



Niigaan Gdizhaami Forum

“We Are Moving Forward Together”

May 4-7, 2021

Anishinabek Education System

Annual Forum Report

Niigaan Gdizhaami Forum

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May 4-7, 2021

Acknowledgements

Mii go giinwin maa Kinoomaadziwin Education Body wewena ezhi-gkenmiyangid ngiw waadookaagyangwaa. Mii s-go ezhi-nkiitmaagyangwaa gchi gii-piitendaagwad mnonkamgizyang megwaa 2021 Niigaan Gdizhaami Forum.

The Kinoomaadziwin Education Body acknowledges the following partners, organizations, and individuals. Their collaboration and support were essential to the success of the 2021 Niigaan Gdizhaami Forum.

Participating First Nations of the Anishinabek Education System

Elder Beatrice Twance-Hynes

Elder Marlene Pierre

Dr. Brenda Restoule

Brandon Petahtegoose

James Vukelich Kaagegaabaw

Ontario Ministry of Education

Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada

Ingaged Creative Productions

Staff and Board of the Kinoomaadziwin Education Body

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Glossary

AES	Anishinabek Education System
ANEA	Anishinabek Nation Education Agreement
BSID	Board School Identification Number
DISA	Data and Information Sharing Agreement
DURRA	Data User Roles and Responsibilities Agreement
DREC	Data, Research & Evaluation Committee
EDI	Early Development Instrument
EDU	Ministry of Education
EKAN	Ezhi Kendmang Anishinaabe Naadziwin
EO	Education Officer
FNMI	First Nation, Métis, and Inuit
IEO	Indigenous Education Office
IEP	Independent Education Plan
JMEAC	Joint Master Education Agreement Committee
KEB	Kinoomaadziwin Education Body
MEA	Master Education Agreement
MYAP	Multi-Year Action Plan
NG Fund	Niigaan Gdizhaami Fund
DSB	Ontario District School Board
PFN	Participating First Nation
REC	Regional Education Council
SEC	Special Education Committee

Welcoming Messages

Kinoomaadziwin Education Body

Mii s-go giinwin taamgo wii-aabjitooyang ni nishnaabe-bmaadziwin nooswadooyang Niizhwaaswe Mishoomsigkendmaadziwinan, Gdoo-gchi-yaamnaaniig, Gdoo-niigaanaabemnaaniig, miinwaa Eshkiniigjig. Mii maamwi ezhi-maawnjidyang eko-ngodwaasong enso-boong Niigaan Gdizhaami e-maawnjiding, mii-sh s-go taamgo waa-piichi-gnawenmiyangidwaa gi geknoomaagzijig enishnaabewjig ezhi-bmaadziwaad naabadosing enweyang, enaadziyang, mina genwenmiyangidwaa.

The Anishinabek Education System is committed to being a system grounded in Anishinaabe beliefs and principles, guided by the Seven Grandfather Teachings, our Elders, our leadership, and our Youth. As we gather together at the sixth annual Niigaan Gdizhaami Forum, we are focused on the well-being of Anishinabek students, and how it connects to our language, our culture, and our relationships.

The relationship we have built with our provincial partners is rooted in the intentions of the Master Education Agreement, and in a shared vision of ensuring the best education experiences for our children and youth. Over the next few days, this forum welcomes an impressive group of speakers, facilitators, community representatives, students, and education partners who all believe in the vision of the Anishinabek Education System. We are hopeful that everyone participating in this event will share, learn, and find evidence of the benefits and progress of this collective journey.

Ontario

It is an honour to take part in the 2021 Niigaan Gdizhaami Forum and to see the incredible work being done to implement the Master Education Agreement and ensure the success of the Anishinabek Education System. This has been an unprecedented year in education due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We recognize the limitless efforts being made by the Participating First Nations and Ontario District School Boards to support Anishinabek students, families, and educators during this time.

The Ministry of Education is committed to our continued partnership, and as such, we are pleased to participate in this virtual gathering to share progress and plan for the future. As the first three years of implementing the Master Education Agreement come to a close, we are working together to jointly establish a new Multi-Year Action Plan that will continue the advancements made since 2018 and begin new initiatives to further the objectives of the Agreement. We are certain the next four days will be filled with meaningful discussions, collaboration between First Nations and school boards, and productive planning. We look forward to continuing our partnership work as we move forward together on this exciting path.

