

Indigenous Education Circle (IEC) Minutes  
Wednesday, June 18, 2025 | 1:00 – 3:00 PM  
In person – Almaguin Highland/Teams

**Present:**

Melanie Gray, Superintendent, Teaching and Learning  
Amanda Mathias, Indigenous Lead  
Louise Sargent, NNDSB Trustee  
Ashley St. Pierre, Indigenous Trustee & Director of Education - Moose Deer Point First Nation  
Lois Lambert, Director of Education, Dokis First Nation  
Mike Kalfus, Education Counsellor, Wasauksing First Nation  
Noodinong-Bemosed Christianson, Biidaaban Community Service-Learning Officer Nipissing University  
Daniel Stevens, Director of Education - Nipissing First Nation  
Chris Walkling, Principal K-12 SAWB  
Lisa Lamoureux, Principal of Student Well-being, and Equity  
Kelly Nootchtai Huston, Indigenous Teacher Lead  
Emily Couchie, Indigenous Student Success Manager, Nipissing University  
Heidi McMillan, Executive Assistant

**Regrets:**

Genevieve Solomon Dubois, Henvey Inlet First Nation  
Géraldeana Goulais, Nipissing First Nation  
Cheryl Partridge, Wasauksing First Nation  
Dave McDougall, Wasauksing First Nation  
Joanne Groulx, Mattawa Metis Council  
Lynn Mongrain, Temagami First Nation  
Sherrill Judge, Shawanaga First Nation  
Rose Jawbone, Kebaowek First Nation  
Jennifer Ford, Nijjcs  
Carol Stevens, Magnetawan First Nation  
Riley Trudeau, Indigenous Student Trustee  
Chantal Larocque, Anishnabek Police  
Lauree Pizzale, Executive Director North Bay Indigenous Hub  
Delores McKay, Parry Sound Friendship Centre  
Sarah Julian, Director First Peoples' Centre Canadore College  
Heather Howald, Principal Parry Sound High

**Welcome**

**a) Land Acknowledgement by Superintendent Gray**

**b) Opening Circle**

The meeting was called to order at 10:20 a.m., opening with a circle that emphasized connection, purpose, and shared responsibility among members.

**c) Approval of Agenda**

*Motioned by Daniel Stevens, seconded by Mike Kaulfus. Carried.*

**d) Approval of the Minutes of the January 22, 2025 meeting:**

*Motioned by Mike Kaulfus, seconded by Trustee Sargent. Carried.*

**Indigenous Student Trustee Report - Riley Trudeau**

- Not in attendance

### 3. Trustee Report

- There were two trustee resignations this month. Appreciation was expressed for their service. Trustees are preparing for passing the upcoming budget and managing graduation season responsibilities.

### Community Reports

#### MDPFN

- reported on summer student employment placements, an ice cream truck initiative, and upcoming graduations with two students graduating from Gr. 8 and two from secondary school

#### NFN

- Shared successes including 26 Grade 12 graduates this year along with a large group of Grade 8 graduates. Returning community professionals include one lawyer and two doctors.
- Due to existing bus routes operating at 97% capacity, plans are underway to introduce a new route to better accommodate student transportation needs.
- A pilot project funded by the national food program has been approved for the upcoming year. The community has reached out to school boards to allow students to participate in the food program without families being billed directly, as reimbursement to parents can be complex.
- Planning is also underway to boost enrollment in summer programs for students entering Grades 1 to 5. A targeted mail-out for NNDSB students is being considered to improve communication and outreach.
- Additionally, there are plans to expand the education office, which may cause some temporary service disruptions during construction. The goal is to begin this work in August.

#### DFN

- held its third annual fashion show, where students showcased their creativity by beading their own hats and ribbon skirts.
- An awards night took place, celebrating the achievements of two Grade 12 graduates and eight Grade 8 graduates.
- The community has been engaging students through field trips and is actively planning upcoming summer programming, including the *Summer Circle of Friends*.
- Recruitment efforts are also underway to hire additional bus drivers for the next school year.

