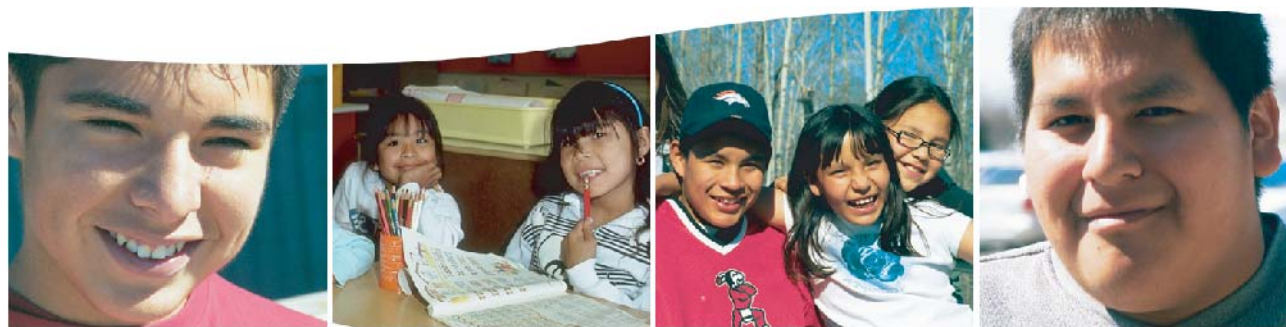


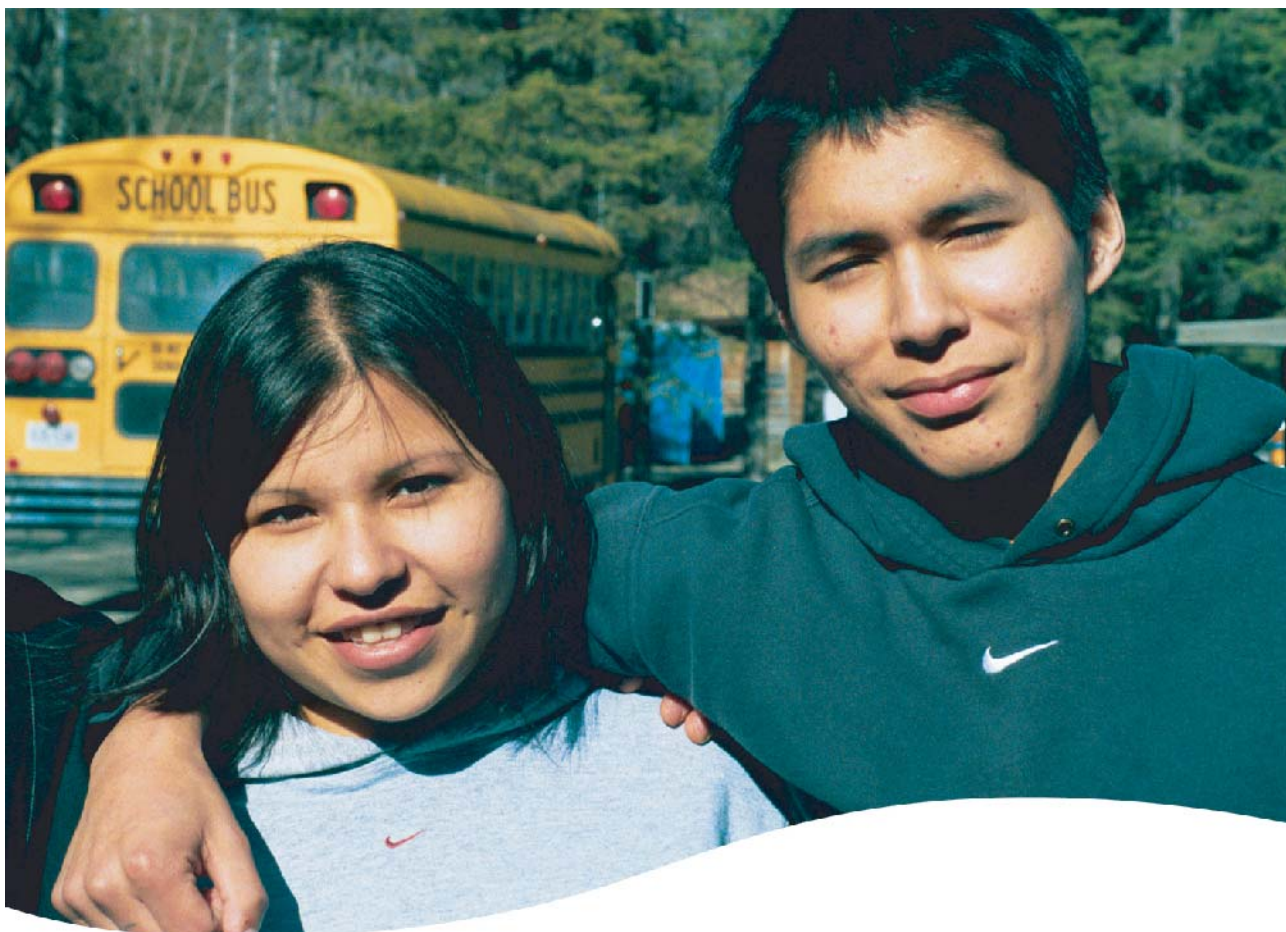


Indian and Northern  
Affairs Canada

Affaires indiennes  
et du Nord Canada



# EDUCATION ACTION PLAN



In response to the Auditor General's  
observations and recommendations  
Chapter 5 of the November 2004 Report

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada  
April 2005



Canada

# ***EDUCATION ACTION PLAN***

*In response to the Auditor General's  
observations and recommendations  
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Indian and Northern Affairs Canada  
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## *Executive Summary*

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This Action Plan addresses the observations and recommendations in Chapter 5 of the Auditor General of Canada's Report, November 2004. The measures proposed are also part of a broader, ongoing agenda: the building of strengthened relationships among Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), First Nations and key parties on First Nation education matters. The intent is to enable First Nations to assume greater responsibility for their education while clarifying and strengthening accountability of all stakeholders.

Central to this Action Plan is work that is well underway to review and enhance existing education policy and management regimes. This collaborative effort will result in a First Nation Education Policy Framework and a First Nation Education Management Framework, developed in partnership with First Nations and other key parties in education. These frameworks will clarify roles and responsibilities as well as program management practices. This is the first time that INAC and First Nations work jointly on such framework initiatives.

The policy framework, to be completed by June 2006, will be based on a common understanding with First Nation representatives on a strategic vision for First Nation education and outline the steps necessary to make this vision a reality as well as clarify roles and responsibilities. It will be informed by a review of INAC's education policies and programs already underway by joint INAC/First Nation working groups.