Canada

The Government of Canada supports the annual Niigaan Gdizhaami Forum through the tripartite relationship with Ontario and the Participating First Nations of the Anishinabek Education System. Each year, representatives of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada participate in the forum to absorb the ongoing developments of the Master Education Agreement and to lend its support to the overall work of the Anishinabek Education System. Welcoming remarks were offered to all participants by the Honourable Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada. To view Minister Bennett's warm remarks, please visit the following link:

[2021 Niigaan Gdizhaami Forum - Minister Carolyn Bennett - Welcoming Message](#)

In Memory

The Kinoomaadziwin Education Body (KEB) unexpectedly lost a team member, Darren Renaud, on Thursday, May 13, 2021. His passing was a shock to everyone who knew him.

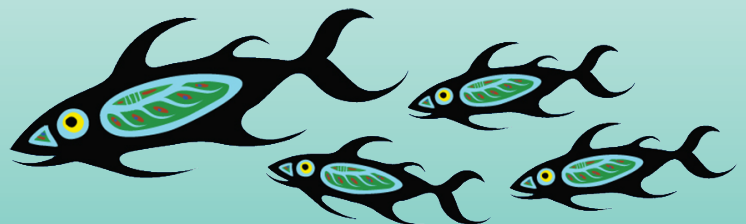
Darren was a proud member of Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation. He joined the KEB in September 2020, in the role of Data Management Officer. His extensive career in quality assurance, organizational development, and workplace wellness gave him a unique skill set to deliver on the data and information priorities of the Anishinabek Education System (AES).

Darren tackled his role with passion and a sincere desire to create effective strategies that would bring the most benefit to Anishinabek students. He carried a positive and friendly nature with his KEB colleagues and everyone he worked with.



At this year's Niigaan Gdizhaami Forum, Darren facilitated the "Evaluation for the AES: Learning As We Go" session, which took place following the Opening Ceremony. In collaboration with our Ministry of Education colleague, Keiko Kuji-Shikatani, Darren guided participants through discussions that asked them to reflect on the journey of the AES and on the changes the system has affected on student success and well-being. The word clouds that he generated during the session can be found in the following pages of this report.

Darren was a valued member of the KEB team and he will missed by his colleagues and all who knew him.



Introduction

The KEB hosted the sixth annual Niigaan Gdizhaami “We are Moving Forward Together” Forum on May 4-7, 2021. The event, held for the first-time as a virtual forum, was hosted in partnership with the Indigenous Education Office (IEO) of the Ontario Ministry of Education (EDU).

The theme of the forum was *Anishinabek Student Well-Being*. While participation varied throughout the four days, at its peak, the online event brought together 127 attendees comprised of Participating First Nation (PFN) representatives and community members, EDU staff, District School Board (DSB) partners, keynote speakers, teachers, students and various guests. All of the forum’s attendees held in common a shared interest in Anishinabek education.

As an annual event established under the Master Education Agreement (MEA) between the PFNs, the KEB, and Ontario, the forum’s main objectives are:

- Sharing information on the implementation of the MEA;
- Securing input from forum participants on MEA initiatives;
- Providing an opportunity for forum participants to learn about educational initiatives and best practices;
- Hearing from Anishinabek youth on their educational priorities and needs, and their collective plan moving forward; and
- Supporting Anishinabek First Nations and DSBs to advance regional educational priorities.

This year’s virtual platform allowed participants to join the event from the comfort and safety of their homes, while still being engaged as valued stakeholders of the AES. Engaged Creative Productions were invaluable in supporting the technological logistics of carrying out a virtual event of this nature.

Each day began with a pre-recorded message from Elder Beatrice Twance-Hynes offering an opening prayer and reciting *Ngo Dwe Waangizid Anishinaabe*, the preamble to the Anishinabek Nation Chi-Naaknigewin (great law).



Elder Beatrice Twance-Hynes joined in virtually to the Forum each morning and at the closing ceremony. Her participation was appreciated by all attendees.

At the Opening Ceremony, Andrea Crawford, Senior Operations Manager for the KEB, provided words of memoriam for Elder Muriel Sawyer Baa.

Muriel was a long-time supporter of the AES throughout its inception, negotiation, and implementation. She served as a Regional Education Council Representative for Nipissing First Nation and she was a valued member of the AES’ Language and Culture Reference Group. Muriel’s kindness, knowledge, and humour, were missed at the forum, and she will be missed at many AES gatherings to come.

