Near North District School Board

Indigenous Education Committee (IEC) Minutes
Tuesday, October 20, 2026 | 9:30 AM – 12:30 PM
Microsoft Teams Virtual Meeting

Present:
Melanie Gray, Superintendent of Teaching and Learning, NNDSB
Amanda Mathias, Indigenous Lead, NNDSB
Kelly Nootchtai Huston, Indigenous Teacher Lead, NNDSB
Jay MacJanet, CEO, CEDO NNDSB
Rebecca Bell, Ministry Appointed Supervisor for NNDSB
Stephanie Norrie, Executive Assistant, NNDSB
Natalie Cockerline, Marketingand Communications Officer, NNDSB
Daniel Stevens, Director of Education, Nipissing First Nation
Amanda Jones, Student Success Worker, Magnetawan First Nation
Laurie Payne, Principal and Director of Education
Lisa Wabegijig, Regional Coordinator, KEB
Mike Kalfus, Education Counsellor, Wasauksing First Nation
Sylvia Rhee, Administrative Assistant for Education Department, Henvey Inlet
Lukeisha Tomagatick, Indigenous Youth Lead, NNDSB
Lois Lambert, Director of Education, Dokis First Nation
Liz Simser, Principal of Parry Sound High School
Caroline LaBrecque, Elementary/Secondary Coordinator, Special Education Coordinator, Nipissing First Nation

Guests
Purveen Skinner, Director, The Critical Thinking Consortium

Regrets:
Ashley St. Pierre, Director of Education - Moose Deer Point First Nation
Dave McDougall, Wasauksing First Nation
Rose Jawbone, Kebaowek First Nation
Ricki-Lee Sheck, Nipissing University
Caitlin Johnston, Nipissing University
Emily Couchie, Indigenous Student Success Manager, Nipissing University
Millie Pawis, Henvey Inlet
Sherrill Judge, Shawanaga First Nation
Delores McKay, Parry Sound Friendship Centre
Tracey Pawis McCans, Parry Sound Friendship Centre
Stephanie Bergman
Sarah Julian, Director First Peoples' Centre Canadore College
Carly Renaud, Canadore College
Chantal Larocque, Anishnabek Police
Lynn Mongrain, Temagami First Nation
Kathy Fortin, Director, NBIFC

Welcome and Land Acknowledgement- Superintendent Melanie Gray

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Opening Circle

Approval of Agenda
The agenda was approved by Mike Kalfus and seconded by Daniel Stevens.

Approval of the Minutes of the June 11, 2026 meeting:

The June 11, 2026, minutes were approved by Daniel Stevens and seconded by Mike Kalfus.

Indigenous Committee Chair Report
Tabled to the next meeting

Community Reports

Amanda Jones, Student Success Worker, Magnetawan First Nation
- Amanda shared a positive update regarding her new Student Success role and visits to the new Parry Sound High School. She has been warmly welcomed by students and staff and is currently at the school approximately two days per week, building relationships and becoming further involved in the school community.

Daniel Stevens, Director of Education, Nipissing First Nation
- Daniel several updates from Nipissing First Nation, including work with the RPTA on dual-credit opportunities and collaboration with provincial school board partners regarding student attendance requirements and jurisdictional considerations. He also reported that changes to the busing model have resulted in efficiencies. He emphasized the importance of communicating any changes to school bell times to both the transportation organizers and communities, as changes can significantly affect routing across multiple schools and boards. The service agreement received over the summer is currently under legal review, with a goal of having it finalized by early January.

Mike Kalfus, Education Counsellor, Wasauksing First Nation
- Mike reported that the start of the school year has gone smoothly for Wasauksing students and that the space allocated to students at the new K-12 school is meeting their needs. Transportation between the community program at Canadore College and the high school bus loop is now working well. He also expressed enthusiasm about future planning related to the Niigan Gdizhaami Fund, which has received school board endorsement.