The management framework will enhance current management and accountability practices. It will be based on the principles of effective accountability: clear roles and responsibilities; clear performance expectations; balanced expectations and capacities; credible reporting; and, reasonable review and adjustment.

Together, these frameworks will clearly identify the strategic vision, clear outcomes, strategies, performance indicators and targets necessary to narrow the education gap. They will support the ultimate goal of First Nation jurisdiction over First Nation education.

The measures proposed in this Action Plan cover five areas (strategy and planning; roles and responsibilities; funding; accountability; and performance measurement and monitoring and reporting) that address the Auditor General's concerns.

Progress in First Nation education cannot be accomplished by one federal department working in isolation, nor can it be achieved by federal efforts alone. Launching effective responses to complex challenges and policy issues will require the ongoing, concerted effort of the federal government working in partnership with First Nations, provinces, territories and other key parties to ensure that First Nation learners enjoy the same educational opportunities and outcomes as other Canadian students.

Building relationships and forming partnerships is a key theme of the Canada - Aboriginal Peoples Roundtable process, launched in April 2004, and INAC's education initiatives. Two sessions on lifelong learning, held in November 2004, produced recommendations that will inform an upcoming Policy Retreat between members of the Cabinet Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Aboriginal leaders.

## Context

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Education is a key factor in enabling First Nation individuals and communities to develop to their full potential and achieve a quality of life comparable to that of other Canadians. Accordingly, the Government of Canada has made commitments to continue to improve educational outcomes for First Nation learners in the 2003, 2004 and 2005 Federal Budgets, as well as in the February and October 2004 Speeches from the Throne.

