

VOLUNTARY, CONFIDENTIAL, ABORIGINAL STUDENT SELF-IDENTIFICATION ***Q and A's for School Boards to Support the Development and Implementation of Self-Identification Policies***

The following Q and A's were developed based on a pilot project the Ministry of Education supported in 2008-09 with four district school boards: Algoma DSB, Rainy River DSB, Kenora Catholic DSB, and Kawartha Pine Ridge DSB. The purpose of the pilot project was to gather information on the successes and challenges related to development of their voluntary, confidential, Aboriginal student self-identification policies, as well as the implementation of these policies and submission of data to the ministry through OnSIS.

Questions and answers addressing some key issues and challenges are included in this document, with some specific examples provided by the pilot boards.

PURPOSE OF A VOLUNTARY, CONFIDENTIAL ABORIGINAL STUDENT SELF-IDENTIFICATION POLICY

1. Why does the Ministry want to collect Aboriginal student self-identification data?

The availability of data on Aboriginal student achievement in Ontario's provincially funded school system is a critical foundation for the development, implementation, and evaluation of programs to support the needs of First Nation, Métis and Inuit students. The development of effective self-identification policies by Ontario school boards is a significant step toward ensuring that First Nation, Métis and Inuit students receive the highest possible quality of education, and that all Ontario students benefit from an appreciation of the richness of Aboriginal cultures and the important contributions of First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities to Ontario's cultural, economic and social future.

2. How will the Ministry of Education use this information?

School boards with established self-identification policies use this data at the local level to plan programming to support student achievement, and communicate results to local communities. At the provincial level, self-id data will be used at an aggregate level to plan policies and programmes to better support student achievement across the province, and to report on results achieved, and areas for improvement.

The Ministry of Education's *Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) Education Policy Framework, 2007* includes specific quantitative and qualitative performance measures that will be used to assess the progress of the implementation of the Framework. The Framework document describes how important it is to have accurate and reliable data in order to assess progress towards the goal of improving Aboriginal student achievement. Such data is also needed to support improvement

planning and accountability, and inform policy and funding decisions, measurement, and reporting.

3. What data specific to Aboriginal peoples is intended to be made public?

The Ministry of Education has committed to providing progress reports every three years on the implementation of the Framework, based on ten performance measures. The ministry will report on the progress of seven of these measures in the fall of 2009.

The following three additional performance measures about Aboriginal student achievement will require the collection of voluntary, confidential, Aboriginal self-identification data through the Ontario School Information System (OnSIS) beginning in the fall of 2009:

- A significant increase in the percentage of First Nation, Métis and Inuit students meeting provincial standards on province-wide assessments in reading, writing, and mathematics;
- A significant increase in the graduation rate of First Nation, Métis and Inuit students; and
- A significant improvement in First Nation, Métis and Inuit student achievement.

The ministry will continue to engage in on-going discussions about how best to use the Aboriginal student self-identification data to understand more about the progress of Aboriginal students.

4. Will the Ministry be communicating this work with provincial level organizations such as the Chiefs of Ontario?

The Ministry is engaged in ongoing dialogue and partnerships with the provincial Aboriginal organizations, including the Chiefs of Ontario, Métis Nation of Ontario, and the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres.

5. How will a Self-Identification policy help Aboriginal students above and beyond what is already being offered through student success initiatives?

The Ministry is committed to addressing the specific needs of Aboriginal learners and all of their students through an evidence informed approach. Reliable, student-specific data is necessary to support improvement planning, accountability, and to inform policy and funding decisions, measurement, and reporting. The Aboriginal Education Office, through funding opportunities and the work of field staff, is supporting boards through specific projects related to transitions, community outreach and partnership initiatives.

6. Is funding for First Nation, Métis, and Inuit projects a long term priority of the Ministry?

As outlined in the Grants for Students Needs, the Ministry is providing targeted support through the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Education Supplement. The First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Supplement:

- Provides increased funding for Native Languages programs offered in any of the seven Native Languages recognized in the Ontario curriculum
- Provides increased support for boards to offer any of the 10 Native Studies courses available in the Ontario curriculum
- Offers additional funding to support programs that assist Aboriginal students.

Funding amounts for the per-pupil component are based on 2006 Census data. For further information on the specific components see the Technical Paper 2009-10, spring 2009.

DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION OF VOLUNTARY, CONFIDENTIAL ABORIGINAL STUDENT SELF-IDENTIFICATION POLICIES

7. What specifically is required in preparing and implementing individual school board Voluntary, Confidential Aboriginal Student Self-Identification Policies?

The *Building Bridges to Success for First Nation, Métis and Inuit Students, 2007* document outlines a recommended three stage approach to developing voluntary, confidential Aboriginal student self-identification policies:

Step 1: Foundations

- Recognition of First Nation, Métis and Inuit peoples
- Consultation with legal counsel to guide the process and policy development

Step 2: Consultation

- Broad consultation with Aboriginal communities and other stakeholders
- Policy development in collaboration with stakeholders
- Communication to ensure broad understanding of the policy and its purpose

Step 3: Implementation

- Development of a data collection methodology
- Data gathering and ongoing communication

Key considerations include:

- It is critical that FNMI families and communities understand that self-identification is voluntary and confidential.

- It is also essential that they understand and support the ways in which school boards, the EQAO and the Ministry of Education intend to use their personal information.
- It is important that boards communicate to Aboriginal communities that data will be shared with the ministry through OnSIS.

8. How do schools and boards collect the voluntary confidential Aboriginal student self-identification information from their Aboriginal students?

Before the collection process, it is understood that boards have preceded the implementation phase by consulting with legal counsel, freedom of information coordinators and all appropriate stakeholders. Communication with stakeholders should involve open discussions aimed at building awareness, clear understanding, support, and addressing concerns.

Based on the information provided by the four boards that participated in the OnSIS Aboriginal student self-identification pilot project in 2008-09, self-identification information for those pilot boards was generally preceded by initial information letters and public awareness (surveys, posters, pamphlets, question & answer brochures, etc.) among all students. Since the initial communication was done through the school secretary, they were also included in awareness training to support students and parents through the self-identification information collection process. Some boards have developed question & answer guides for their support staff to use as a reference. As well, information was vetted through consultations with their local Native Advisory and/or Aboriginal Education Advisory committees, and/or local FNMI organizations.

The pilot boards collected Aboriginal student self-identification information through a number of avenues such as student registrations at early entry in Junior Kindergarten, throughout the school year, during parent interview times, and at the secondary level during course selection and/or other information gathering opportunities (indexing cards). Forms have indicators for checking off the specific group identifier and a place for the student /parent /guardian to sign. Follow up to the collection of information is generally expected and boards are doing this through home visits, sending letter reminders, and telephone calls home. Boards are getting returns on self-identification information through general permanent board collection. Once the student is registered the information is put into the student reporting system.

Sample registration forms used by the pilot boards are attached.

9. How have boards approached their Aboriginal community members about the collection of voluntary self-identification information for board and ministry use?

The *Building Bridges to Success for First Nation, Métis and Inuit Students, 2007* document contains early examples of insights and critical success factors, as shared by Keewatin-Patricia, Kenora Catholic, and Toronto District School Boards.

Further information has been provided by the four boards that participated in the OnSIS Aboriginal student self-identification pilot project in 2008-09, as follows:

Rainy River District School Board:

RRDSB's key strategy was not only to work together and build positive ongoing relationships with their FN communities and stakeholders but to demonstrate their continued commitment by meeting with them face to face. The self-identification information was directly explained at meetings both in FN communities with their community representatives such as the Chief, council members, parents, students and Elders as well as at off-reserve locations. These opportunities although lengthy built trust and understanding for community members especially around specific questions on the relevancy of data collection and expectations of the results related to funding.

Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board:

Similarly, the KPRDSB personally addressed and approached First Nations through the Chiefs of their three local First Nations where possible, the local chapter of the Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) in Northumberland county, and an urban FNMI service group, Nijkiwendidaa Native Women's Circle. These meetings were oriented at working in partnership through dialogue on the development of their policy and implementation. The overall approach to better understanding the needs of Aboriginal students and shared concerns about data collection especially aggregate use were clarified through these meetings. Some individual concerns were raised directly to the board Aboriginal education coordinator but generally for most inquiries community members were receptive to the board's overall commitment to the policy.

