



**Discussion Paper on Implementation of Multi-Year Action Plan
re: matters concerning Aboriginal and Indigenous Education**

October 2015

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NOTE: Please consult Appendix A for definitions of select terms used throughout the following executive summary and discussion paper.

Purpose

The purpose of this discussion paper is to outline several concepts, issues and principles that may serve to provide greater definition and direction toward the development and implementation of our multi-year action plan.

Key concepts

When developing the action plan, it will be important to recognize four key concepts:

- many Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples have their own aspirations for education
- all Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples exercise rights of self-governance and self-determination
- some Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples have guaranteed education rights under treaties
- we are all called to action in matters of truth and reconciliation

These key concepts mean that our association must consult and collaborate with Aboriginal and Indigenous organizations and partners. Our action plan should be co-constructed by our Aboriginal and Indigenous partners. We must exercise due deference to self-government and self-determination. We must acknowledge our collective and shared responsibility for the education of all Aboriginal and Indigenous youth who reside in our province.

Issues

There are many issues at stake in the development of our action plan, reflecting the long and difficult historical context of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations. It will be important for our association to understand and confront colonialism, including the loss and/or extinction of Aboriginal and Indigenous cultures, languages and identities. We must understand that, especially in matters relating to education, trust, transparency and vulnerability will always remain relationship issues that must be identified and redressed, before any meaningful planning and/or partnership can occur. Our multi-year action plan must become a vehicle for redressing the past by reclaiming that which has been lost and extinguished. It must affirm and confirm the human and cultural dignity of Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples and communities.

Guiding principles

It is also proposed that the following five guiding principles serve to inform our association when developing and implementing the action plan:

1. **appreciative inquiry:** an analytical framework for future strategy-development and action-focused change, appreciative inquiry invites partners and stakeholders to envision a better future. It serves to capitalize upon the collective dreams, visions and aspirations of a group or organization to create that future. It draws upon and focuses on strengths and opportunities, rather than deficits.
2. **collaboration and non-duplication:** by establishing a collaborative or “networked” action plan we can avoid duplicating our efforts. We can acknowledge and address our weaknesses by

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drawing upon the individual strengths of our partners. We can join in and celebrate shared successes through mutual efforts. We can also remain apprised of new developments within the educational environment, so that our action plan remains adaptive and responsive to emerging trends and opportunities

3. **consensus:** a traditional feature of all decision-making and other interpersonal communication processes as practiced by Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples is consensus, meaning that all voices and perspectives have equal value and are used to inform outcomes and results. The Aboriginal and Indigenous Education Action Planning Committee will operate according to this principle, whether in meeting, in producing documentation and reports or in moving forward with actions.
4. **cultural autonomy:** respect for cultural autonomy means that we must support and recapture Aboriginal and Indigenous vision and voice by decolonizing the planning process. This is achieved by acknowledging the values and interests of our Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples, that we strive for equality of voice and representation, that we recognize the right of Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples to define and protect their own cultural traditions and customs, and that we recognize the multi-layered relationship between the past, present and future and how this relationship impacts Indigenous identities.
5. **cultural competency and proficiency:** it is important to recognize that there are many Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples in Manitoba, each with their own rich educational, cultural, linguistic and spiritual identities. Cultural competency and proficiency means recognizing each person according to their specific traditions and customs. Accordingly, the definition of “who, what, where, when and how” typically involved in planning processes may need to vary, depending upon cultural contexts. It is also important to understand that there are many voices and visions within our Aboriginal and Indigenous communities. We must not generalize, oversimplify or reduce complex realities.
6. **Wholism:** at the individual level, means that everything we do must respect and acknowledge the whole person– body, mind and spirit. At the community level, the application of wholism has often been interpreted to mean that one cannot consider the enhancement of one of the community’s constituent parts, without also considering the enhancement of the whole. We must acknowledge the close relationships that exist between public education and other social, cultural and economic mandates.

Objectives and recommendations

One of the key features of the framework as approved by the executive and committee, in order to inform and maintain focus, are the establishment of independent goals and objectives to structure the action plan. Through these agreed-upon objectives we can effectively communicate what our action plan involves and is about. Activities, events and initiatives shall be grouped around these core objectives, while also being categorized by year, to chart progress and monitor implementation.

Our objectives include:

1. To expand board capacity and proficiency in Aboriginal and Indigenous matters.

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2. To enhance representation and voice of Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples in school governance.
3. To promote greater equity and justice through inclusive workplaces and organizational practices in the public school system.
4. To foster a culture of innovation and creativity for addressing Aboriginal and Indigenous student success.
5. To acknowledge truth and champion reconciliation in public education.