#### WFN

- The recent PSH powwow, supported by the NF Fund, was a tremendous success—thanks in large part to the strong leadership and support from Amanda and Kelly. The event had incredible energy and offered students a much-needed opportunity for healing following a significant loss in the community.
- Collaboration with the Principal of PSH on the development of the new "super school" has been very positive, with proactive and supportive engagement. A recent experience involving safe schools was handled exceptionally well by Principal Samuel, who ensured that both students and parents felt genuinely heard. While there are still some disparities, her fair and thoughtful approach has been commendable.
- Six students from WFN will be graduating from PSH this year. The community is also continuing its summer job program to provide employment opportunities for all students within the First Nation.
- Although the NG Fund will not be offered next year, applications have been submitted for alternative funding opportunities, including *Keep the Momentum* and *Hear Our Voices*. Elders are actively engaged in ongoing discussions to identify meaningful ways to move forward.

#### Nipissing U

- Celebrated recent convocation and graduation events. Leadership transitions are underway, and summer is being used for fall planning and building partnerships.

### Director/Superintendent Report – Superintendent Gray

- Recognition was given to Amanda and Kelly for their outstanding leadership and dedication and expressed appreciation for being part of the learning they fostered.
- The board hosted nine powwows this year, noted as respectful, inclusive events.
- Gratitude was expressed to staff for organizing the powwows and to the communities who attended and supported them.

- Community collaboration continues through various grants and initiatives. SO Gray highlighted impactful classroom experiences such as rawhide rattle making in Indigenous language classes and emphasized the importance of cultural learning and expressed gratitude to the holders of the grants.
- Concerns about sustainability were raised. Leaders stressed the importance of a framework to maintain initiatives when champions move on. The goal is to embed Indigenous cultural practices into everyday school experiences. Increased involvement of non-Indigenous staff is seen as essential for long-term impact.
- Participants expressed appreciation for how schools are adapting and embracing Indigenous initiatives, with leadership from principals and pride shown by students.
- There was a shared concern about ensuring sustainability beyond individual champions—highlighting the need for a strong, systemic framework so efforts continue even with staff changes.
- The importance of involving more non-Indigenous educators was emphasized, making cultural learning accessible and ongoing.
- It was also noted that the responsibility of advancing this work should not fall on just a few individuals but be shared broadly across the system to ensure longevity and meaningful integration.

## **Indigenous Education Team Update (review of 2024-25 BAP initiatives)**

### **Student Achievement and Preparing Students for the Future**

- The Indigenous Education Team outlined ongoing initiatives and events, including graduation celebrations, the expansion of Indigenous student centres, Ojibwe language programs, youth mentorship recognition, and the continued implementation of the *Seven Stones* Alternative Secondary School Program (ASSP). These initiatives are guided by student feedback and aim to shape responsive and reflective educational practices.

### **BAP Priorities**

Key focus areas of the Board Action Plan include:

- Student achievement and future readiness
- Indigenous language revitalization
- Land-based learning opportunities
- Engagement and collaboration with Indigenous partners, communities, and organizations
- Expanding awareness and knowledge of Indigenous history, perspectives, contributions, and ways of knowing
- Culturally responsive well-being supports

### **Reflections from the Group**

- Daniel emphasized the need for systemic healing before true achievement can occur. He challenged the tendency to focus on outdated educational content and urged for a more progressive, reflective approach to teaching.
- Mike highlighted that much of the current work is foundational, especially for students unfamiliar with Indigenous culture. Daily efforts are helping build cultural identity and academic strength.
- Principal Walkling and Lamoureux noted the importance of recognizing student voices and transitions year-after-year, emphasizing a focus on present-day support as students navigate complex decisions.

## **Graduation Coaches and Student Success Supports**

Indigenous Graduation Coaches play a crucial role in academic success. Their responsibilities include:

- Academic support and progress monitoring
- Coordination with teachers and tutoring services
- Career and post-secondary planning (e.g., campus tours and fairs)
- Cultural engagement with elders and partners
- Family and community connections
- Youth leadership development through initiatives like the Indigenous Youth Circle
- Currently, there are Seven Indigenous Graduation Coaches, with plans to expand to 7.5 positions next year. Coaches have strong working relationships with Amanda and Kelly and are seen as a key part of the student success strategy.