Sylvia Rhee, Administrative Assistant for Education Department, Henvey Inlet
- Sylvia shared that the post-secondary start-up period went well. Current projects include developing a fillable post-secondary education application form that can be submitted electronically and updating the secondary school policy. She also reported that a Children in Need special education proposal had been approved and acknowledged Chief and Council's support for special education.

Laurie Payne, Principal and Director of Education
- Laurie provided an update on the start of the school year and her work overseeing the school in Shawanaga First Nation. Laurie is continuing to focus on learning related to her portfolio and has also connected with students in Grades 7–12 attending Parry Sound High School. She has started to further her connections related to the new school.

Lois Lambert, Director of Education, Dokis First Nation
- Lois reported that things are going well in Dokis, with 27 students currently attending the community school. Work continues on the daycare addition attached to the school, although the project is approximately two months behind schedule.

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Lisa Wabegijig, Regional Coordinator, KEB

- Lisa provided an update on the fall regional meetings, noting that Region 3 had been completed and Region 2 was beginning, with two additional regional meetings to follow. Once the meetings are complete, a summary report will be prepared for EDU partners and shared with school boards. Planning is also underway for the annual Building a Pedagogy event scheduled for the end of January.

Indigenous Youth Circle (IYC) Student Report

The Indigenous Youth Circle met to share updates from our schools, celebrate successes, discuss upcoming opportunities, and identify areas where students would like additional support. Throughout the discussion, students highlighted the importance of cultural learning, community connections, and having spaces within schools where Indigenous students feel supported, welcomed, and heard.

School Updates

Chippewa
Students shared that Orange Shirt Day was recognized through morning announcements and the sale of orange shirts to help raise awareness about the legacy of residential schools. Planning is underway for the Walk for Wenjack on October 22, and students discussed a three-year vision that includes encouraging all schools to become Legacy Schools, creating a consistent Walk for Wenjack experience across the board, and committing to making the walk an annual event. Students are also looking forward to a Seal Skin Poppy Workshop on November 2.

West Ferris
Students reported that both women's and men's drumming groups continue to provide opportunities for cultural connection and learning. Students attended the Nipissing University Welcome Pow Wow and participated in a post-secondary fair, where 23 students explored future education pathways. Additional learning included Elder visits and hands-on experiences in the medicine garden, where students learned about traditional medicines. The school also participated in Every Child Matters Day activities and the Lee Park event on September 30. Upcoming opportunities include the Walk for Wenjack and a moose hide scraping workshop facilitated by Zach Beaudette.

Northern Secondary School
Students shared that they attended the Canadore Welcome Pow Wow and participated in Truth and Reconciliation Day learning, including a visit from Judy Couchie, a residential school survivor from Nipissing First Nation. Collaboration between the Indigenous Youth Circle and Student Activity Council helped support the Walk for Wenjack. Students also learned about Fall Walleye Netting through a visit in Nipissing First Nation and are looking forward to learning more about moose hide scraping through activities at West Ferris.

F.J. McElligott
Students reflected on Truth and Reconciliation Week, explaining that the school reviewed data from the previous year to help determine next steps in learning and growth. The school dedicated two full days to whole-school learning focused on Truth and Reconciliation.

Almaguin Highlands Secondary School

Students shared that they met with Christine Charette and created a display board for Orange Shirt Day. Several students also participated in the birch bark canoe build in Huntsville and are currently planning activities and learning opportunities for Treaty Week.

Parry Sound High School
Students shared that the recent transition into the new school building created some stress during exams but noted many positive developments. The school offers courses including Indigenous Arts, Ojibwe Language, and Indigenous Governance. Students highlighted the success of The Hive and The Nest, which provide support for Indigenous students from Grades 7 to 12. Students also participated in painting rocks and lining walkways with positive messages. Fashion students created Orange Shirts for September 30, and the school hosted an Orange Shirt Day assembly. Looking ahead, students are excited about upcoming experiences including a trip to Killbear Provincial Park, a visit to the ROM, and the continued construction of the Teaching Lodge.

