

FIRST NATIONS LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

News Release

March 9, 2022

New Graduation Requirement a Powerful Commitment to a more Inclusive and Equitable K-12 Education System

(Xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish) and səliłwətał (Tsleil-Waututh)/Vancouver, B.C.) The First Nations Leadership Council (FNLC) is celebrating the March 4th announcement by the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) and the BC Ministry of Education introducing a new Indigenous-focused graduation requirement for secondary students in BC schools beginning in the 2023-2024 school year.

“Students will graduate with a more robust understanding of the histories and perspectives of BC First Nations,” said Regional Chief Terry Teegee, BC Assembly of First Nations. “The graduation requirement will be an important learning tool for all students and all British Columbians. It is an important step toward improving BC’s education system in the spirit of recognition and respect.”

Secondary students will be able to meet the new requirement through a variety of existing and new course options. Professional learning opportunities for educators will be co-developed by the BC Ministry of Education and FNESC, including strategies for implementing the requirement in ways that support Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners.

“The new Indigenous-focused graduation requirement marks a transformative moment in BC public education,” said Chief Lydia Hwitsum of the First Nations Summit Political Executive. “For the first time we are ensuring all students graduate with an understanding of the contributions and diversity of the First Nations of this province.”

The new graduation requirement responds in part to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s report on the residential school system, which recommends that an age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, treaties and Aboriginal peoples’ contributions to Canada be mandatory for kindergarten to Grade 12 students. It also reflects the standards established by the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which describes how Indigenous peoples have the right to the dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions, histories and aspirations, which shall be appropriately reflected in education and public information.

“This also represents an opportunity to drive a desperately needed anti-racism and reconciliation strategy to counter the systemic and inter-personal racism Indigenous peoples face,” said Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, President of the Union of BC Indian Chiefs. “We know that too often the public education system has misrepresented or omitted First Nations within the provincial curriculum. Furthermore, too many Indigenous students have faced the racism of low expectations in the public education system, as described in the 2015 report of the Office of the Auditor General of BC.”



BRITISH COLUMBIA
ASSEMBLY OF
FIRST NATIONS

1004 Landooz Rd.
Prince George, BC
V2K 5S3

Ph: 778-945-9910
Fx: 778-945-9916



FIRST
NATIONS
SUMMIT

1200-100 Park Royal South
West Vancouver, BC
V7T 1A2

Ph: 604-926-9903
Fx: 604-926-9923
Toll Free: 866-990-9939



UNION OF
BRITISH COLUMBIA
INDIAN CHIEFS

401 – 312 Main Street
Vancouver, BC
V6A 2T2

Ph: 604-684-0231
Fx: 604-684-5726

“I want to recognize the support and guidance of the First Nations Leadership Council, the FNEESC Board, and our partners at the BC School Trustees Association, the BC Teachers’ Federation, and the BC Association of Institutes and Universities, who for many years have advocated for this change to the graduation program,” said Tyrone McNeil, President of the First Nations Education Steering Committee. “Your courage and determination have been instrumental to this achievement.”

The Ministry of Education will be engaging with Indigenous communities, the education sector, and the public on the implementation plan for the new requirement. FNEESC will continue to facilitate information sharing with First Nations.

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For further details, including a summary, detailed overview, and Q&A document, please visit <http://www.fnesc.ca/indigenous-focused-graduation-requirement/>

The First Nations Leadership Council is comprised of the political executives of the BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN), First Nations Summit (FNS), and the Union of BC Indian Chiefs (UBCIC).

For further information, contact:

Chief Lydia Hwitsum, FNS, Phone:	604-868-0032
Annette Schroeter, BCAFN Phone:	250-962-1603
Grand Chief Stewart Phillip, UBCIC, Phone:	250-490-5314