Please see the companion “Agendas” document for a comprehensive roadmap designed to inform each of these priorities.

NOTE:

Please consult Appendix A for definitions of select terms used throughout the following discussion paper.

I. PURPOSE OF THIS DISCUSSION PAPER

There is no greater or more sacred activity than the development and implementation of a strategy or action plan relating to Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples in Manitoba, particularly in the context of education.

As the Manitoba School Boards Association embarks on the development and implementation of a multi-year action plan for Aboriginal and Indigenous matters in public education, there are many concepts, points of view, background contexts, and issues that the association must recognize and understand, if such an action plan is to prove successful and be viewed as a positive contribution to the lives and well-being of Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples.

The purpose of this discussion paper is to outline several concepts, issues and principles that may serve to provide greater definition and direction toward the development and implementation of our multi-year action plan. The paper concludes with some thoughts and recommendations to start formal development of the action plan.

II. KEY CONCEPTS

1. Many Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples view education as integral to social, cultural and economic well-being for themselves, for their families, and for their communities.
 - a. In this respect, many Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples desire a public education system that *“affirms their own ways of knowing, cultural traditions and values. However, they also desire Western education that can equip them with the knowledge and skills they need to participate in Canadian society. First Nations, Inuit and Metis recognize that ‘two ways of knowing’ will foster the necessary conditions for nurturing healthy, sustainable communities”* (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007).
2. Aboriginal and Indigenous self-government and self-determination means that the ultimate authority for the education of Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples resides in the Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples themselves. Self-governing authority is independent and sovereign from any other authority (federal, provincial or local), that may be exercised by others in matters of education. Self-determination means that decision-making and choice are promoted and also remain free from any outside burdens, limitations or constraints. In this context, the institutions of election, voting and democracy— whether at the school board level or beyond— must be situated within the history and rights of Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples, relative to these institutions.
3. In the context of the treaties between Canada and First Nations, it is important to recognize that education rights were often included as a specific duty and obligation on the part of the settlers towards the First Peoples. In addition to treaty rights, it is important to be aware of the close relationships between the educational, constitutional and other human rights due to Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples. This includes rights outlined under:
 - a. the Canadian *Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (see sections 25 and 35).
<http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/const/page-15.html>

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- b. the United Nations' *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People*.
http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf
4. With the recent conclusion of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, we have been called to action. In terms of non-Aboriginal authorities and organizations with educational mandates, we must remove any distinction between the spirit and the letter of the calls to action. We must acknowledge that there is no difference between our association and those entities that have been specifically called into action. Though we may not be specifically named, we are called to focus on working toward a more equal, responsive and appropriate educational system, to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Indigenous youth and thereby achieve reconciliation.
 - a. Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: *Calls to Action*
http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/2015/Findings/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

It is intended that the above concepts will help to delineate appropriate roles, relationships and responsibilities, as we move forward with the development of our association's action plan.

What does this mean for MSBA? It is important that, where possible, our association consult and collaborate with Aboriginal and Indigenous organizations and partners to ensure that we do not appropriate roles and responsibilities that are not ours to assume or to exercise. For the same reason, it is equally important to ensure that our action plan be co-constructed by our Aboriginal and Indigenous partners. Where we do seek to make a positive difference and impact, it is paramount that this occur with due deference to self-government and self-determination and also according to our board members' jurisdiction. In this latter respect, we must embrace the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action by acknowledging our collective and shared responsibility for the education of all Aboriginal and Indigenous youth who reside in our province.

III. ISSUES

While it is important for our association to recognize the specific benefits, duties and obligations, and roles and responsibilities concerning public education for Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples, it is also equally important for our association to understand and confront the many centuries of colonial policy that have gradually resulted in the loss and/or extinction of Aboriginal and Indigenous cultures, languages and identities, along with the Traditional Knowledges and practices of Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples.

It will be important for our association to appreciate that discriminatory practice and treatment on the part of many non-Aboriginal authorities and organizations towards Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples, particularly in matters of education, means that trust, transparency and vulnerability will always remain relationship issues that must be identified and redressed, before any meaningful planning and/or partnership can occur.

Genuine reconciliation means a process whereby relationships are healed through "*public truth sharing, apology and commemoration that acknowledge and redress past harms*" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015).

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To this end, we must accept collective responsibility and develop a shared conscience for the variety of ways in which the loss of Aboriginal and Indigenous cultures, languages and identities has occurred.

