Near North District School Board

Indigenous Education Council (IEC) Minutes
Thursday, June 11, 2026 | 10:00 AM – 2:00 PM
Almaguin Highlands Secondary / TEAMS

Present:
Melanie Gray, Superintendent, Teaching and Learning
Amanda Mathias, Indigenous Lead
Kelly Nootchtai Huston, Indigenous Teacher Lead
Ashley St. Pierre, Director of Education - Moose Deer Point First Nation
Chris Walkling, Principal K-12 SAWB
Lisa Wabegijig, Regional Coordinator, KEB
Mike Kalfus, Education Counsellor, Wasauksing First Nation
Sylvia Rhee, Henvey Inlet
Heidi McMillan, Executive Assistant
Carly Renaud, Manager Indigenous Research and Development Canadore College (for Sarah Julian)
Lois Lambert, Director of Education, Dokis First Nation
Daniel Stevens, Director of Education - Nipissing First Nation

Regrets:
Delores McKay, Parry Sound Friendship Centre
Liz Simser, Acting Principal Parry Sound High
Chantal Larocque, Anishnabek Police
Lynn Mongrain, Temagami First Nation
Rose Jawbone, Kebaowek First Nation
Kathy Fortin, Director, NBIFC
Sherrill Judge, Shawanaga First Nation
Stephanie Bergman
Sarah Julian, Director First Peoples' Centre Canadore College
Emily Couchie, Indigenous Student Success Manager, Nipissing University
Riley Trudeau, IYC
Noodinong-Bemosed Christianson, Biidaaban Community Service-Learning Officer Nipissing University
Genevieve Solomon Dubois, Henvey Inlet First Nation
Geraldeana Goulais, Nipissing First Nation
Cheryl Partridge, Wasauksing First Nation
Lauree Pizzale, Executive Director North Bay Indigenous Hub
Onel Evangelista, Shawanaga First Nation
Carol Nesbitt, North Bay Metis Council
Carol Stevens, Magnetawan First Nation
Jay MacJanet, Director of Education
Lisa Lamoureux, Principal of Student Well-being, and Equity
Dave McDougall, Wasauksing First Nation

Welcome

a) Land Acknowledgement by Superintendent Melanie Gray

b) Opening Circle – Amanda Mathias

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c) Approval of Agenda
The June 11th agenda was approved by Mike Kalfus and seconded by Daniel Stevens.

d) Approval of the Minutes of the Feb 19, 2026 meeting:
The February 19th minutes were approved by Mike Kalfus and seconded by Carly Renaud.

IYC Update – Amanda and Kelly
A new Indigenous Youth Council (IYC) lead was successfully elected. The IYC retreat was held at Nipissing University and was co-created with students to ensure authentic voice, leadership development, and meaningful engagement. The retreat included an opening circle, structured opportunities for student feedback, and a variety of leadership and team-building activities facilitated by student alumni.

Evening programming provided opportunities for cultural engagement, music, and relationship building among participants. Students also stayed overnight in residence, further supporting connection and community building.

The second day of the retreat focused on post-secondary exposure and hands-on cultural learning. Activities included ash basket making and guided experiences to help students build connections with both Canadore College and Nipissing University. Students were able to gain familiarity with campus environments and begin building relationships in preparation for future transitions. The retreat was reported as highly successful, with strong student engagement, positive participation, and no incidents

Community Updates
Community and partner updates highlighted ongoing positive and strengthening relationships between schools and Indigenous communities. Feedback acknowledged strong school leadership and collaboration. Partnership work continues to focus on cultural programming, student success initiatives, and addressing anti-Indigenous racism through collaborative approaches.

Post-secondary partners shared updates on leadership changes and planning for the upcoming academic year, including Indigenous-focused orientation programming, mentorship opportunities, and recruitment efforts. Summer programming such as STEAM camps continues to provide experiential learning opportunities despite limited capacity.

Community-based education programming continues to evolve with a focus on transition supports, transportation challenges, and culturally responsive programming. Celebrations such as powwows, student showcases, and fashion shows reflect strong community engagement.

Wasausking First Nation shared positive updates regarding strengthened relationships with Parry Sound Highschool leadership. A joint application supporting a Seven Grandfathers-based initiative was submitted. Cultural materials remain under community ownership and require permission for sharing. A recent powwow demonstrated strong student engagement.