Indigenous Education Team Updates
Students received updates from the Indigenous Education Team, including ongoing language revitalization initiatives, anti-Indigenous racism work, and discussions about the importance of student voice in decision-making. The team also shared updates about meetings with school staff and expressed excitement about continuing partnerships with Knowledge Keepers, Elders, artists, and community members. The IYC Gives Back initiative was deferred until the November meeting.

Speak Your Voice
Students participated in a discussion focused on what is going well in schools and where additional support would be helpful.

What's Going Well
Students identified several positive developments happening across schools:
Indigenous student spaces continue to provide welcoming and supportive environments.
Opportunities to attend and host events help students connect with culture, community, and one another.
Cultural activities and learning experiences continue to grow across schools.
Strong staffing within Indigenous Student Centres has increased support and accessibility for students.
Collaboration between Indigenous Youth Circle members and Student Activity Councils has strengthened student leadership and helped support events such as Truth and Reconciliation Week.

Areas Where Students Would Like More Support
Students also identified several areas where additional support could enhance their school experience:
More opportunities to spend time with school-based supports and staff.
Additional motivation, encouragement, and wellness supports throughout the school year.
Greater connection and engagement opportunities with daycare and younger learners.
Solutions to scheduling conflicts that make it difficult for students from intermediate grades and neighbouring schools to participate in activities together.
More frequent visits from Knowledge Keepers, particularly at F.J. McElligott, with a focus on Indigenous joy, cultural teachings, and traditional skills.

Looking Ahead
Students are excited about the continued growth of Indigenous student programming across the board. The sharing of cultural knowledge, land-based learning opportunities, language revitalization initiatives, and partnerships with Elders, artists, and Knowledge Keepers continue to create meaningful experiences for students. The Indigenous Youth Circle remains committed to amplifying student voice, supporting one another, and helping shape opportunities that strengthen Indigenous student success and well-being.

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Board Action Plan (BAP) Presentation

Amanda Mathias provided an overview of the Board Action Plan (BAP) and the role of the Indigenous Education Advisory Circle (IEC) in its ongoing development. She emphasized that the BAP is an evergreen document, built over several years through First Nation and Indigenous advisory recommendations, advocacy, and community input. Moving forward, the goal is to strengthen co-creation and consultation with First Nation and Indigenous communities so that community voices are reflected and amplified within the plan.

A future full-day meeting is proposed to allow for a more comprehensive review of the BAP, including finances, deferred revenues, staffing, priorities, and initiatives. Consultation may include community visits, individual conversations, regional meetings, virtual or in-person sessions, and may align with the Board's strategic planning process.

The group will also review the IEC Terms of Reference, including membership, meeting frequency and format, and opportunities to expand participation. Regional engagement will continue to recognize the differing priorities and needs of communities across the Board.

Amanda outlined the BAP's four key areas:

- Supporting students
- Supporting educators
- Engagement and awareness building
- Indigenous education/system planning

Current priorities include student achievement and well-being, Indigenous language revitalization, land-based learning, community engagement and collaboration, culturally responsive supports, staff learning, anti-Indigenous racism initiatives, Indigenous curriculum and studies, student support programs, and strategic planning.

Kelly Huston provided an update on Indigenous language revitalization, including professional learning for language teachers, development of classroom resources, collaborative learning opportunities, and efforts to increase awareness of Anishinaabemowin programming and pathways available to students. Work is also underway to gather student feedback about their experiences in language programs and strengthen connections among schools, families, communities, and language speakers.

The presentation concluded by highlighting the importance of student voice in guiding BAP priorities and system-level decisions. Feedback from Indigenous students has identified the value of Indigenous youth spaces, Graduation Coaches, and Student Support and Transition Workers. Students continue to identify mental health supports as an area of need, while also reporting positive experiences with school-based Indigenous spaces, events and opportunities, and a perceived decrease in incidents of racism. Student feedback continues to inform work related to anti-racism education, curriculum review, student experiences, and school-based decision-making.