Additional opening remarks were provided by:

- Greer Atkinson, Chair, KEB Board of Directors;
- Denise Dwyer, Assistant Deputy Minister, EDU;
- Grand Council Chief Glen Hare, Anishinabek Nation;
- Christine Dokis, Director of Education, KEB; and
- Taunya Paquette, Saugeen First Nation, Director, Indigenous Education Office, EDU.

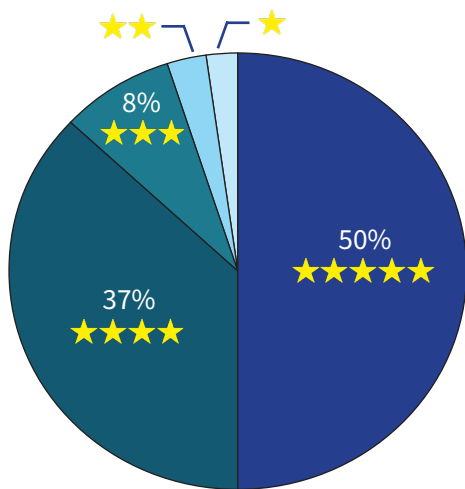
This report, and its supporting documents, provide a summary of events for the 2021 Niigaan Gdizhaami Forum.

Day One Overview

Session	Presenter(s)	Number of Participants	Average Rating out of 5
Opening Ceremony	Andrea Crawford Christine Dokis Taunya Paquette Brandon Petahtegoose	108	4.5
Youth Keynote Address			
Evaluation for the AES: Learning As We Go	Darren Renaud Keiko Kuji-Shikatani	115	4.2
Special Education	Elizabeth Bigwin	82	4.3

Overall satisfaction rate = 86%

Based on 60 survey respondents



Participant Feedback

"Brandon, meegwech for your talk and the powerful stories that you shared. I could totally relate to the experiences. You are indeed a role model for all."



"I found the presentations well organized, with good visuals and the opportunity for break-out discussion groups providing valuable participant interaction."



"I enjoyed my afternoon and have a greater appreciation for all the support our students receive and knowing that we still have a ways to go to ensure they have greater successes as they get older."



"Lots of great information and great conversation - love hearing from everyone and all the stories they have to share."

Daily Prize Pack Winner

Mikayla Dawson, Long Lake #58 First Nation



Day One Session Summaries

Youth Keynote Address

Brandon Petahtegoose, Atikameksheng Anishnawbek

The leading voice at this year's Niigaan Gdizhaami Forum belonged to the Youth of the AES. Their presence and voice in the ongoing development and implementation work of the AES is essential to its overall success. Each year, the Niigaan Gdizhaami Forum strives to host the Youth of the AES in various sessions and activities that speak to their own priorities and interests. This year brought challenges to this element of the forum, with Youth involvement limited to virtual participation.

With the intent of keeping Anishinabek youth at the forefront of our collective thoughts, Brandon Petahtegoose offered a keynote address that focused on the journey of Anishinabek Youth in the varied landscapes of education.

Brandon shared his story and spoke about the impacts of a childhood influenced by alcohol and how his environment as a child helped to normalize a negative lifestyle that he aspired to follow. His path as a young learner saw him relocate from his home community of Atikameksheng Anishnawbek, to an urban centre nearby, and later across the country to British Columbia. Brandon's journey through adolescence included experiences with alcohol and substance abuse, racism, unemployment, trauma and loss, and a struggle with finding pride in his own identity.

Eventually, it was the sound of the powwow drum that spoke to his spirit and reminded him of his happier, earlier years in Atikameksheng. Listening to the drum led to dancing, and dancing led Brandon to a calmness that allowed him to reflect on and feel his connection to something strong and beautiful – his culture. From there, Brandon began learning through ceremony and spending time with Elders – and ultimately learned about the power of Youth voices. By channeling his own gift of speaking, Brandon reminded listeners of the importance of seeking out Youth voices in everything we do and taking direction from the Youth. His opening remarks were extremely well-received by the audience and participants reflected on the impact of his words for the remaining days of the Niigaan Gdizhaami Forum.



Brandon Petahtegoose is a motivational speaker and educator from Atikameksheng Anishnawbek. His life experiences led him to a career path dedicated to youth advocacy and life-long learning.

