department of Education recognizes the need to respond to the changing needs of communities by continuing to evaluate and assess the way in which services are being provided.

The new division I plan to implement in response to the project report is designed to ensure that the Mi'kmaq community, as well as other Aboriginal Nova Scotians, will receive an improved level of service in all areas of education.

I ask that you continue to engage in dialogue with the department as these changes are implemented, so that we continue to increase our service level to Aboriginal learners in Nova Scotia.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Coosey'.

Karen Casey

Minister of Education

Introduction

Located within the Public Schools Branch, the Mi'kmaq Services Division (MSD) was established in 1997 in response to the recommendation of the Task Force on Mi'kmaq Education. The Task Force became the Council on Mi'kmaq Education (CME) in 1997 and continues to provide guidance and make recommendations to the Minister of Education.

In 2007, on the 10 year anniversary of the MSD, the department engaged a Mi'kmaq consultant, Theresa Meuse (now chief of Bear River First Nation), to conduct a review process with the Mi'kmaq community in Nova Scotia.

The review involved a consultation across the province through written responses and a series of regional dialogue sessions that included stake holders from the 13 Nova Scotia Bands, as well as other organizations including the Native Council of Nova Scotia and the Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre.

During the review process a proposal was submitted to the department by the Assembly of Nova Scotia Mi'kmaq Chiefs. This document proposed that the work of the entire division be relocated to Mi'kmaq Kina'matnewey (MK). The Department of Education services all Aboriginal people in the province including those who are members of non MK bands, those who live off reserve, and those who are members of other First Nations.

Therefore, this proposal will not be accepted in its entirety. However, the department recognizes the expertise in Mi'kmaq language curricula which exists at MK and plans to develop partnerships to better utilize that expertise.

Five key areas of concern were identified through the consultation process:

- Communication
- Structure
- Policy
- Service Delivery
- Curriculum

The following provides an overview of the direction that will be taken by the Department of Education in response to these five key areas. The Mi'kmaq Liaison Office (MLO) will be established and located within the Corporate Services Branch of the department as the service delivery body responsible for this new direction.

It is important to highlight that only with the continued dedication and support from The Council on Mi'kmaq Education and our Mi'kmaq education partners can we be successful in carrying out this new direction in service delivery.

COMMUNICATION

The department plans to ensure that all of its branches; Skills and Learning, Public Schools, and Higher Education, liaise with the new Mi'kmaq Liaison Office (MLO). In turn, the MLO will be mandated to serve as the conduit between these branches and the community through the Council on Mi'kmaq Education, The Tripartite Forum, and the MK Education Working Group.

The Council on Mi'kmaq Education (CME) will take an active part in the interview process for all positions of the MLO. Additionally the department will embark on legislative change to increase the membership of the CME to ensure greater representation.

Communication is not only important between the community and the department, but also among the department, schools, and post secondary learning institutions. Professional development, as well as other Mi'kmaq awareness initiatives, will be developed to this end.

STRUCTURE

The Mi'kmaq Liaison Office (MLO) will be part of the Corporate Services Branch, giving it a more global role in Mi'kmaq education matters. The Director will be part of the Senior Management Team at the department and will report to the Senior Executive Director of Corporate Services.

The MLO will be staffed adequately to address the direction of this new division. It is recognized that all positions will not necessarily need to be located within the MLO and may be located in other divisions of the department or other geographical areas of the province. Adequate space and support services will be provided to ensure the optimal operation of the office.

This new service delivery model will include the Director, a Student Services Consultant, and a Curriculum Consultant (the Curriculum Consultant will report jointly to the Director of the English Program Services Division and the Director of the Mi'kmaq Liaison Office). These three positions, along with a Secretary II to support the division, will be posted in 2008–2009.

Additionally there will be an Adult Education / Skills / Lifelong Learning Consultant position which will be staffed in 2009–2010.

The Department of Education, the Office of Aboriginal Affairs, and the Confederacy of Mainland Mi'kmaq will work jointly to develop a funding mechanism for the creation of a Mi'kmaq Cross Cultural Consultant.

Work on Mi'kmaq language curricula may be contracted out to the community at the discretion of the Director of English Program Services, the Director of the Mi'kmaq Liaison Office, and the Curriculum Consultant.

To ensure the Council on Mi'kmaq Education is properly supported, an administrative budget will be established for the council. This budget will be administered by the MLO.

POLICY

The Department of Education, in establishing the Mi'kmaq Liaison Office (MLO), will consider the recommendations from *A Treasured Past A Precious Future: A Heritage Strategy for Nova Scotia 2008–2013* (Nova Scotia Tourism, Culture and Heritage 2008), as they relate to Mi'kmaq Education, as well as recommendations from the 1993 Task Force on Mi'kmaq Education.

The Director of the MLO, while an employee of the Department of Education, will serve as an advocate, within the three branches of the department, for the needs of Aboriginal learners in the province of Nova Scotia.

Budget planning for the new division will be done each year after consultation with the Council on Mi'kmaq Education.

SERVICE DELIVERY

The Mi'kmaq Liaison Office (MLO) will identify gaps that currently exist for Mi'kmaq learners living both on and off reserve as well as other Aboriginal learners residing in the province. Enhancements will be developed to address those gaps.

The department, as part of the Learning for Life II strategy, conducted three Mi'kmaq Support Worker pilot projects throughout the province over the past three years. The Director of the MLO will engage in a review of these pilots and will, based on best practices identified in that review, develop a province wide Mi'kmaq Student Support Worker Network.

The MLO will co-ordinate professional development for teachers and administrators regarding Mi'kmaq infusion into the provincial curricula.

Through open discussion with Mi'kmaq Kina'matnewey (MK), the MLO will co-ordinate services to teachers and administrators within the MK school system.

Interfacing with the Higher Education, Public School, and Skills and Learning branches, efforts will be made to support Mi'kmaq and other Aboriginal learners in each of these areas.

CURRICULUM

The Department of Education acknowledges the importance of maintaining and enhancing the knowledge and use of the Mi'kmaq language in the province of Nova Scotia. The new Mi'kmaq Liaison Office (MLO) will explore ways to enhance opportunities for language instruction across the province. Part of this process will be the development of language curriculum and use of alternative teaching methods, including technological innovation.

In addition to language curricula, however, including Mi'kmaq content and perspective in the provincial curricula is a priority of the department. The Curriculum Consultant, who will report jointly to the Director of English Program Services and the Director of the MLO, will be mandated with developing initiatives to ensure this inclusion.

The department is also dedicated to finding and/or contracting the development of new texts and resources to support and enhance teaching in the above stated areas.

Conclusion

On August 8, 2007 Premier Rodney MacDonald, along with the other provincial Premiers, met with the Leaders of the five national Aboriginal organizations in Moncton, New Brunswick. At this meeting the Premiers reaffirmed their commitment to the principles and objectives set out at the November 2005 First Ministers' Meeting in Kelowna.

The Department of Education recognizes that one of the pre-eminent commitments of the Kelowna Meeting was closing the Aboriginal Education gap.

The development and implementation of the new Mi'kmaq Liaison Office demonstrates the provincial government's commitment to this goal. By continuing to work in partnership with the community, and under the advice of the Council on Mi'kmaq Education, the Department of Education will continue to improve on the services provided to Mi'kmaq and other Aboriginal learners in Nova Scotia.