

by

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As school leaders, our key responsibilities can include the introduction of new curriculum, the implementation of revised reporting standards or updated assessment practices, the articulation of updated policies, or the enactment of Ministerial Orders at the school level. In this work, we may recognize the impetus of a 'new' initiative which seems to become an accelerated priority. While updates can appear to be 'new' initiatives, many have been nurtured and developed for some time, and started as an idea far, far away from the classroom. One such example is the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Declaration Act), passed into law by the province of British Columbia in November 2019. The Declaration Act establishes the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) as the province's framework for reconciliation, as called for by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. Here is how UNDRIP is having a profound and important impact on BC's schools and classrooms.

Part One: UNDRIP - A Brief History

The Declaration was more than 25 years in the making. The idea originated in 1982 at a United Nations working group to address problems of discrimination

WHAT IS UNDRIP?

What Do I Need to Know, and How Does it Impact My Work?

faced by Indigenous peoples. After many years of hard work and consultation, the United Nations General Assembly passed the landmark resolution – the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) – on September 13, 2007. The Declaration "emphasizes the rights of Indigenous peoples to maintain and strengthen their own institutions, cultures and traditions, and to pursue their development in keeping with their own needs and aspirations." It "prohibits discrimination against Indigenous peoples," and it "promotes their full and effective participation in all matters that concern them and their right to remain distinct and to pursue their own visions of economic and social development."

Canada was one of four nations to initially vote against the resolution at the UN, alongside Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. However, all four countries reversed their original position and went on to support the UN Declaration.

In December 2015, the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission¹ confirmed the ratification of UNDRIP as one of its national Calls to Action in its final report.

The government of Canada pledged on June 21, 2017, to rename National Aboriginal Day² to be consistent with the terminology used by the Declaration.

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www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1450124405592/1529106060525

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On November 26, 2019, with the unanimous passage of the Declaration in the BC Legislature, BC was the first Canadian province to start bringing its legislation in alignment with UNDRIP by implementing the BC Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act. The ongoing implementation process is intended to propel reconciliation forward in BC. The provincial government has been working with the Assembly of First Nations³, First Nations Summit⁴, and Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs⁵, to employ and integrate UNDRIP principles.

On December 3, 2020, Bill C-15, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act⁶, was introduced to the House of Commons and

3 www.afn.ca/Home
 4 fns.bc.ca/
 5 www.ubcic.bc.ca
 6 www.laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/u-2.2/page-1.html

received royal assent on June 21, 2021, to become law. In doing so, Canada became the first of the four countries that originally voted against the resolution to now adopt UNDRIP.

On March 30, 2022, the Province of British Columbia released the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA) Action Plan⁷, developed in consultation with Indigenous peoples, including the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC)⁸, outlining 89 actions across all government ministries that will be undertaken over the next five years (2022-2027). The Action Plan has a number of actions specific to education that will directly impact the future of the BC education system.

7 www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/government/ministries-organizations/ministries/indigenous-relations-reconciliation/declaration_act_action_plan.pdf
 8 www.fnesc.ca

Part Two: K-12 Specific Items

BC Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act Action Plan: Summary of Education-Specific Actions⁹

Theme 1: Self-Determination and Inherent Right of Self-Government

1.6 Co-develop an approach to deliver on the BC Tripartite Education Agreement commitment, in which the Ministry of Education and Child Care and the First Nations Education Steering Committee will codevelop legislation that requires local education agreements (LEAs) with First Nations where a First Nation wants one, and that requires the application of the provincial LEA at the request of a First Nation. (*Ministry of Education and Child Care*)

1.7 Update the Bilateral Protocol agreement between the BC Ministry of Education and Child Care and the First Nation Education Steering Committee for relevancy, effectiveness, and consistency with the UN Declaration to support First Nation students in the K-12 education system. (*Ministry of Education and Child Care*)

Theme 3: Ending Indigenous-specific Racism and Discrimination

3.3 Conduct an external review of Indigenous-specific racism and discrimination in the provincial public education system, and create a strategy, including resources and supports, to address findings. (*Ministry of Education and Child Care*)

3.4 Implement a mandatory course or bundle of credits related to First Peoples as part of graduation requirements in B.C. and co-create culturally relevant provincial resources with Indigenous people for use by all educators across the K-12 education system. (*Ministry of Education and Child Care*)

⁹ These education-specific items are excerpted from the BC Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People Act Action Plan, March 30, 2022. The full document is available at <https://declaration.gov.bc.ca>

Theme 4: Social, Cultural, and Economic Well-being

4.1 Identify and undertake concrete measures to increase the literacy and numeracy achievement levels of Indigenous students at all levels of the K-12 education system, including the early years. *(Ministry of Education and Child Care)*

4.2 Develop and implement an effective recruitment and retention strategy to increase the number of Indigenous teachers in the K-12 public education system. *(Ministry of Education and Child Care, Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training)*

4.3 Co-develop and implement a framework for the involvement of Indigenous Education Councils in school district financial planning and reporting. *(Ministry of Education and Child Care)*

4.4 Identify, develop and implement mechanisms and approaches to enable boards of education to better support Indigenous students, including increasing and ensuring equitable access to education and safe environments. *(Ministry of Education and Child Care)*

4.29 Establish an Indigenous-led working group to develop a strategy for the revitalization of Indigenous languages in B.C., including potential legislative supports. *(Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, Ministry of Education and Child Care, Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training)*

4.30 Support Indigenous language revitalization through sustainable funding. *(Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation, Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Training)*

4.31 Develop full-course offerings in First Nation languages and implement the educational Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the K-12 education system. *(Ministry of Education and Child Care)*

4.32 Co-develop a K-12 First Nations Language Policy and associated implementation plan for the public education system with the First Nations Education Steering Committee, including ensuring that the language and culture of the local First Nation(s) on whose territory(ies) a board of education operates schools are the ones primarily reflected in any First Nations language and culture programs and services of the board. *(Ministry of Education and Child Care)*

The Declaration “emphasizes the rights of Indigenous peoples to maintain and strengthen their own institutions, cultures and traditions, and to pursue their development in keeping with their own needs and aspirations.” It “prohibits discrimination against Indigenous peoples,” and it “promotes their full and effective participation in all matters that concern them and their right to remain

Part Three: Current Priorities

In surveying the K-12 specific items, the reader can understand the current priorities for the Ministry of Education and Child Care and, by extension, for BC schools. Four main areas of focus emerge:

- 3.3 – an external review of Indigenous-specific racism and discrimination in the public education system
- 3.4 – implementation of a mandatory Indigenous-focused graduation requirement
- 4.1 – concrete measures to increase literacy and numeracy achievement levels of Indigenous students
- 4.2 – an effective recruitment and retention strategy to increase the number of Indigenous teachers in the K-12 system

While the education-specific action items present an ambitious agenda, we can recognize that for Indigenous communities, these are long-neglected priorities. From an idea that germinated 40 years ago at the United Nations, UNDRIP has blossomed into a reality for education in BC's schools. Beginning with the 2023-2024 school year, all students working towards a BC Dogwood Diploma will be required to complete four credits of Indigenous coursework to graduate¹⁰. (Find out more about the Indigenous-focused Graduation Requirement in this issue of *Principl(ed)*: "Advancing Reconciliation Through Education" by Melanie Stewart and Connor Morris.)

The K-12 specific agenda items will lead to transformative change for everyone in the BC education system. These are important steps toward lasting and meaningful reconciliation, and success for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

¹⁰ www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/support/indigenous-focused-graduation-requirements

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