## **Indigenous Language Revitalization**

- Ninaatigoons is leading professional development sessions to support Indigenous language revitalization, including one four-day and two two-day workshops for language teams.

- This initiative is a collaborative effort between NNDSB and the Nipissing-Parry Sound Catholic Board, with shared costs and grant support from Dokis First Nation.
- Key initiatives include the Ninaatigoons Learning project (a partnership with Dokis and KEB) and ongoing collaboration with Anishnaabemowin Teg. These efforts have resulted in new teaching resources, materials, and the involvement of youth mentors to support language learning and long-term sustainability.

### **Land-Based Learning**

- Land-Based Learning opportunities have expanded significantly, now reaching students in Grades 4–12 across 10 schools.
- This growth is supported by continued professional development for educators, as well as recruitment and retention strategies in partnership with Nipissing University, including promotion of Indigenous Education Programs (IEP) to students.
- Blended learning models are also being utilized, with access to online Ojibwe resources and virtual Cree language sessions helping to extend cultural learning opportunities.
- Additionally, Indigenous youth mentors—funded through language revitalization grants—are supporting succession planning and leadership development within schools.
- Land-based learning continues to grow with the introduction of cultural camps, increased curriculum integration, and stronger community collaboration.
- Activities such as hide scraping, maple syrup tapping, and trapping provide authentic learning opportunities. Programs like Indigenous games in physical education classes have proven highly engaging and are being planned again with stronger curriculum connections.

### **Engagement and Collaboration with local Indigenous Partners, Communities and Organizations**

- Efforts to strengthen partnerships continue through participation in FNAC, IEC, the "Seven Stones" initiative (IFC ASSP), and work with knowledge keepers.
- Challenges remain in engaging partners consistently due to time constraints and access to culturally grounded frameworks.
- Discussions emphasized the need for shared priorities and benefits through funding and grant initiatives.

### **Culturally Responsive Well-Being Supports**

- The Mentorship Program supports Indigenous educators and encourages youth engagement through connections with Nipissing University.
- Mentors, particularly in northern communities with limited language programming, play a vital role and are in high demand.
- All mentors currently supporting the board are NNDSB alumni.

### **Student Voice and Leadership**

- The Indigenous Youth Circle (IYC) meets monthly, led by Indigenous Student Trustee Riley Trudeau. A retreat held June 5 at Nipissing University provided students a platform to express experiences and needs. Students emphasized the importance of graduation coaches, safe spaces, and mental health supports.
- Students also expressed a preference for hands-on, flexible learning, visual tools, and one-on-one supports to enhance success.

Key concerns raised included:

- The need for recognition of experiential learning (e.g., cultural activities) in academic settings.
- A desire for more influence in curriculum and school decision-making.
- Ongoing experiences of racism and discrimination, with a call for stronger, more confident responses from staff.

### **Discrimination and Staff Capacity**

- Concerns were raised about staff hesitancy to respond to discriminatory incidents. A lack of confidence—not competence—was cited as the main barrier. Suggestions included:
- Building confidence through professional development.
- Using tools like "*Call In/Call Out*".
- Ensuring a restorative, not punitive, approach.
- Training all staff—not just Indigenous staff—to respond effectively.

- The importance of equipping all adults in schools with the tools to confidently and appropriately address discrimination, fostering safer and more inclusive environments for Indigenous students was stressed.

### **Engagement and Collaboration with local Indigenous Partners, Communities and Organizations**

- Improving/Expanding Knowledge of all Students and Educators on Indigenous History, Perspectives Contributions and Ways of Knowing
- How we can build collaborative relationships, collective benefit and how to grow in a positive way.
- FNAC, IEC, Community Partnerships, Knowledge keepers in schools' initiatives, IFC (ASSP) "Seven Stones"

### **Board Action Plan BAP – Engagement and Consultation Activities**

Improving/Expanding Knowledge of Students and Educators on Indigenous History, Perspectives, Contributions and Ways of Knowing.