Algoma District School Board:

The ADSB board's focus on ensuring a process of transparency began with discussions between First Nation Chiefs and Councils, representatives from the local Métis Nation of Ontario organization, and their Urban Aboriginal representatives during the draft stages of their self-identification policy. These discussions were followed by a 'community blitz' communication to FN and Métis communities and the Urban Aboriginal population on the clear purpose of the policy. Information was shared throughout the district by mail outs to Aboriginal families, at pow wows, at hockey games, at baseball games, available at band offices, community offices and in all schools in the area. All communication (printed, radio advertisements, newspaper notices, etc.) included all of the community partners' logos.

Kenora Catholic District School Board:

KCDSB is one of the few original boards in the province that have been collecting data related to self-identification for several years now. The board's initial consultation with local First Nations was very specific to their individual board data collection and use. They have continued to meet regularly throughout the year with their First Nation community representatives to discuss educational issues as it relates to their data. The information gathered is shared and reflected upon by both partners and ensuing discussions occur specific to their Aboriginal education initiatives.

In recent years, data has also been shared with the Northern Ontario Education Leaders (NOEL) partners in the Oral Language Assessment project, which has helped in identifying larger trends and projections of Aboriginal learners and all students that impact on regional focussed decisions.

KCDSB is reviewing their self-identification policy process and planning to renew discussions with their First Nation and Aboriginal organizations to revisit information that supports the clarification and understanding of data use and collection beyond their board.

COLLECTION OF ABORIGINAL STUDENT SELF-IDENTIFICATION INFORMATION BY THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

10. What happens to the personal information that the ministry collects?

Personal information is collected by the Ministry through the Ontario School Information System (OnSIS) at predetermined points of time during the school year. Personal information is maintained in an identifiable format throughout the data collection process to ensure data integrity, e.g. that the correct Ontario Education Number (OEN) is assigned to a student. The personalized information is only accessible to a limited number of authorized staff in the ministry, and in the educational institutions and entities from which the ministry indirectly collects the personal information. When the data collection process is complete, the information is depersonalized (stripped of identifiable personal information) and transferred to the Elementary and Secondary Data Warehouse (ESDW). Once the personal information has been depersonalized, it cannot be linked back to the OEN or the identifiable personal information.

Both OnSIS and the ESDW are secure environments that have undergone stringent Privacy Impact Assessments and I &IT evaluations in respect to privacy and secure access.

11. How does the ministry protect the privacy of students' information?

The ministry has the authority to collect personal information, directly or indirectly, under [section 8.1\(1\) of the Education Act R.S.O 1990 Chapter E.2](#). The ministry is bound by privacy protection rules under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. F.31 and takes all necessary steps to safeguard personal information collected.

Personal information collected by schools and school boards is protected in accordance with the Municipal Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act R.S.O.1990.

The Notice of Indirect Collection of Personal Information and the accompanying fact sheet provide details about the protection of privacy and are available at:

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/about/access.html>
<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/about/faqs.html>

12. Is the Ministry collecting data about On versus Off-reserve status of students?

Yes. OnSIS collects whether students self-identified as First Nation residing on reserve and paying a tuition fee ("First Nation Tuition), or residing within the jurisdiction of the school board ("First Nation"). Enrolment information for tuition paying students is also collected through OnSIS.

13. How will schools and boards report Aboriginal student self-identification information to OnSIS?

Currently, for the pilot data collection project, the "Status in Canada" field has been changed for the FOUR PILOT BOARDS ONLY to accommodate the capture of First Nation, First Nation Tuition, Métis and Inuit codes. For the 2008-09 OnSIS data submission the "Native Ancestry" code has been removed.

The OnSIS application will be changed to include a separate field for the above four student self-identification codes for the October 2009-10 data submission. Schools, boards and vendors will be advised of enhancements with the appropriate lead time.

14. If a student no longer wishes to self-identify as Aboriginal can she or he change the information on their student record?

As a general principle, students should be able to remove a self-id designation in a given year, in keeping with the policies and protocols developed within each school board. However, once data has been reported in final form to the ministry, the information will remain in a depersonalized format for statistical purposes.

When will OnSIS be collecting Aboriginal student self-id data from all other school boards with self-identification policies?

OnSIS will be collecting student level Aboriginal student self-identification information from all school boards with self-identification policies beginning with the October 2009-10 data submission cycle.