Among these:

- a rigid interpretation of international law (in particular the laws of discovery and conquest, which have legalized the concept that in terms of settler and Aboriginal and Indigenous relationships, “might makes right”);
- attempts to extinguish entire Peoples (through intentional spreading of disease);
- the manner and means under which treaties were ratified (often with implied threat of force);
- the establishment of a reservation system (that served as the model for apartheid in South Africa);
- the forcible confinement and/or relocation of Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples into non-traditional communities;
- implementation of the Federal *Indian Act* (which usurped the self-governance and determination rights of Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples and fostered a culture of dependency).

In respect of education and youth in particular, the experience of Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples has been poignant and includes:

- the residential school experience (which aimed to eradicate culture, spirituality and language across generations of Aboriginal and Indigenous youth);
- the legal extinguishment of Aboriginal and Indigenous legal status through completion of formal education;
- the “60s scoop” (whereby thousands of youth were removed from Aboriginal and Indigenous parents, adopted by non-Aboriginal guardians, and educated in non-Aboriginal milieus);
- the 1969 Federal White Paper on Education (which, only 46 years ago, represented the last attempt by the Federal Government to formally extinguish the identity and rights of First Peoples through education).

What does this mean for MSBA? In light of this long history of broken relationships and unfair treatments toward Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples, it is important that all organizations be particularly aware and conscious before seeking to implement plans and strategies concerning matters relating to the education of Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples.

We must be aware that what may seem straightforward and borne of the best intentions may be fraught with obstacles and unintended interpretations. We must remain conscious of the very thin line between our own efforts to enhance outcomes and address the needs of Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples, while being certain to avoid ongoing colonialism and the substitution of our own aspirations, culture, values and language with those of the Peoples in whose cause we strive to serve. In these respects, many organizational strategies concerning education do not adequately include the due pause and sober account that are required before proceeding with planning.

In this respect, a multi-year action plan for Aboriginal and Indigenous matters in public education must be more than just a document or a “to do” in a list of strategic priorities. Through its initiatives and actions, it becomes a sacred tool. Situated within the above historical context, it must become a vehicle for redressing the past by reclaiming that which has been lost and extinguished. It must affirm and confirm the human and cultural dignity of Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples and communities. Through the

development and implementation of this action plan, we acknowledge that we can and must do better; indeed, we will do better.

IV. GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In addition to the above concepts and issues, it is also proposed that the following serve as our association's guiding principles for development and implementation of the multi-year action plan:

Appreciative Inquiry

The issues that have been outlined in the preceding section mean that while our association must confront and redress the past, we must also take the necessary steps required to move toward a better future, lest the past become the sole focal point of our planning. As an analytical framework for future strategy-development and action-focused change, appreciative inquiry invites partners and stakeholders to envision this better future. It serves to capitalize upon the collective dreams, visions and aspirations of a group or organization to create that future. It draws upon and focuses on strengths and opportunities, in order to address and overcome weaknesses and challenges.

The principles behind appreciative inquiry do not ignore poignant or difficult realities. Rather appreciative inquiry starts from the premise that our words, ideas and vision help us to appreciate, to create and to shape our future reality. Since its introduction in the 1980s, appreciative inquiry has been effectively used to build organizations and communities for greater and improved outcomes. The cyclical process used within the appreciative inquiry process tends to reflect and embrace Indigenous ways of thinking, doing and worldviews, over linear planning processes that tend to reflect Western traditions and practices.

Collaboration and Non-duplication

It will be important for our association to recognize that the establishment of a distinct action plan pertaining to Aboriginal and Indigenous education must be situated in a larger and broader context. Most educational partners have established plans or strategies, many of which aim to achieve the exact same goals and objectives. Too often, the implementation of these goals and objectives occurs in an isolated and uncoordinated manner. As a result, many Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples and organizations tend to view new plans as "yet another" in a long succession of plans that involve a great focus on planning, with little follow-on action or outcome.

As mentioned prior, it is important to address issues of trust, transparency and vulnerability, by way of establishing credibility. Therefore, in order to distinguish our association's plan, we must make every effort to address the specific needs and requirements of our member boards, while also joining with our partners to achieve shared goals and objectives in matters of Aboriginal and Indigenous education.