Over the last 30 years, First Nation education has changed significantly. In the past, INAC delivered educational services directly, running most of the schools that Aboriginal students attended. This scenario began to change when, in the early 1970s, First Nations called for greater control over the education of their peoples. In particular, the (then) National Indian Brotherhood published a manifesto in 1972 advocating Indian Control of Indian Education (i.e., based on parental involvement, local control, teacher training and the use of language and culture in the classroom). In 1973, the Government of Canada accepted the objectives of Indian Control of Indian Education as a guiding principle for the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development's approaches to First Nation Education. Since, schools have gradually been turned over to First Nations administering organizations. This has taken place, however, with inadequate consideration for First Nation capacity development and school-board type support services for First Nation schools. In 1998, the Government of Canada announced *Gathering Strength - Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan*, which called for a renewed partnership with Aboriginal people based on recognizing past mistakes and injustices and acknowledging its role in the development and administration of residential schools. Overcoming this era is a great challenge to full reconciliation between First Nations and the Government of Canada.

Today, the vast majority of First Nation communities manage their own schools. A number of First Nations have established tribal/regional organizations that support on-reserve schools through activities similar to those performed by provincial school boards. Some First Nations have furthered control over their education by moving towards self-government.

Although there is still a significant gap in educational attainment between First Nation students and the general population, the proportion of First Nation students living on reserve who have completed high school has increased significantly - from 31.4 percent in 1991 to 41.4 percent in 2001. The First Nation population (on and off reserve) with a post-secondary certificate, diploma or degree has also increased from 20 to 23 percent between 1996 and 2001. Approximately 4,500 of INAC-funded students graduate from post-secondary programs annually. Nevertheless, education programs and services have not kept pace with the needs and expectations of First Nations and Canadian society as a whole.

Major challenges to closing the education gap include:

- a variety of socio-economic factors that impact educational attainment;
- rapidly increasing populations;
- the legacy of residential schools;
- the diversity of First Nation communities and needs;
- the need for improved support for First Nation control of First Nation education;
- geographic remoteness of First Nation communities;
- 38 percent of on-reserve students attend provincial schools;
- the movement of students between on- and off-reserve schools; and
- the ever-increasing educational expectations of today's knowledge based economy.

These challenges result in:

- many young children coming to school ill-prepared to learn;
- significant drop-out rates during high school;
- low high school graduation rates; and
- difficulties making transitions to post-secondary education or entering the labour market.

Maintaining the status quo would be detrimental to both First Nations and Canada as a whole. The country's demand for a skilled labour force is rising due to an aging population and a declining birthrate. The First Nation population, by contrast, is a youthful one, with more than 50 percent under the age of 25. The next 10 years will see a great increase in First Nation children passing through the education system. If the system fails to meet their needs, it will put too many members of this generation at risk and deprive Canada of valuable human resources.

The federal government has been actively pursuing positive educational outcomes in a variety of ways.

- A. INAC officials are working with First Nation representatives regionally and nationally to provide support to schools and communities in areas identified as key to a high quality education and student success. These areas include:
- recruitment and retention of a high-quality teaching staff;
  - parental and community involvement in education;
  - special education needs of students;
  - review of the band-operated schools funding formula; and
  - establishment of First Nation education systems that can provide individual schools with school-board-type services.<sup>1</sup>
- B. The Canada - Aboriginal Peoples Roundtable process, launched in April 2004, is a tangible demonstration of the Government of Canada's commitment to improve First Nation education. Among other things, the Roundtable process aims at closing the gap between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians in quality-of-life indicators, including education. The Prime Minister and Aboriginal leaders have identified lifelong learning as a key means of doing so and made it a priority for follow-up.

Two sessions on lifelong learning, held in November 2004, were very informative and produced recommendations on a wide range of education-related issues that were summarized in a Facilitators' Report. The recommendations focussed on strengthening Aboriginal jurisdiction, control and governance; improving access to programs; building community capacity to deliver programs; and strengthening existing accountability and performance measures. These recommendations will inform an upcoming Policy Retreat between members of the Cabinet Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Aboriginal leaders. This retreat will contribute to the preparations for a federal/provincial/territorial First Ministers meeting with Aboriginal leaders that is now in the planning stage.

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<sup>1</sup> Additional information on these initiatives can be found in Annex A.

Building relationships and forming partnerships is a key theme of the Roundtable process and INAC's education initiatives. Progress in First Nation education cannot be accomplished by one federal department working in isolation, nor can it be achieved by federal efforts alone. Launching effective responses to complex challenges and policy issues will require the ongoing concerted effort of the federal government working with First Nations, provinces, territories and other key parties to ensure that First Nation learners enjoy, at a minimum, the same educational opportunities and outcomes as other Canadian students.

