

the First Nation Education Commission

Prepared by Jennifer Wykes



FNEC

Mandate

FNEC was reinstated in April 2013 by resolution from the YFN Leadership.

FNEC provides technical support, advice and recommendations to the Yukon First Nations that are members of FNEC with respect to education matters relating to Yukon First Nation citizens and communities. Education matters include early childhood education, primary and secondary education, post-secondary education and employment training.

The Council of Yukon First Nations is represented on the commission and provides administrative and secretarial support to FNEC.

In 2014-15, FNEC's scope and mandate was expanded to include the provision of recommendations on culture and language programs and services at the central levels, including central organizations such as the Yukon Native Language Centre and the Department of Education that service Yukon First Nations in this area.

FNEC meetings 2014-15

Over the course of 2014, FNEC came together on:

- May 21-22, 2014
- June 17-19, 2014
- October 21-23, 2014
- January 12-13, 2015
- March 3, 2015

Current members and representatives

Elder Representative

- Mark Wedge

Carcross / Tagish First Nation

- Geraldine James
- Robin Lord

Champagne and Aishihik First Nations

- Paula Banks
- Vera Owlchild

First Nation of Na-Cho Nyak Dun

- Roberta Hager-Ball (co-chair)

Kluane First Nation

- Tosh Southwick (co-chair)
- Kluane Adamek

Liard First Nation

- Helen Loots

Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation

- Appointment required

Ross River Dena Council

- Appointment required

Selkirk First Nation

- Julia Joe

Ta'an Kwach'an Council

- Lynn Sparks
- Linnea Rudachyk

Teslin Tlingit Council

- James Smarch
- Robin Smarch

Tr'ondek Hwech'in First Nation

- Ashley Doiron
- Dexter MacRae

Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation

- Jeremy McCulloch

White River First Nation

- Appointment required

Council of Yukon First Nations

- Jennifer Wykes

FNEC:

- Provides technical support, advice and recommendations to YFN members of FNEC with respect to education matters;
- Works to implement the YFNs' authority with respect to education matters;
- Promotes collaboration amongst YFNs, governments and institutions with respect to education matters;
- Identifies areas of common interest and concerns to YFNs related to education, including programs, standards and measures;
- Facilitates the development and delivery of culturally-appropriate education systems, programs, services; and
- Promotes the development of internal capacity within YFNs relating to education matters.

The Commission works toward common and unified strategies and recommendations aimed at advancing YFN education across the spectrum of lifelong learning; improving YFN student learning outcomes and improving the involvement and engagement of YFN students, parents, families and communities in the school system.

In 2013, the Commission identified for itself the following priority areas and key issues:

- Language/culture revitalization (including curriculum and resources)
- Early childhood (parent empowerment)
- Teacher/administration - qualifications, hiring, certification, evaluation, cultural awareness
- Best legislative route for education – Education Act, Land Claims, Self-Government, Charter
- Streamlining committees
- Support for high school dropouts
- Capacity for educators (Pro D for teachers, co-expertise in content area)
- CELCs/ESWs/EOCs
- FN education policy, protocol, procedures
- Accountability for YFN education outcomes
- Information and data
- Equity for rural communities
- Grad rates/upgrading
- Attendance
- Financial resources auditing, identifying obligations and accountability
- Yukon Grant

These focus areas continued into 2014-15 and much headway was made over this past year.

In order for the commission to address the sheer number and complexity of issues, members participate and engage by way of subcommittees and assignments to particular projects and initiatives. In 2014-15 these initiatives included:

Gadzoosdaa Review * Yukon Literacy Strategy * Labour Market Strategy * Rural Equity Action Plan
Yukon First Nation Policy and Protocol * Joint Education Action Plan



Major Milestones

Yukon First Nation Engagement

Over 2014-15, FNEC met on several occasions with Public Schools Branch to discuss the restructuring of Yukon Education's boards and committees. Importantly, government sought FNEC's input into how Yukon First Nation engagement and consultation processes on education matters would occur within its proposed framework. As an outcome of these discussions, FNEC successfully negotiated the dissolution of Yukon First Nation Education Advisory Committee (YFN EAC) and the transfer of both its advisory functions and resources to FNEC. This means that FNEC has become the body and table to which Yukon Education will be seeking YFN engagement on education initiatives undertaken by the department. FNEC and CYFN are currently negotiating a 3-5 year contribution agreement to support long-term discussion, cooperation and engagement.