It is thus recommended that our action plan become a "networked" plan: by joining together for mutual strength and impact, we can avoid duplicating our efforts. We can acknowledge and address our weaknesses by drawing upon the individual strengths of our partners in circumstances where we may lack capacity or agency to achieve our goals and objectives. We can join in and celebrate shared successes through mutual efforts. We can also remain apprised of new developments within the educational environment wherever these may occur, so that our action plan remains adaptive and responsive to emerging trends and opportunities, rather than remaining fixed upon a limited set of activities, events or initiatives (which risks the action plan then becoming stagnant and potentially unresponsive to community needs).

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Consensus

A traditional feature of all decision-making and other interpersonal communication processes as practiced by Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples is consensus, meaning that all voices and perspectives have equal value and are used to inform outcomes and results. The Aboriginal and Indigenous Education Action Planning Committee will operate according to this principle, whether in meeting, in producing documentation and reports or in moving forward with actions.

Cultural Autonomy

The concepts of self-government and self-determination of Aboriginal and First Peoples have been described in the “Key Concepts” section. Respect for cultural autonomy is a twin principle that emerges from these concepts. In order to respect the cultural autonomy of Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples, it is important to decolonize our planning process. Decolonizing planning means that we at all times acknowledge the values and interests of our Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples and communities, that we strive for equality of voice and representation, that we recognize the right of Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples to define and protect their own cultural traditions and customs, and that we recognize the multi-layered relationship between the past, present and future and how this relationship impacts Indigenous identities (University of Washington Center for Ecogenetics and Environmental Health, 2013).

Supporting and recapturing Aboriginal and Indigenous vision and voice is a good summary of the principle of respect for cultural autonomy.

Cultural Competence and Proficiency

When making any general statements under our action plan and when using any of the terms that have been defined in Appendix A, it is important to recognize that there are many Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples in Manitoba, each with their own rich educational, cultural, linguistic and spiritual identities. Traditionally, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dene, Inuit, Dakota, Métis, Ojibway and Anishinaabe peoples have continued to thrive as individual and very distinctive linguistic groups in Manitoba. Over time, Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples from across North America who are not members of these traditional linguistic groups have chosen to reside in Manitoba and these persons each have their own individual traditions, culture, language and heritage.

As such, it will be important for our association to understand that a strategy or action plan that seeks to address the needs of “Aboriginal and Indigenous” Manitobans ought not to confuse the rich heritage and individual cultures and practices that represent the many Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples and identities that are traditional and non-traditional to Manitoba’s territory. We must ensure that our action plan is inclusive and recognizes each person and community.

Cultural competency and proficiency means recognizing each person according to their specific traditions and customs. Accordingly, the definition of “who, what, where, when and how” typically involved in planning processes may need to vary, depending upon cultural contexts. It is also important to understand that there are many voices and visions within our Aboriginal and Indigenous communities. Every attempt must be made to reflect this rich diversity without generalization, oversimplification or reduction.

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Wholism

Wholism is an Indigenous principle that applies both to the individual as well as to the community. At the individual level, wholism implies that everything we do must respect and acknowledge the whole person, body, mind and spirit. One part of the whole should not be neglected to the detriment of the other parts or to the whole. At the community level, the application of wholism remains subject to several different interpretations. One of the most prevalent is that one cannot consider the enhancement of one of the community's constituent parts, without also considering the enhancement of the whole.

When consulting broadly to inform our action plan, it may be found that goals and priorities are proposed for inclusion that, at first glance, either do not directly address public education, that are only indirectly related to public education, or that address other social, cultural or economic mandates. Too often however, organizations that neglect community-based wholism during consultations with Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples and Aboriginal and Indigenous partners, because of narrowed or exclusive focus on core mandate, do so to the detriment of the planning process and at the peril of their plan's success. We must acknowledge that, due to the close relationships that exist between public education and other social, cultural and economic mandates, what may seem indirect to some may be perceived by others as having very direct implications for the overall success of our action plan.

Our association has had a long experience advocating for change among broader priority areas, including the health, housing, employment and nutrition of our students and their families. This reflects an embracing of the wholistic principle. It will be important for our association to continue to take all perspectives into consideration when developing and implementing our action plan.

V. OBJECTIVES AND PROPOSED NEXT STEPS

The template that has been drafted in Appendix B provides an overview of a select number of initiatives, events and actions that our association may wish to further consider when commencing development of a multi-year action plan. This template is not intended to be exhaustive or to be approved "as is". Rather, it is intended to help start conversations and consultations with internal and external partners, in order to inform initial development of the action plan.