In addition to INAC, a number of other federal departments, as well as provincial governments, are involved in programs (e.g. childhood development programs, housing, and child and family services) that can influence educational outcomes. Collaborative relationships will need to be strengthened to design and implement solutions to the issues outlined above.

- C. Over the next two years, INAC will continue to work with First Nation education key stakeholders to review and, revise its current policies, programs, funding levels and methodologies through the formalization of a First Nation Education Policy Framework and a First Nation Education Management Framework. This is the first time the Department and First Nations work jointly on such framework initiatives.

These over-arching frameworks will support the ultimate goal of First Nation jurisdiction over First Nation education. Broadly speaking, the policy framework will establish strategic directions and a basis for decision making, as determined by First Nations and INAC. The management framework will provide a complete and consistent means of managing education program delivery.

## Strategic Vision

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In the coming months, INAC will continue to work with First Nation representatives to reach a common understanding on a strategic vision for First Nation education. Key components of such a vision would be:

- maximized participation and success in early learning, education, training and skills development;
- education characterized by quality and excellence of instruction and relevant curricula;
- education grounded in First Nation values, traditions, culture and languages;
- safe learning environments;
- appropriate fiscal resources; and
- an ultimate outcome of First Nation jurisdiction over First Nation education.

INAC recognizes that this vision can only be achieved through an education system that puts the learner's achievement at the centre of all decision making and embraces a culture of learning.

Improving the education outcomes of First Nation students, at all levels, requires the pursuit of three broad but complementary goals:

1. Enhance the quality, accessibility and relevance of educational programs and supports for First Nation *students*;
2. Strengthen the planning, management and accountability of First Nation education programs and supports, based on effective and meaningful First Nation education *systems*; and,
3. Foster *interconnections* and collaboration between First Nation educators, federal-provincial/territorial governments and other stakeholders.

These goals can only be attained if all the key players (learners, parents, teachers, school principals, communities, First Nation leaders, institutions and governments) share the same vision and contribute fully to the achievement of commonly pursued results.

Upcoming discussions with First Nation representatives will enable INAC and First Nations to reach a common understanding on the vision for First Nation education and outline the steps necessary to make this vision a reality. These joint efforts will lead to a First Nation Education Policy Framework and a First Nation Education Management Framework.

## *Priorities for Action*

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In December 2004, INAC received an extension of its current education policy authorities for three years. The extension allows the department to continue providing existing education programs and services (elementary/secondary, post-secondary, and cultural education centres programs), as well as funding for kindergarten students, mature students, school-board-like services, and education services for all students ordinarily on reserve. Over the three-year period, INAC was also explicitly mandated to continue with its larger agenda: redesigning its education policies and programs to improve the educational attainment of First Nation students and to further First Nation jurisdiction over First Nation education.

This Action Plan contributes to these efforts while addressing the issues raised in Chapter 5 of the Auditor General's November 2004 Report.

The Plan focuses on five areas:

- Strategy and Action Plan
- Roles and Responsibilities
- Funding
- Accountability
- Performance Measurement, Monitoring and Reporting

While the Auditor General reported separately on INAC's elementary and secondary education policies and programs and on the Post-Secondary Student Support Program, the measures identified in this Action Plan encompass both areas.

## Milestones and timelines

This chart provides an overview of the actions and deliverables which are the building blocks necessary for the completion of the Policy framework and the Management framework.

Key areas	2005	2006	2007
<b>Strategy &amp; Action Plan</b>	First Nation Education Policy Framework: <i>June 2006</i> ( <i>vision, priorities, strategies, roles &amp; responsibilities</i> )		
	First Nation Education Management Framework: <i>June 2007</i> ( <i>outcomes, performance indicators, targets, reporting requirements</i> )		
<b>Roles and Responsibilities</b>	Draft statement of INAC's roles and responsibilities <i>Sep. '05</i> Discussions with FN to reach common understanding <i>Dec. '05</i>	Information sessions among INAC (HQ and regions), FN and other key parties involved in FN education  <i>Jan '06 &amp; ongoing</i>	" " " " " "
<b>Funding</b>	Report on current national funding formula  <i>Sep. '05</i>	Resourcing options compatible with FN Education Policy Framework  <i>June '06</i>	Finalize options for revised funding model, developed in consultation with FN  <i>June '07</i>
<b>Accountability</b>	Complete program and policy reviews on education programs  <i>June '06</i>		Complete comprehensive FN Education Management Framework  <i>June '07</i>
<b>Performance Measurement, Monitoring and Reporting</b>	Implement an electronic tool that captures information on existing indicators  <i>Nov. '05</i>	Develop blueprint for more comprehensive data system to reduce FN reporting burden and report on progress  <i>Nov. '06</i>	Finalize performance indicators & reporting requirements and develop data capture & performance reporting system  <i>June '07</i>
	Develop INAC's compliance regime and guidelines <i>June '05</i>  Introduce INAC's compliance guidelines and provide training & guidance <i>July/Sep. '05</i> Implement INAC's education compliance regime & guidelines <i>Oct. '05</i>	" " " " " "	Implement INAC's redesigned education compliance regime and guidelines  <i>June '07</i>

