

Provincial Advisory Council on Education (PACE)
January 24 and 25, 2019
2021 Brunswick Street (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development)
DRAFT Minutes (Subject to approval of PACE Chair)

Mi'kmaq Acknowledgement

The meeting began by acknowledging that this meeting 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>) with one amendment, to have further discussion on how to structure the PACE meetings and build public understanding of PACE's role.

PACE's Role, Terms of Reference, Code of Conduct

Some members of the public do not have a clear understanding of the role of PACE. Because PACE was created following the elimination of English regional school boards, some people believe PACE is a replacement for those boards.

However, PACE was created as an advisory council, formed of volunteers. PACE is intended to operate like other advisory councils to the minister, without duplicating the work of those councils (Council on African Canadian Education and Council on Mi'kmaq Education, for example). PACE is not intended to replace existing boards. PACE is expected to provide regional perspectives to the Minister on provincial educational issues and initiatives.

PACE has now finalized its terms of reference. Once approved, PACE has asked that they be publicly shared.

While PACE members have appreciated the need to spend its first meetings discussing foundational information for key educational priorities, PACE wants more information (including presentations and research) shared well in advance of each meeting.

Actions:

- Forward the terms of reference to the Minister for approval. Once approved, post the terms of reference on the website and share with regions/Conseil scolaire acadien provincial and others interested in understanding the role of PACE.
- Communicate to the department that information needs to be shared at least a week in advance of meetings to give members time to prepare, and to free up more meeting time for questioning, group work and formulation of advice for the minister.

- Actively engage PACE members in planning the structure and content of upcoming meetings, including discussions in-between meetings.

Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is now foundational to the work of the entire Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, for all programs, policies and initiatives. As such, the Minister has asked PACE and other councils to advise him as the department moves forward in creating inclusive, responsive and equitable schools and classrooms.

The work is complex and multi-faceted. In preparing for the January meeting, PACE members read the *Students First* report, as well as other research.

The department also updated PACE on a request for proposals (RFP) issued to contract experts in developmental evaluations. Developmental evaluations are used to develop social change initiatives in complex or uncertain environments. This process facilitates real-time, or close to real-time, feedback to program staff as the work is unfolding, rather than waiting until the work is completed. The RFP has now closed, and submissions are being evaluated.

Within the meeting, department staff provided additional context around the recommendations within *Students First*, as well as highlights of Year 1 actions. Conversation focused on intended outcomes, potential challenges and the definition of inclusive education, which goes well beyond special education. Further, student success cannot be narrowly defined as academic achievement on standardized tests, but must consider students' learning (knowledge, skills and competencies), development (social, emotional, behavioural) and well-being (physical and mental). In short, a balance must be achieved between a student's academic success and well-being.

The table also discussed ways that the department and education system can more effectively collaborate to meet the needs of all students. Priorities include:

- greater diversity in our schools and on planning and policy teams
- leaders working regularly in schools and communities
- stronger connections with marginalized families
- effective communications
- trust and relationships
- interagency co-operation
- evaluation

Information was shared on the teams leading the work on the inclusive education policy and multi-tiered system of support (MTSS).

Action: Schedule time on the April agenda to review and advise on drafts of the inclusive education policy and multi-tiered system of support.

Agenda-Setting, Future Meetings

PACE members reiterated its request to receive more information in advance, to free up more meeting time for questioning, group work and formulation of advice for the minister during meeting time. To support this, PACE wants more structure in its meetings, a clearer articulation of priorities, and greater focus on the priorities as identified in the terms of reference, specifically priorities linked to:

- improving student achievement and well-being,
- closing the achievement gap so that learners from all backgrounds find success through education, and
- promoting and advancing policies, programs, and initiatives both pre- and post-implementation that (a) foster and grow an environment of equity for all learners and (b) advance inclusive education and support all learners in Nova Scotia

Based on data presented at previous meetings, as well as the priority above, PACE would like the next meeting to focus on raising the bar and closing the achievement gap for African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq learners. While this is part of the broader conversation and work on inclusion, the table would like some focused attention on the needs of these learners. PACE members highlighted recommendations that date back to the BLAC report and Task Force on Mi'kmaq Education that should be reviewed.

Beyond inclusive education, PACE would like the Minister to identify his priorities for the table to advise on. Members would also like a fair process for them to identify priorities. For example, PACE is forming an ad hoc committee to provide advice related to programs and supports for students who have English as an additional language. PACE also wants to ensure that the activities of the Early Years branch are shared and considered, along with those from public schools.

Actions:

- Work closely with PACE members on the February agenda, based, in part, on information from the department on current activities under way, informed by evidence, that are targeted at closing the achievement gap for Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotian learners. Consider involving people working on school-based initiatives in the agenda (e.g., the math initiative at Auburn High).
- Ask the deputy or minister to identify specific areas of focus for PACE to advise on.
- Share information, following the meeting, with PACE members on work under way to develop a strategy to support students with English or French as additional languages. Call for PACE volunteers to form an ad hoc committee to speak with the advisory committee developing the strategy, and inform next steps.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for February 16 and 17, 2019.