These initiatives and actions tend to align with and reflect the key tenets of the preceding framework and are readily achievable within the original three year timeframe proposed during the spring 2015 executive retreat. If the executive should so approve, the proposed guiding principle of collaboration and non-duplication will mean that our action plan can and will change as we embrace new developments occurring during the action plan's 2015-18 timeframe. In consequence, the Appendix B draft is a preliminary template only. It will grow and change as we consult and work with our partners in a collaborative manner into the future.

One of the key features of the framework as approved by the executive and committee, in order to inform and maintain focus, are the establishment of independent goals and objectives to structure the action plan. Through these agreed-upon objectives we can effectively communicate what our action plan involves and is about. Activities, events and initiatives shall be grouped around these core objectives, while also being categorized by year, to chart progress and monitor implementation.

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Our objectives include:

1. To expand board capacity and proficiency in Aboriginal and Indigenous matters.
2. To enhance representation and voice of Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples in school governance.
3. To promote greater equity and justice through support for inclusive workplaces and organizational practices in the public school system.
4. To foster a culture of innovation and creativity for addressing Aboriginal and Indigenous student success.
5. To acknowledge truth and champion reconciliation in public education.

Please see the companion “Agendas” document for a comprehensive roadmap for informing each of these priorities.

The development of our multi-year action plan will continue be an iterative process (involving regular discussion, ongoing consultation and frequent opportunities to receive feedback and direction). Through its Aboriginal and Indigenous Education Action Planning Committee, MSBA has developed internal capacity with which to negotiate and accommodate the many requirements that development and implementation of the action plan will involve. With its approval for an important liaison position on this Committee, the Provincial Executive can ensure that the action plan remains focused and measured to achieve the association’s strategic priorities.

APPENDIX A: DEFINITIONS

Aboriginal – is a characteristic rooted in time, in the sense of “before time”. It commonly refers to persons who identify with at least one Aboriginal group– that is, Peoples who were inhabitants of Canada before the time of the arrival of European and other settlers. Legally and Constitutionally, the term “Aboriginal” refers to Indians, Métis and Inuit peoples, each of whom are entitled to their own unique set of rights, guarantees and protections under the laws of Canada. The term “Aboriginal” can also be used for descriptive purposes, as anything that belongs to Aboriginal Peoples or features Aboriginal characteristics.

First Nation – is a term that began replacing “Indian” in the 1970s. Now widely used, the term describes both Status and Non-Status Indian people. Many Indian people have also adopted the term “First Nation” to replace “band” in the name of their community (Manitoba Centre for Health Policy).

First Peoples – refers to any person descended from ancestors who resided in North America prior to contact with Europeans in 1492.

Indian – a Registered or **Status Indian** refers to a person who is registered under the *Indian Act* of Canada. **Treaty Indian** refers to a person who is registered under the *Indian Act* and can prove descent from an Indian Band that signed a treaty. About two-thirds of Manitoba Aboriginal people are Status Indians. There are 63 First Nations communities in Manitoba. **Non-status Indian** refers to an Indian person who is not registered under the *Indian Act*. This may be because their ancestors were never registered, or because they lost status under former provisions of the *Indian Act*. Non-Status Indians represent only a small number of Aboriginal people in Manitoba.

Inuit – are Aboriginal people who traditionally live in Canada's far north. Inuit means *people* in their native Inuktitut language. The singular of Inuit is Inuk. Inuit represent a small number of Aboriginal people in Manitoba.

Indigenous – is a concept rooted in the sense of place. It commonly denotes any person, place or thing that originates in and is characteristic of a particular region or country. This term is often considered to be synonymous with “native”.

Métis – is a person who self-identifies as Métis, is of historic Métis Nation ancestry, is distinct from other Aboriginal peoples and is accepted by the Métis Nation (Métis National Council). The Manitoba Métis Federation also defines a member of the “Historic Métis Nation”, referring to the people then known as Métis or Half-Breeds who resided in the Historic Métis Nation Homeland (the area of land in west central North America used and occupied as the traditional territory of the Métis or Half-Breeds, as they were then known). Commonly, the term “Métis” refers to people of mixed First Nation and European ancestry. They identify themselves as distinct from First Nations people, Inuit, and non-Aboriginal people. They have a unique culture that draws on diverse ancestral origins such as Scottish, French, Ojibway and Cree (Manitoba Centre for Health Policy). Slightly more than one third of Manitoba's Aboriginal and Indigenous people are Métis. Manitoba's population includes the largest number of Métis people per capita in Canada, the majority of whom live in southern Manitoba including the City of Winnipeg.

