

PACE Meeting - May 28-29, 2020 – Virtual

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 acknowledgement was followed by an affirmation.

Approval of the Agenda

Council approved the agenda

Overview of Education Response to COVID-19

EECD provided an overview on the at-home learning period and the supports put in place to help students.

EECD started by giving the context behind the response. The onset of COVID-19 in March 2020 caused radical changes to our everyday life. The education system was no different. The response was clearly an emergency response, with swift changes to continue to support students continuing their studies from home. While school buildings closed, supports are still required.

EECD officials continue went through the details of the response; the learning continuity plan, additional supports, African Canadian and Mi'kmaw supports and other initiatives.

A learning continuity plan was created by quickly forming a committee, with union and administrator support. The guiding principles set out to ensure no student was disadvantaged by COVID-19 and that students who were set to progress or graduate did so. Actions to help students included no-tech, low-tech and high-tech solutions, including the Nova Scotia Learning Package (distributed through the Saltwire network), phone calls, and video conferencing.

Additional supports for students were also a significant area of focus. Virtual specialist support is being provided through a tele-education platform. In the first two weeks, 2500 meetings were held, including 1:1 counselling, transition meetings, and assessment reviews. These supports are helping our most vulnerable children, youth and families. Mental health supports through SchoolsPlus also mobilized and have been supporting families with accessing services, strategies to manage time at home and confidential support conversations.

African Canadian and Mi'kmaw Services have also taken on an important role in the response, particularly to help with student and staff well-being. Both branches at EECD created work

continuity plans to support Regional Coordinators and Student Support Workers in helping students. There has also been a focus on engaging community partners to find solutions to barriers faced by students and identify available supports. For example, helping with access to technology and learning packages.

With schools closed, students were also unable to access things they had relied on, like food programs and use of school supplies. In order to continue to provide some of these supports, EECD partnered to create a restaurant program in a few areas across the province with over 10,000 meals provided so far. Schools have also donated remaining food inventories from breakfast and lunch programs to local food banks and school supplies have been distributed to students in need through partnerships with local groups like Family Resource Centres.

With this context, EECD updated on planning discussions underway around reopening schools. Many scenarios are under discussion and EECD is in close contact with Public Health. The experiences and discussion about the responses outlined will help guide us.

Reflection and advice

A list of questions was provided to PACE to guide this discussion, the same approach is being used in schools to gather input from teachers. The questions were created to help gather input on the at-home learning period and how improvements could be made.

Each member shared experiences and feedback on the at-home learning period. Some additional advice was also provided following the meeting. The discussion was facilitated by senior officials at EECD, including officials who are being tasked with leading the reopening planning work, and will be considered during the planning process.

Several points were discussed.

It was recognized that the response was a crisis response with many things that have been working well and other aspects that need improvement.

There was general concern about vulnerable students and ensuring additional support is in place, especially those students who have no support system at home. In particular, there was concern that many of these students will have significant difficulty recovering from having missed so much time.

Access to technology needs to be considered to ensure stronger connections are made with students. There have been some good examples of this happening, but it could be much more widespread.

Communication was also highlighted as an area to focus on, with inconsistencies across the system. There was a feeling that parents were adapting but need more help, especially if students continue to learn from home in the Fall. It was suggested that some parents struggled

and could use more communication and support on how to help their child. For example, some parents had difficulty with the online tools and could benefit from tutorials. It was also suggested that parents could use help to create a consistent daily routine for their children.

Approval of Minutes

Council reviewed the minutes from the February 21-22, 2020 meeting and approved the minutes through email.