*Strategy and  
Action Plan*

INAC is committed to developing, in partnership with First Nations, comprehensive First Nation education policy and management frameworks by 2006 and 2007, respectively. The *policy* framework will be informed by a review of INAC's education policies and programs that is being conducted by joint INAC/First Nations working groups. The *management* framework will be based on the principles of effective accountability: clear roles and responsibilities; clear performance expectations; balanced expectations and capacities; credible reporting; and, reasonable review and adjustment. These frameworks will clearly identify the strategic vision, clear outcomes, strategies, performance indicators and targets to narrow the education gap.

*Actions*

- Complete a First Nation Education Policy Framework . . . . . June 2006
- Complete a First Nation Education Management Framework June 2007

**T** *This responds to the Auditor General's recommendation (5.33) which stated that "INAC, in consultation with First Nations, should immediately develop and implement a comprehensive strategy and action plan, with targets, to close the education gap. It should also report progress to Parliament and to First Nations on a timely basis."*

(Note: The part of this recommendation referring to progress reports is addressed in the section "Performance Measurement, Monitoring and Reporting" of this Plan.)

*Roles and Responsibilities*

Under the current legislative framework, INAC establishes overall elementary-secondary education policies, funding levels and delivery requirements for status Indians living on reserves. Under various funding arrangements with the Department, First Nations deliver education on reserves, arrange to buy education services from local provincial school boards, or use a combination of both. INAC also establishes overall policies, funding levels and delivery requirements in a number of education-related programs including post-secondary education and cultural education centres.

Over the years, INAC's role in education has evolved from direct delivery of education services to one where most First Nations provide their own education services. As this direction continues and First Nations assume greater direct control of education, the department's role will become more focussed on support, advocacy and management of the various funding arrangements. The department will have to clearly articulate its role to develop an effective management framework.

INAC's overall role is to put in place the appropriate legislative and policy frameworks, institutional and organizational structures, and fiscal and other supports and services so that First Nations can provide a high-quality and culturally relevant education.

In February 2005, a departmental working group was established to draft a statement of INAC's roles and responsibilities. Dialogue with First Nations will be engaged in order to arrive at a mutually agreed upon statement of respective roles and responsibilities.

*Actions*

- Department develops a draft statement of INAC's roles and responsibilities . . . . . *September 2005*
  
- Department engages in discussions with First Nations to reach a common understanding of INAC's roles and responsibilities . . . . . *December 2005*
  
- Information sessions among INAC (HQ and regions), First Nations and other key parties involved in First Nation education . . . . . *January 2006 and on-going*

( The finalized statement of INAC's roles and responsibilities will be included in the comprehensive First Nation Education Policy Framework to be completed by June 2006.

*Roles and  
Responsibilities  
(cont.)*

**T** *This responds to the Auditor General's recommendation (5.42) which stated "INAC should clearly define and document its roles in education while taking into account its basic legal responsibilities and the roles of other parties. The Department should provide its regional offices with sufficient guidance and training to ensure that its roles and responsibilities are understood and applied consistently."*

*Funding*

In January 2004, a joint First Nations/INAC Working Group was established to review the current funding formula on education and to identify the elements of a revised formula. The group's work plan includes four components:

1. Study INAC funding of First Nation education programs with how the provinces would fund similar programs to determine whether the Government of Canada's funding is reasonably comparable;
2. Compare the salaries of teachers in First Nation schools with those in provincial schools to determine whether First Nation teacher salaries are competitive;
3. Study the unique costs associated with First Nation education (e.g. the costs of culturally relevant programs); and,
4. Review education program services budget allocations at all levels (INAC HQ & regions and First Nations).