*"You are a true inspiration to youth
and all those you come into
contact with."*



*"Miigwech Brandon for leaning
in, sharing, and honouring your
teachers in your leadership."*

Darren Renaud & Keiko Kuji-Shikatani

This method of evaluation produces quantitative data that supports the development of important statistics needed to build an education system. More importantly, the Learning As We Go model captures qualitative data that describes the progress of our journey and informs the ongoing implementation of the AES.

Participants were asked to consider how education has been impacted by the AES over time, specifically examining changes student success and well-being, and changes to the relationship between EDU and the KEB.

There was a rich discussion when it came to considering the strategies that make a difference or contribute to student success in an education system, how we identify student success, and how we make it meaningful and sustainable.

Overall, participants reflected positively on the initiatives and programming that have been taking place across the AES. There are beneficial “trickle-down” effects that have influenced increased access to new staffing, resources, and funding. While the discussion focused on the importance of working together to benefit Anishinabek student success, it was noted that it is hard to quantify the factors that contribute to student success. Nevertheless, those who work on the frontline with students are often able to “see” the successes quite easily.

When participants thought about the evaluation of AES programs and initiatives as being a tracking process of the overall AES journey, it became easier to connect how evaluation supports meaningful and sustainable student success. By considering what changes participants are “seeing, hearing, and feeling,” they were able to offer feedback that is based on Anishinaabe thinking and community priorities.



Moving Forward

- Continue developing Anishinaabe-centred approaches to evaluation that support Learning As We Go.
- Create customized tools that enable the evaluation of PFN priorities, such as teacher education, number of Indigenous teachers in the AES, off-reserve student engagement, mental health, youth voices, and student well-being.

Special Education Guideline Tutorial

Elizabeth Bigwin

The Special Education Guideline Tutorial was a continuation of community engagement sessions on the Special Education Guideline, which has been under development since 2018. Conversations around the Guideline and discussions about Anishinabek best practices and policies were topics of focus, such as Education Service Agreements, other shared agreements, and protocols.

Stakeholders in special education services advocated to support the unique and diverse needs of every student in the AES, offering suggestions for ensuring the final Guideline document, and the implementation of the Guideline, truly meet the needs of students and parents. Break-out discussions in this session supported the collection of feedback in specific areas of consideration, such as partnerships, First Nation education laws, provincial legislation, and community and school board protocols.

Throughout the discussions, participants emphasized the importance of establishing Special Education processes that are student-centred and holistic. Community members also made mention of issues with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) not having space for the student's cultural background, such as their Spirit Name. Another area for improvement is in the acceptance of First Nation developed IEPs once a student transitions to a public school from a First Nation school. Participants reinforced the principle that all students have gifts and learn in particular ways, and that there is a need to develop each child's gifts specific to who they are.

Moving Forward

- Continue ensuring that Anishinabek cultural perspectives and holistic approaches are foundational in Special Education resources and program development.
- Create tools that help PFNs and families to mitigate funding issues around assessments for IEPs.
- Address inquiries from the Special Education Guideline Tutorial session and previous information sessions through a plain-language Question & Answer document.



Day Two Overview

Session	Presenter(s)	Number of Participants	Average Rating out of 5
Seven Generations and Seven Grandfather Teachings	James Vukelich Kaagegaabaw	124	4.8
Ezhi Kendmang Anishnaabe Naadziwin Program & Professional Development Plan – Generating Ideas	Elizabeth Bigwin and Nancy O'Donnell with Guest Speakers	104	4.6
Niigaan Gdizhaami Fund: Learning Circles and Project Highlights	Tammy Desmoulin with Guest Speakers	91	4.7

Overall satisfaction rate = 94%

Based on 71 survey respondents



Participant Feedback

"I was very proud and inspired of all our Indigenous educators and students who are doing amazing work and reclaiming our traditional knowledge and teachings."



"The morning sessions were engaging, stimulating and well done - even if we had to have the forum virtually!"

Daily Prize Pack Winner

Bob Pitfield, Wahnapiatae First Nation



"Enjoyed the discussion, the exchange of ideas and the variety of perspectives shared! Good discussion, lots of potential for future initiatives!"



"There needs to be more advertising, broadcasting of AES and KEB. It would be helpful for communities that have not signed yet."