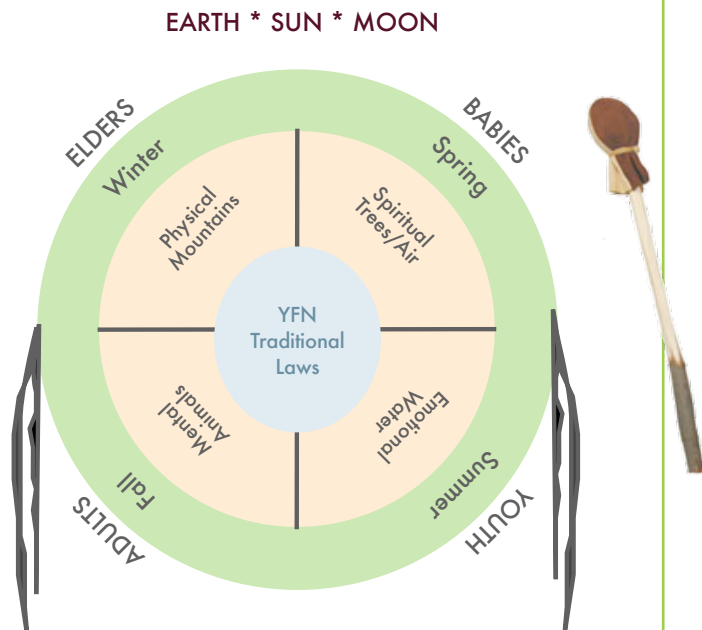


Yukon Education Engagement Pieces

Yukon Literacy Strategy

In 2013-14, as an outcome of the New Horizons Summit, Advanced Education began the development of a Yukon Literacy Strategy. The strategy called upon the participation of numerous community stakeholders and partners for its design. However, and with the exception of Kwanlin Dün First Nation, YFN representation on the literacy strategy working group was low. As such, the document evolved to have little reflection of YFN perspectives and aspirations in regards to literacy and therefore, had little relevancy.

At the same time, however, the Council of Yukon First Nations held a YFN Literacy Framework workshop. This was the first time First Nations people from across

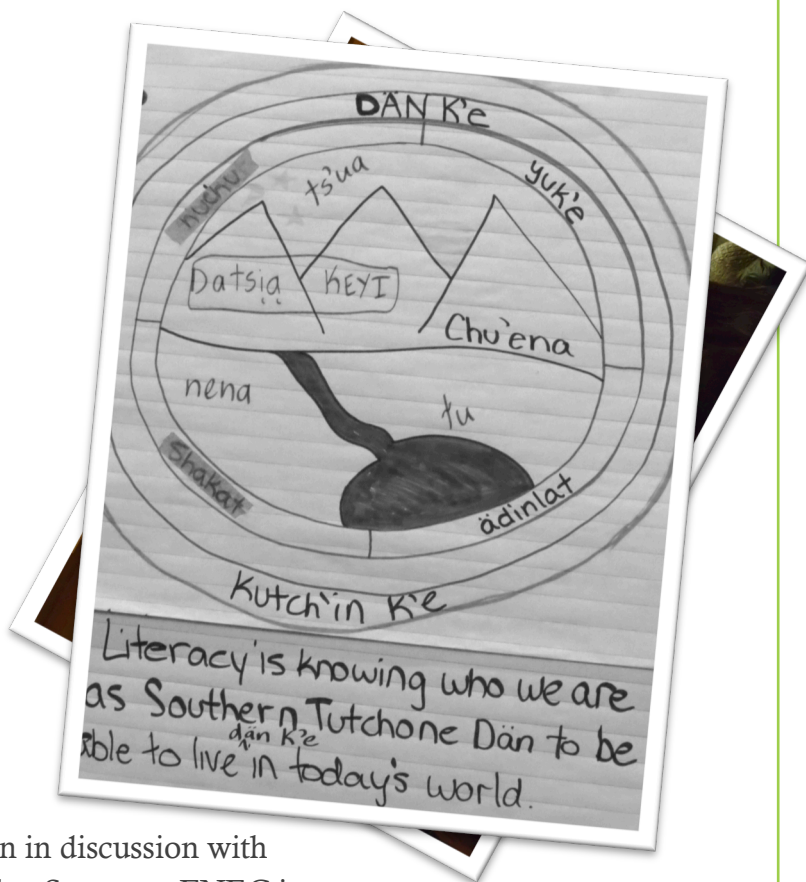


the territory came together to think about and discuss literacy and what it means to them. What participants came up with differed radically from the definition of literacy created by the Yukon Literacy Strategy working group. As FNEC Elder representative Mark Wedge expressed, *how does the ability to read the water factor into western concepts and definitions of literacy?*