*Actions*

- Produce a report on the current national funding formula that:
  - 1) Identifies the actual cost drivers of *basic* First Nation education programs that are reasonably comparable to provincial programs. (An internal cost-driver analysis is currently underway. It considers characteristics of First Nation schools, e.g. size, location, language of instruction, learning of local cultures and languages, that result in a higher cost for program delivery in First Nation communities than in provincial schools. For example, more First Nation schools are located in remote or limited-access locations than is the case for provincial schools.);
  - 2) Assesses regional and national expenditure levels. (INAC has initiated a study of regional and national expenditure levels to determine the magnitude of regional variations, develop an analysis of the impact of cost drivers regionally, and examine options for an adjustment to present formula. First Nations claim that the 2% annual increment to budgets has not allowed them to meet actual education costs.);

*Funding  
(cont.)*

*Actions (cont.)*

3) Analyses the impact of increases in provincial investments on departmental funding practices . . . . . *September 2005*

- Develop resourcing options compatible with the comprehensive First Nation Education Policy Framework . . . . . *June 2006*
- Finalize options for a revised funding model developed in collaboration with First Nations . . . . . *June 2007*

( This revised resourcing model will be included in the comprehensive First Nation Education Management Framework to be completed by June 2007.

**T** *This addresses the Auditor General's recommendation (5.51) which stated that "INAC should undertake to obtain reliable and consistent information on the actual costs of delivering education services on reserves and compare the costs with those of providing comparable education services in the provinces."*

(Note: The part of this recommendation referring to actual costs is further addressed in the section "Performance Measurement, Monitoring and Reporting" of this Plan.)

*Accountability*

INAC is working jointly with First Nations to strengthen the accountability regime in all areas of education, including the Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP). INAC and First Nation representatives are conducting policy and program reviews which will contribute to the development of reliable accountability principles and practices. These principles will need to consider First Nations' accountability to their membership and the need for mutual accountability between INAC and First Nations, based on their clearly defined respective roles and responsibilities. The strengthened accountability regime will be set out in the First Nation Education Management Framework.

Its components will include financial and non-financial reporting elements such as performance indicators, targets, monitoring and compliance requirements, clearly defined terms and conditions for funding agreements and the accompanying infrastructure to support adequate reporting. The framework will also include an ongoing process to review management practices and results that will include audit, evaluation and compliance activities as well as the sharing of best practices and the development of corrective actions. As the framework is developed, capacity and resourcing requirements will be addressed.

**Accountability**  
*(cont.)*

These measures will clarify the information required to determine the actual costs of delivering education services for First Nation students living on reserve (in First Nation schools and in provincial schools). This information will also assist INAC in being fully accountable to Parliament, Central Agencies and other stakeholders.

*(Note: the issue of accountability is also addressed in the sections of this Action Plan on Performance Measurement, Reporting and Monitoring)*

**Actions**

- Complete program and policy reviews addressing the wide range of accountability issues, including more consistent and reliable financial information on education programs . . . . . June 2006
  
- Complete the comprehensive First Nation Education Management Framework, which will form the basis of effective accountability in all education programs, including post-secondary education . . . . . June 2007

**T** *This addresses the Auditor General's recommendation (5.88) which stated that "INAC, in consultation with First Nations, should develop and implement a strong and meaningful accountability regime for its PSSSP. This regime should include the following principles of effective accountability: clear roles and responsibilities, clear performance expectations, balanced expectations and capacities, credible reporting, and reasonable review and adjustment.*

**Performance Measurement, Monitoring and Reporting**

INAC has defined a performance measurement and reporting strategy which aims to:

1. Reduce First Nations' reporting burden by allowing for the electronic exchange of data and by collecting only data linked to clearly defined indicators and reporting requirements and that measure results-oriented progress.
2. Develop meaningful performance indicators in partnership with First Nation representatives and other key parties.
3. Ensure that INAC is able to clearly report on performance and progress to Parliament, Central Agencies and First Nations.

