

Provincial Advisory Council on Education (PACE)
February 16 & 17, 2019
2021 Brunswick Street (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development)
DRAFT Minutes (Subject to approval of Council Chair)

Mi'kmaq Acknowledgement

The meeting began by acknowledging that it is taking place in Mi'kma'ki traditional territory of the Mi'kmaq people.

Affirmation

The acknowledgment was followed by an affirmation.

Approval of the Agenda

Council approved the agenda (see <https://www.ednet.ns.ca/PACE/documents>).

Report on Adhoc Sub-committees

At the January meeting, PACE decided to form a sub-committee to provide advice related to programs and supports for students who have English as an additional language (EAL). Between the January and February meetings, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development staff shared information with PACE on the mandate of an existing EAL and French as an Additional Language (FAL) advisory work group, which is to develop and implement a provincial EAL and FAL strategy. Department staff will meet with PACE members prior to the next meeting to see how PACE can advise on the strategy, without duplicating the work of the existing advisory group.

Deputy's Round Table

Education and Early Childhood Development Deputy Minister Cathy Montreuil met with PACE to discuss the Minister's priorities, among which members may choose to advise on over the coming months:

- inclusive education policy
- framework for multiple systems of support for all students
- raising the bar for all students and closing the achievement gap
- the Public School Program
- safe and inclusive schools' policy
- system improvement and student success planning
- student assessment policy

She said all priorities are focused on supporting student achievement, well-being and equity. The deputy said inclusive education should not be confused with special education – inclusive education is for all students. Inclusive education will be the umbrella policy, with all other policies and initiatives aligning with it.

PACE members are also encouraged to identify regional educational issues. As one example, PACE is interested in advising on the continuing evaluation of the provincial attendance policy. They are also interested in learning more about the ongoing work with universities on changes to the teacher training programs. The deputy said that the student transportation policy would also come back to PACE before being finalized for a last check against any regional considerations.

The deputy said that other tables are also advising on the identified priorities, as the Minister is committed to hearing from a broad range of Nova Scotians interested or working in education. PACE's mandate is to provide regional perspectives on educational priorities that complement, not duplicate the role of other advisory councils, such as the Council on Mi'kmaq Education (CME), the Council on African Canadian Education (CACE), the Special Education Program and Services Committee, and the Council on Classroom Conditions.

Council Structure

The Minister has approved the PACE terms of reference (see <https://www.ednet.ns.ca/PACE/documents>).

PACE members also discussed the structure of individual meetings. PACE members appreciated receiving more information, well in advance of the meeting, of actions intended to support African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq learners. This allowed for more open discussion and questions and answers with presenters.

PACE members committed to continue to be actively engaged in planning agendas, and to receive advance information.

The deputy minister discussed the role that the new Common Services Bureau will play in supporting PACE. A major theme of the Dr. Avis Glaze's *Raise the Bar* report was how greater coherence and focus in education systems can support student achievement and well-being. The Common Services Bureau's purpose is to increase system coherence and focus, including providing support to PACE. That will include identifying and sharing evidence, including lived experience, that can inform PACE's work.

Actions:

- Ask the department to provide information on current activities that are intended to support student well-being. Available evidence should also be provided, as well as activities related to teacher education and ongoing professional development.
- Invite Education and Early Childhood Education Minister Zach Churchill to the May PACE meeting.

Members' Sharing

While PACE members are expected to advise on regional issues, they also asked for opportunity to share regional success stories. An experiential learning program at St. Mary's Bay Academy in Tri-County was raised as an example of how an innovative approach to curriculum can improve student engagement.

The program is run outdoors, where the students have built trails, conducted archaeological digs, grow food served in their cafeteria and learn about the land from Elders from the nearby Bear River First Nation. The program is linked to subjects across the curriculum, and promotes respectful relationships, adventurous learning, responsible citizenship, and personal growth and development.

Evidence is being gathered on how this program is making a difference in the student achievement and well-being.

Achievement Gap: African Canadian and Mi'kmaq Learners

An overview of actions and strategies to support African Canadian and Mi'kmaq learners was presented to PACE. Actions and strategies were in the areas of research, early years, system support and change, curriculum, school- and student-based support, scholarships, and community-based supports.

In discussing the information, both executive directors of the African Canadian and Mi'kmaq Services branches acknowledged that while a lot of activities are happening, the intended outcomes have not materialized. Both branches are new in the department as recommended by Dr. Avis Glaze (previously, African Canadian and Mi'kmaq Services were

divisions within a branch). The executive directors say their focus is to work with people in education, communities and advisory councils on how to focus the work to improve student achievement and well-being.

Existing reports like BLAC, Reality Check, and the Task Force on Mi'kmaq Education will be reviewed. A greater emphasis is also being placed on evidence, including data and lived experience from Elders and others. For example, data is being analysed along a host of variables – drilling deeper into achievement, self-identified, suspension, attendance, caseload, IPP, and graduation rates data. This will help identify trends, inform teaching, guide leadership practices, and bring about systemic change that, over time, will more effectively support the achievement and well-being among African Canadian and Mi'kmaq learners.

Information to come from the first provincial student survey focused on student well-being and learning skills, to be launched in spring, will also support this work.

Actions:

- Ask the department to provide the student survey questions to PACE for information.
- Ask the department to provide data on the number of students who identify as having shared African and Indigenous ancestry.

The executive directors stressed that the work is not expected to rest on their shoulders alone. It is the shared responsibility of all branches of the department, and people working in every aspect of education and in communities.

Advice to Minister:

- Recognizing that progress takes time, PACE should receive progress on goals for African Canadian and Mi'kmaq learners, based on evidence.
- When applications are made to the department for funding, require that the applicant include intended outcomes, supported by evidence that demonstrates progress of those outcomes.

Information on Mi'kmaq ways of being and knowing were also shared. Mi'kmaq core values, principles and philosophy of life tend to center around an understanding of spirituality and to connectedness of all of creation.

Advice to Minister:

- In consultation with the CME and CACE, explore the efficacy of the role of elders and knowledge keepers to assist with the spiritual well-being of Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotian students.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for April 12 and 13, 2019.