Canadore College shared updates including new leadership appointments and continued planning for the First Peoples' Centre. Orientation programming for Indigenous students, mentorship initiatives, and recruitment efforts are ongoing. STEAM programming continues with limited enrollment capacity and efforts to align with course credit pathways. Indigenous learning outcomes are being embedded across multiple program areas.

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Nipissing First Nation provided updates on policy development, identifying gaps and ongoing jurisdictional challenges. Enrollment is projected at approximately 160 students, with discussion of transportation changes and increased students returning to the community.

Moose Deer Point First Nation shared updates on summer programming, staffing supports, and ongoing program adjustments. Six post-secondary students are graduating, with new students receiving sponsorship. Transportation supports remain in place.

Dokis First Nation shared updates on upcoming events including a student fashion show and year-end celebration. Plans for a new school build with a licensed daycare remain on track.

KEB provided thanks for participation in the spring meeting and shared upcoming plans including educator recognition and an Elders gathering.

Superintendent Report – Melanie Gray
Recent powwows across the system were acknowledged for strong participation and organization. Appreciation was extended to staff and community partners supporting these events. One remaining powwow will take place in conjunction with a graduation ceremony.

Updates on the new school build included a walk away ceremony incorporating cultural practices such as a pipe ceremony, drumming, and smudging.

System leadership updates were shared including the arrival of a new Director and upcoming structural changes. A renewed focus will include curriculum, literacy, mathematics, special education, and Indigenous education. The Superintendent will continue to lead the Indigenous portfolio with support from the central team.

Indigenous Education Team Update
The Indigenous Education Board Action Plan continues to centre student voice and responsive practice. Student engagement sessions gathered feedback on learning preferences and barriers, identifying the importance of hands-on learning, pacing, and culturally relevant pedagogy. Students expressed a preference for in-person language learning and highlighted the importance of relationships and supportive learning environments.

Strategies to strengthen belonging include relationship building with staff, increased visibility of supports, and consistent engagement opportunities.

Effective practices were noted where Parry Sound Highschool staff actively engage in school activities to build trust and familiarity with students. Literacy initiatives include increased access to texts by Indigenous authors and balanced approaches to content that celebrate culture alongside historical context. Future work includes enhanced monitoring of student progress, expanded consultation opportunities, and increased awareness of available supports and pathways across the system.

Sharing of Indigenous Education Board Action Plan – The Indigenous Education Team
Ongoing data collection continues through reports focused on student access to supports such as graduation coaches. This information will inform system planning and be shared at a future meeting.

Niigaan Gdizhaami Fund

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Funding continues to support language priorities, community engagement, youth programming, cultural knowledge keepers, and development of culturally relevant resources across communities. Support also includes honorariums and materials aligned with Anishnaabemowin learning and cultural practices.

Pow Wow updates and spring celebrations
Powwows and celebrations were held across multiple schools throughout the spring. Events were well attended and reflect strong collaboration between schools, families, and communities. These gatherings continue to be an important component of cultural engagement within the system.

Grad coaches generated a report with student accessing centres and the role supported to individual learners. This report is ongoing and being collected with data available to the system and will be shared at our next meeting

Closing Circle
Closing reflections emphasized gratitude for the collaborative work of the council and the strength of partnerships across communities and organizations. Participants highlighted the importance of ongoing relationship building, shared learning, and breaking down silos to better support students.

There was recognition of the value of partnership approaches, including two-eyed seeing and shared responsibility in addressing challenges such as anti-Indigenous racism. Participants expressed confidence in continued collaboration and the positive direction of this work moving forward.

Appreciation was extended to the Indigenous Education Team for their leadership, commitment, and impact on student learning and well-being. Reflections also highlighted the importance of embedding culture within education and supporting students in building confidence, identity, and success as they transition beyond their home communities.

Community perspectives reinforced the role of schools in fostering belonging and maintaining strong connections with students and families. The importance of mentorship, role modelling, and creating safe and supportive environments was emphasized. Invitations for continued collaboration and participation in community events were shared.

Discussion also focused on future consultation approaches, including the use of surveys, meetings, sharing circles, and ongoing communication to ensure meaningful engagement and co-creation. The importance of clear communication and feedback on how input is reflected in planning was highlighted.

Next Meeting: TBD - October 2026

Adjournment motion to close by Mike Kalfus and seconded by Carly Renaud.

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