*Performance Measurement, Monitoring and Reporting (cont.)*

The identification of clearly defined outcomes, performance indicators and targets will ensure that only useful, and meaningful data are collected, including reliable and consistent information on the actual costs of delivering education services on reserves. As a beginning, the Department has completed a data collection review, which provides a profile of all education data currently being collected (e.g. student enrollments). The study includes the rationale for and authority under which each element of information is collected. The Department's performance measurement strategy also aims to ensure that the proper tools, infrastructure and capacity are in place (both in First Nations and within INAC) so that it is possible to report on results. The following work, in partnership with First Nations, will inform the development of performance indicators and reporting requirements. This work will support both First Nations and INAC with respect to performance measurement, monitoring and reporting, in the context of their respective evolving roles, responsibilities and accountabilities.

*Actions*

- Implement an electronic tool that captures information on existing indicators related to INAC-funded education programs  
..... *November 2005*
  
- In partnership with First Nation representatives, develop a blueprint for a more comprehensive data system to reduce the First Nation reporting burden and to report on progress for all education programs  
..... *November 2006*
  
- Finalize performance indicators and reporting requirements based on the comprehensive First Nation Education Policy Framework and develop the data capture and performance reporting system  
..... *June 2007*

The Department is also planning to create an interface between INAC's First Nation and Inuit Transfer Payment System and the Education Programs System that will allow on-line capture of the financial and non-financial reporting requirements for education (as defined in the First Nation National Reporting Guide). It would be operational by December 2006.

- ( The performance indicators and streamlined reporting requirements will be included in the comprehensive First Nation Education Management Framework to be completed by June 2007.

*Performance  
Measurement,  
Monitoring and  
Reporting  
(cont.)*

INAC will also continue to:

- contribute to the development of an Aboriginal Progress Report;
- contribute to Canada's Performance Report (Aboriginal Chapter), and
- publish the *Education Programs Report* (2nd edition) so that INAC will continue to fulfill its commitment to report publicly on its education programs (in response to the June 2000 AG's Report).

*This addresses the Auditor General's recommendations:*

- T** 5.46 which stated that "INAC, in consultation with First Nations, should accelerate its efforts to develop and apply appropriate performance and results indicators along with targets."
- T** 5.94 which stated that "INAC should improve the quality of the performance information that it reports to Parliament. It should clearly define and document the objective and expected results of the PSSSP, report on costs and performance, and clarify how the program is making a difference in narrowing the gap in post-secondary education between First Nations and the Canadian population as a whole." and
- T** 5.33 (in part) which stated that "INAC should also report progress to Parliament and to First Nations on a timely basis.", and
- T** 5.89 which stated that "INAC should ensure that it provides accurate information to the Treasury Board about the way in which the PSSSP operates."

INAC is also strengthening internal processes and procedures designed to ensure a more consistent departmental application of the terms and conditions of tuition agreements and education program requirements to provide reliable information on the actual costs of delivering education services on reserve. The department is also reinforcing its guidelines for regional offices. The guidelines will include a compliance policy statement, compliance processes and procedures, and training and reporting requirements. The guidelines will be developed in consultation with First Nations representatives and take into consideration an assessment of the most appropriate means of determining progress for results, including conducting school evaluations and strengthening provincial tuition agreements.

*Performance  
Measurement,  
Monitoring and  
Reporting  
(cont.)*

*Actions*

- Develop INAC's compliance regime and guidelines for education programs . . . . . *June 2005*
- Introduce INAC's education compliance guidelines and provide training and guidance to ensure consistent understanding across all INAC regions . . . . . *July/September 2005*
- Implement INAC's education compliance regime and guidelines . . . . . *October 2005*
- In collaboration with First Nations, implement INAC's redesigned education compliance regime and guidelines, to be included in the comprehensive First Nation Education Management Framework . . . . . *June 2007*

*This addresses the Auditor General's recommendations:*

- T** 5.55 which stated that "INAC, in consultation with First Nations, should ensure that tuition agreements are in place. The Department should also provide its regional offices with sufficient guidance and training to ensure that its responsibilities are understood and applied consistently." and
- T** 5.59 which stated that "INAC, in co-operation with First Nations, should ensure that school evaluations are completed and that recommendations are addressed within a reasonable time."