- **Curriculum Development:**
  - *NBE3 Course:* Ted Nolan visited WFSS, Nbsiing, and Seven Stones to support understanding of contemporary First Nations, Métis, and Inuit perspectives. Offered both in-person and virtually.
  - *Grade 9 De-streaming Projects:* Focused on Science, Math, and English curriculum.
  - *Primary & Junior Math:* Dr. Ruth Beatty's work on decolonizing math through cultural learning. Grade 4's used beading (bracelets/keychains) to explore math patterns, totals, and problem-solving before starting loom work.
- **Learning and Innovation Fund for Teachers (LIFT):**
  - **Project 1 – White Woods PS:** "Welcome the Path" with George Couchie. Focused on reviewing Indigenous curriculum resources to ensure cultural safety (distinguishing appreciation vs. appropriation). Teachers requested vetted materials to responsibly include more Indigenous content.
  - **Project 2 – PS Intermediate:** Based on *The Power of Story Book*. Involved 8 intermediate teachers in professional development to address historical and contemporary narratives. Continued into a full-day session and will extend into the next school year.
- **Teacher Interest and Student Engagement:**
  - Educators increasingly request resources; students seek experiential learning.
  - Intentions to support lead teachers and expand culturally responsive classroom practices.
- **Indigenous Studies Course Enrolment:**
  - Growth in courses that offer English credit through Indigenous authors and storytelling.

### **Culturally Responsive Well-Being Supports**

- **Indigenous Student Transition Support Worker:** Supporting Indigenous student well-being during key school transitions (e.g., to PS and North Bay).
- **Indigenous Mental Health Clinicians:**
  - *North Region:* 49 students accessed services
  - *West Region:* 32 students accessed services
  - *Top referral reasons:* Anxiety/panic, self-regulation challenges, peer relationships, and low mood/depression.
- **Community Engagement:**
  - Secondary school dinner event at Canadore College included advocacy and art sessions with Vanessa Brousseau, an Indigenous artist and educator. Well-received by students and staff.
- **Powwows:**
  - Held at **CSS, WFSS, PSH, NOR**—students in Grades 6–12 participated.
  - "Beginner powwows" introduced cultural protocols, dances, and storytelling for educational purposes.
  - *North Bay Powwow:* Focused on Grades 4–5 and alternative school students; held in partnership with other school boards. City of North Bay provided space free of charge.
- **NFN Powwow:** Attended for the third consecutive year through grant funding; several busloads of students participated.
- **PSH Powwow:** Included students in Indigenous language courses, community members, and feeder schools.
- **Mini Powwows:** Delivered at seven schools by youth mentors to continue cultural engagement.

- **Local School Celebrations:** Held at Mactier, Nobel, and Britt, including local elders and community knowledge sharing.
- **Leadership Support:**
  - Shout-out to Lisa Ross for leading west region cultural activities and planning for summer learning programs.
  - Mentors will continue programming into summer in both the west and north regions.
- **Student Response:**
  - High levels of joy and cultural pride observed, particularly among elementary students.

## **SYSTEM SUPPORTS:**

### **Shine a Light:**

- The Indigenous Graduation Coach program is recognized as being important and clearly supports student success.
- Relationships and engagement with community is important in K-12 education and post-secondary.

### **Reflect to grow and learn:**

- Punitive versus restorative approaches when dealing with students
- Disparate approaches by administrators creates disparity in student experiences.
- How might we work more collaboratively to support language revitalization?
- Human resources and staff recruitment/retention continue to be a challenge.

### **Reimagine what could be:**

- There exists an opportunity to learn about/adopt restorative circles.
- Developing common/best practices for administrators
- Co-constructing plans and tools related to antidiscrimination and/or anti-racism
- Addressing instances of discrimination through a culturally responsive lens
- Develop skills and tools that support staff in developing confidence in addressing discrimination.
- Communicate with FN/Families when there are issues of discrimination or racism. It will help to inform community response and supports for students.

**Next Meeting: TBD**

## **Closing Circle**

Meeting adjourned at 2:00 pm. *Motioned by Mike Kaulfus and seconded by Daniel Stevens.*