Strategic Planning Process: Gathering Guidance and Feedback

Director Jay MacJanet introduced Purveen Skinner, Director with the Critical Thinking Consortium, and provided context regarding the development of the Board's new five-year Multi-Year Strategic Plan. He explained that the proposed approach will be more focused than previous planning models, with particular

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attention to Indigenous students and students receiving special education supports. The intent is to ensure the Board's responsibilities to Indigenous students, families, and communities are explicit and measurable, while providing students and community partners with a meaningful voice in defining what success should look and feel like.

Director Purveen Skinner outlined the Critical Thinking Consortium's proposed inquiry-based approach to developing the Multi-Year Strategic Plan. She explained that a focused strategic plan will establish a shared vision and direction, allow resources and professional learning to be more intentionally aligned, support fiscal responsibility, centre equity, and provide a framework for using data and evidence to assess impact.

Engagement with students, families, and staff will focus on three key areas:

- understanding the learner experience and the goals, skills, and attributes families want students to develop;
- identifying school experiences and practices that help support student learning; and
- identifying experiences or practices that may negatively affect or cause harm to the learning experience.

Purveen emphasized the importance of creating a safe and respectful environment for engagement, including confidentiality, sharing from personal experience, and providing participants with opportunities to think, discuss, and confirm that their perspectives have been accurately understood.

Family engagement sessions will use opening and closing circles, individual reflection, partner and group conversations, and opportunities to submit feedback electronically through QR codes or on paper. Participants will also be able to provide additional comments beyond the structured questions.

Feedback gathered through the engagement process will be analyzed by the Critical Thinking Consortium and used to inform preliminary findings and development of the Multi-Year Strategic Plan. Families may voluntarily provide their contact information if they wish to review the preliminary findings and confirm whether their perspectives have been accurately reflected.

Please see the attached document to further review the presentation that Director Purveen Skinner delivered.

Presentation Questions

Mike Kalfus asked what the overall vision is for hosting these events. He underscored the importance of trust when participating in this feedback forum and asked who would facilitate these meetings.

Director Jay MacJanet Jay MacJanet emphasized that engagement with First Nations will be relationship-based and responsive to each community's unique needs. Indigenous leads Amanda Mathias and Kelly Huston will accompany the Board on personal visits to each First Nation, recognizing that the engagement process may look different in each community. He acknowledged that conversations may surface difficult truths but stressed that hearing this feedback is necessary to create meaningful change. The Board intends to adapt its approach based on community needs and ensure that feedback is reflected in the strategic plan, particularly in areas that have not been adequately addressed in the past. He also expressed the importance of personally attending these meetings alongside Superintendent Gray and the Indigenous Leads.

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Mike Kalfus echoed his apprecition of the trust built by Kelly and Amanda in the community of Wasauksing and supports the idea of them facilitaing the circle.

Superintendent Melanie Gray has shared that Moose Deer Point has confirmed their meeting and noted that she would like to see these meetings scheduled as soon as possible.

Next Meeting: December 3, 2026

Amanda Mathais provided an overview of the Board Action Plan (BAP) reporting process and timelines. She noted that the first report is required in January, with further reporting in the spring and prior to the new school year. The Committee reviews new initiatives and provides input to ensure members are comfortable with the proposed direction before submission. The BAP requires signatures from the Committee Chair, Indigenous Education Lead, and Director, supporting transparency and shared accountability. To meet Ministry timelines, a meeting is required in late November or early December to allow sufficient time to compile and formalize the Committee's decisions. Additional meetings may be scheduled throughout the year as needed to address new initiatives or further regional discussions.

Closing Circle

Adjournment: Unanimous consent was reached to adjourn the meeting at 2:08 pm.

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