



Building Bridges
toward
Cultural Understanding

Friday, November 30, 2007

Improving outcomes for

First Nations, Métis and Inuit students:

the journey continues together ...

What we know:

According to the data collected in June 2007 from the Voluntary Self-Identification Survey, we know that there are approximately **800 First Nation, Métis and Inuit students in Rainbow Schools**, including:

- **645 students**
who identify as First Nation
- **157 students**
who identify as Métis
- **4 students**
who identify as Inuit
- **34 students**
with some native ancestry

The Vision applies to all students

First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students in Ontario will have the knowledge, skills, and confidence they need to successfully complete their elementary and secondary education in order to pursue postsecondary education or training and/or to enter the workforce.

They will have the traditional and contemporary knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to be socially contributive, politically active, and economically prosperous citizens of the world.

All students in Ontario will have knowledge and appreciation of contemporary and traditional First Nation, Métis, and Inuit traditions, cultures, and perspectives.

*(First Nation, Métis and Inuit Policy Framework,
Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007)*

Introducing Kathy Ranney Principal: First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education



Kathy Ranney has been a teacher and administrator with the Rainbow District School Board for 14 years. Her enthusiasm, interest and support for Aboriginal learners have been an important part of her career even before joining the Board.

As a member of the Dokis First Nation, Kathy has always been connected and involved with Aboriginal students through her work. As a First Nations Career Officer with Canadore College, Kathy visited First Nation communities around Ontario and presented career education workshops to Aboriginal youth and Educational Counsellors. She also took part in career fairs where Aboriginal role models met with youth.

While she was a student at Laurentian University, Kathy completed Native Studies and Ojibwe language courses. She taught Ojibwe for Rainbow District School Board for three years.

In her new role, Kathy looks forward to using the knowledge and skills she has gained through her teaching and administrative experience to implement the First Nation, Métis and Inuit Policy Framework and ensure success for Aboriginal students in Rainbow Schools.

**Kathy Ranney's office is at Lively District Secondary School.
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Key messages

“The strategies outlined in this framework are based on a holistic and integrated approach to improving Aboriginal student outcomes.

The overriding issues affecting Aboriginal student achievement are a lack of awareness among teachers of the particular learning styles of Aboriginal students, and a lack of understanding within schools and school boards of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit cultures, histories, and perspectives.

Factors that contribute to student success include teaching strategies that are appropriate to Aboriginal learner needs, curriculum that reflects First Nation, Métis, and Inuit cultures and perspectives, effective counseling and outreach, and a school environment that encourages Aboriginal student and parent engagement. It is also important for educators to understand the First Nations perspective on the school system, which has been strongly affected by residential school experiences and has resulted in intergenerational mistrust of the education system.

It is essential that First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students are engaged and feel welcome in school, and that they see themselves and their cultures in the curriculum and the school community.

(First Nation, Métis and Inuit Policy Framework, Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007)

It starts with... **R E S P E C T**

By having high expectations for the Aboriginal student through honouring their culture, language and worldview in our schools.

This principle is central to the success of the Aboriginal student and has been reaffirmed through ongoing research (e.g., Bell, 2004; Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat & Curriculum Services Canada, 2006).

It is crucial that the Aboriginal student feel that they have a meaningful place in our schools. This can be achieved by ensuring that our own belief in the abilities of the Aboriginal student is great.

Educators can either make or break the school experience of the Aboriginal student. This is why it is so important that the Aboriginal student see themselves (history, origins, culture) in the classroom.

It is also key that these students know that their teachers care about them and have the highest regard for their learning.

Respect (in Ojibwe terms) means to know that we are sacred and that we have a place in this world. This is ‘how’ we need to foster and support our Aboriginal students.

The implications for practice and ‘what’ this means for the classroom can be found in the following applications:

- Aboriginal cultures are celebrated throughout the school program.
- The library has a broad range of Aboriginal books and resources.
- Teachers are encouraged (and supported) to incorporate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples throughout the curriculum.
- The uniqueness of Aboriginal cultures is taught as a minimum baseline (500 Nations and their contributions) before the end of Grade 8.
- The Aboriginal territory on which the school is located is acknowledged at the door. This can be represented by having a welcoming in the Aboriginal language of that land.
- These strategies are a beginning in showing respect for the Aboriginal peoples of the area. The Aboriginal student will feel that they are an integral part of the school. This ‘caring’ for their origins will be reinforced by the teacher’s belief that they can and will succeed.

Dr. Pam Toulouse’s article - Supporting Aboriginal Student Success: Self-Esteem and Identity, A Living Teachings Approach

What is Rainbow District School Board doing?

Rainbow District School Board continues to implement strategies and activities to ensure success for all students, including our First Nation, Métis and Inuit students.

Overview of strategies and activities:

- First Nation, Métis and Inuit education goals and strategies are included in the

Strategic Board Improvement Plan and School Improvement Plans.

- Two new **Ojibwe language teachers** have been hired.

- **Ojibwe language classes**

are being offered at Lively District Secondary School, Espanola High School, Little Current Public School, R.H. Murray Public School, Lansdowne Public School, Queen Elizabeth Public School and Wembley Public School.

- **Native Studies courses** are being offered at Lively District Secondary School, Lasalle Secondary School and Manitoulin Secondary School

- A team of administrators and teachers attended the **Circle of Light Conference**, a First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Conference being presented by the Ministry of Education.

- Members of the N'Swakomok Native Alternative School and a student from Lively District Secondary School were among the **speakers at the Circle of Light Conference.**

- A Métis **homework/tutoring club** will be offered at one public school.

- An **alternative report card** is being piloted in the first term at Queen Elizabeth Public School, Monetville Public School and Little Current Public School.

- Support is being provided to **conduct interviews** to reach out to our Aboriginal families.

- A **Principal of First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education** is providing system-wide leadership in this important area.

- **Support staff** has been hired to manage information for student achievement.

- An **Aboriginal centre** is being created at Lively District Secondary School that includes offices, classroom space and a drop-in lounge.

Current projects include:

- Follow up to the **Voluntary Self-Identification Survey** will ensure that all students have been reached.

- **Resource Kits** will be provided to every school to support teachers in the classroom as they develop their understanding of the Aboriginal culture and learner, embed cultural understanding in the curriculum and improve outcomes for First Nation, Métis and Inuit learners.

- **Aboriginal Student Mentorship Projects** will allow Aboriginal role models to be identified and mentors to provide support to students through school visits and career fairs.

- **Transition Projects** will focus on developing supports for Aboriginal students as they transfer from the reserve to Rainbow schools, from elementary to secondary school or from one school to another school within the Board.

- **Community Outreach Projects** will engage First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities to build partnerships with families to support Aboriginal student achievement.

- A **Guide for Staff** will be developed to support Rainbow District School Board employees as they continue building bridges toward cultural understanding.

- A **Reading Pilot** will be introduced in some Grade 1 classes, using leveled books featuring First Nation content.

- A **Key Contact** will be established for First Nation, Métis and Inuit initiatives in each school.

- A First Nation, Métis and Inuit **Working Committee** will be established.