Over 2014-15, FNEC used the outcomes of the YFN Literacy Framework to guide its discussion with Advanced Education and negotiate the incorporation of YFN perspectives of literacy and literacy needs into the Strategy. The document is in its final phases of review.

Yukon Labour Market Strategy

For the past couple of years, FNEC has also been in discussion with Advanced Education regarding the Labour Market Strategy. FNEC is working to include the incorporation of a fifth and independent pillar for YFNs within the Strategy to address the gap between labour shortages in the Yukon and employment and training needs of Yukon First Nation peoples.



FNEC presentation at the First Nation Education Steering Committee (FNEC) Conference, Vancouver, December 4-6 2014

Gadzoosdaa Student Residence Review

The Gadzoosdaa Review had decent YFN representation on the committee and the review is now complete. The review process and reporting was done in a way that reflects best practices: interviews were conducted with current and former students, parents and residence staff. Chiefs from four YFNs were invited to participate as well. Recommendations include improvements in communications, cultural relevancy, activities, support services, setting expectations etc. The full report is available at:

www.yesnet.gov.yk.ca/schools/gadzoosdaa/pdf/14-15/srr_gst_jan_15.pdf



Curriculum Redesign

This is a new and very progressive initiative currently being undertaken by Yukon Education and an opportunity for YFNs to become players in localizing old methods of teaching and contents of school curriculum. The initiative follows international shifts and involves veering away from *what students should know* (usually based on Eurocentric content and values) to *how students learn (competencies)*. This comes about with the understanding that information, including FN knowledge(s) is endless and what matters are the skills students need in order to learn. Yukon Education is seeking YFN engagement in advance of the redesign process.

This just in!

There have been some major staffing changes in Yukon Education in recent months and opportunities to engage and deepen relationships with the department have expanded. This is most evident with the recent invitation extended to FNEC and CYFN to participate in the hiring of the Assistant Deputy Minister position. This seemingly marks a new era in government-to-government partnerships as concerns education.

FNEC representatives are working with their Leaderships on responses to the Student Financial Assistance Act, currently under review. The consultation deadline is August, 31st 2015.



Joint Education Action Plan

There have been major recent breakthroughs regarding the Joint Education Action Plan (JEAP). Most importantly Yukon Government approved the action plan in October 2014 (following YFN Leadership in March 2014). Ever since then, a working group comprised of representatives from the three parties – Canada, Yukon Government and Yukon First Nations (CYFN and FNEC) – have been at the table developing an implementation strategy. FNEC has been reticent about sharing out the strategy until Yukon Government commits to the actions and the financial resources that will be the change for First Nation learners.

There is much to remain optimistic about, however, given the open lines of communication. FNEC is currently awaiting Yukon Government's launch of the *New Vision*, which, it is hoped, will be an affirmation of Yukon Government's commitment to, and prioritization of JEAP initiatives.



Key Focus Areas for 2015-16

A policy framework document was developed by a contractor under the direction of a FNEC subcommittee. This document supports JEAP priorities as concerns: culture and language; authority, control and responsibility; sustainability, supports and success; closing the education achievement gap and; data and student information. FNEC will be moving this policy framework forward and will be seeking Leadership's approval of the document in the near future.

FNEC will continue to advocate for YFN engagement on all education initiatives that have implications for First Nation students and learners across the spectrum of lifelong learning. Concerning the issue of engagement, FNEC and CYFN will be pursuing policies and protocols that determine processes for engagement and consultation. Importantly, FNEC and CYFN seeks to dialogue and engage with education initiatives, reviews, projects and programs prior to their initiation rather than being brought in at the end of a process for endorsement purposes. Policy and protocol will assist with rules of engagement.

Prepared for the First Nation Education Commission by:



TOGETHER TODAY... FOR OUR CHILDREN TOMORROW

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