## *Conclusion*

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This Action Plan outlines the consultations and concrete measures INAC will undertake to address the concerns of the Office of the Auditor General and the Standing Committee on Public Accounts. The Plan sets out clear commitments and delivery dates. All these measures support the direction towards First Nation control of First Nation education through increased support for capacity building and the development of First Nation education systems and jurisdiction. These measures also support INAC's effort to establish nationally consistent and coordinated policy and management frameworks for INAC's education programs and services. The implementation of the Plan will ensure greater efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery of First Nations' education programs and services throughout Canada. Its clear focus, commitment to strengthened relationships and concrete actions will ensure the continuous improvement of First Nations education outcomes.

As stated in the Auditor General's Report: "The Department is currently carrying out a comprehensive review of all its policy and program delivery authorities, including its education programs. This exercise provides the Department and central agencies, in consultation with First Nations and other parties, an opportunity to take a fresh look at the programs' design, administration, and accountability for and reporting of results." This Action Plan clearly supports and addresses this observation.

## ***Annex A - Progress and new initiatives***

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This Annex elaborates on INAC's progress and recent initiatives in the field of First Nation education.

- The education program authorities were revised and extended. Revised terms and conditions were implemented via arrangements with First Nations in April 2004, for the 2004-2005 school year.
- The Department is completing evaluations of the elementary/secondary, post-secondary education and cultural education centers programs.
- Joint departmental and First Nation working groups were established in 2003 and 2004 to collaborate on the review of a number of priority areas such as special education, data linkages and the funding formula for band-operated and federal schools and post-secondary education.
- The education reform initiated under *Gathering Strength* was replaced in April 2003 by **New Paths for Education**. This initiative was launched to:
  - . strengthen First Nation education management and governance capacity;
  - . improve the effectiveness of classroom instruction through curriculum and language development, pedagogical improvements, school activities and the development and enhancement of technological knowledge in the school;
  - . support community and parental involvement in the education of children and youth; and
  - . facilitate school-to-work transition.
- The **Teacher Recruitment and Retention** initiative, launched in 2003, helps band-operated schools recruit and retain qualified teachers and educators and provide them with professional development opportunities. This includes funding to enhance the salaries of teachers in First Nation schools.
- The **Special Education Program** assists First Nation students with special needs. The program, established in 2003, is providing critical support to children with behavioural and/or physical challenges such as autism, learning disabilities, deafness and blindness. To date, over 9,500 students have been assessed and 8,787 have received special education services.
- The **Parental and Community Engagement Strategy**, introduced in 2004, aims to raise the awareness of parents and community members of their valuable role in their children's education and to support them in that role. It provides funding to communities to support parents and caregivers in their role as a child's first and most influential teacher, to encourage community involvement in education, to promote a home environment that lays the groundwork for success in the classroom, and to facilitate family literacy and native language and culture.

## Successful First Nation initiatives in education

- The **First Nation Education Steering Committee (FNESC)**, a not-for-profit organization, was established in May 1992 to facilitate discussion about education matters affecting First Nations in British Columbia. It provides relevant and up-to-date information to First Nations about federal and provincial government policies and programs, undertakes research to support First Nation education, and communicates with the federal and provincial governments to ensure that First Nation concerns are being addressed. About 60 First Nation education technicians representing First Nation communities from throughout the province provide direction for the steering committee's activities.

The steering committee administers a number of components of the on-reserve education program, including the Special Education Program, band school evaluations (or assessments), and the education reform initiative under New Paths. In those three cases, the steering committee allocates funds to member First Nations, analyses and approves project proposals, reviews project reports, and assesses project results. In addition, it provides support to First Nations on professional development, teacher recruitment, and capacity building. It produces studies and discussion papers on issues affecting education for First Nations and on best practices observed throughout the province.

- The **Mi'kmaq Education Agreement** was enshrined in federal and Nova Scotia law in 1999. The legislation gave each of the nine participating communities the power to make laws related to primary, elementary, and secondary education that would be applicable on their reserves. It also created a corporation, the Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (MK), to support them in the delivery of education. There are potential lessons to be learned from the Mi'kmaq Education Agreement, including the preparedness of the First Nations on governance, accountability, pedagogical, and financial matters.

The participating communities continue to deliver education under the agreement. They have developed a curriculum to teach the Mi'kmaq language and have built or expanded schools. The Department, the participating communities, and the MK agreed in 2002 to extend the initial agreement for a three-year period and subsequently renewed the agreement for another five-year period to end on March 31, 2010. Since the Mi'kmaq Agreement has become a model for other "education self-government agreements" in the country, what is learned in the implementation of this agreement can offer valuable lessons for the future.