Day Two Session Summaries

Seven Generations and Seven Grandfather Teachings

James Vukelich Kaagegaabaw



James Vukelich Kaagegaabaw opened Day Two of the Niigaan Gdizhaami Forum with language and story telling. His teachings set the foundation for a positive day.

The first presentation of Day Two was delivered by James Vukelich Kaagegaabaw, a phenomenal linguistic speaker and educator who has spent years recording, preserving, and teaching the Anishinaabe language. James is Turtle Clan from North Dakota. Throughout his presentation, James reminded participants that Anishinaabemowin has been passed through generations of Anishinaabe ancestors and that the language is instilled with the foundational teachings of our own ways of life. This concept is also known as “The Seven Generations.”

Offering a detailed analysis of the Anishinaabemowin terms for the Seven Grandfather Teachings, James described what the teachings mean, culturally, in the language. Following the theme of student well-being, James concluded the talk with a reminder

that bimaadiziwin is passed down to younger generations when we pass down the language, making the resurgence of Anishinaabemowin the greatest priority. Participants were emotionally charged by the presentation. Anishinaabemowin is vitally important to the Anishinabek and James’ teachings demonstrated how interconnected Anishinabek language and culture are.

One of the strategic directions of the AES is founded on the priority of *“Using our knowledge keepers to support fluency and understanding of Anishinaabemowin to revitalize language and culture with learners.”* The fundamental importance of this strategic direction was reinforced by James’ presentation and over the next year, the KEB looks forward to making significant progress in the areas of Anishinaabe language and culture for the benefit of AES students and communities.

“Excellent!”

I really appreciated the link between the language and the teachings. James provided much deeper insight into the 7 Grandfather Teachings, the concept of 7 Generations, and some aspects of ceremony.”

Moving Forward

- Prioritize language and culture in AES programming and strategic planning.
- Create opportunities for learning, professional development, and resource development that enable language revitalization initiatives throughout the AES.

Ezhi Kendmang Anishnaabe Naadziwin Program & Professional Development Plan

Elizabeth Bigwin and Nancy O'Donnell with Guests
Lisa Michano-Courchene and Claire Onabigon

Ezhi Kendmang Anishnaabe Naadziwin (EKAN) is a cultural competency program that aims to support the professional development of educators in DSBs and enhance the learning experiences of Anishinabek students. After nearly three years of consultation and development with the PFNs, the program is now in the early phases of implementation. It will be piloted in four regional school boards in the 2021-2022 academic year.

The program's Anishinaabemowin name translates in English to "*Sharing the Knowledge of the People*", which captures the spirit and intent of EKAN. In REC #1, educators from the PFNs have taken the additional steps of adapting the program's content to reflect and share the specific history and the education landscape of communities within the region.

Lisa Michano-Courchene and Claire Onabigon presented the community-led adaptation of the EKAN program which included an overview of the region's priorities, their partnership with a local school board, and the customized modules that are being developed with local Elders and Knowledge Keepers. There was valuable discussion on education history, decolonization, and respectful inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge.

The second part of the session focused on the development of a professional and leadership development plan for the AES. The KEB will be drafting an annual plan for sharing and learning with AES staff and educators, that will invite partners from local DSBs to participate in. Nancy O'Donnell reviewed the AES Learning Series that has been taking place virtually and discussed plans for continuing the program and working towards the integration of a parent council that will create space for parents and guardians to have a voice in the AES.

There are many priority areas in professional development and cultural learning. The KEB will work towards integrating the feedback collected during this session into the ongoing and future professional development work of the AES.

Suggested areas of focus for future professional development and cultural learning opportunities:

- Consider how to reach a significant number of teachers in large school boards;
- Address cultural appropriation and micro-aggressions;
- Land acknowledgements and their cultural complexity;
- Effects and benefits of colonization/ decolonization;
- Sessions and resources developed for parents and caregivers;
- Preventing Indigenous teacher burn-out/ Addressing the significant reliance on FNMI teachers to educate other staff;
- Language;
- Cultural teachings;
- Contemporary issues that communities and students are confronted with;
- Student transitions;
- Curriculum support and resources; and
- Creating forums for Youth voices.

Moving Forward

- Release the Call for Expressions of Interest for participation in the pilot program.
- Continue expanding on the AES Learning Series.
- Establish an AES Parent Council to provide a platform for parental voice.



Niigaan Gdizhaami Fund: Learning Circles and Project Highlights

Tammy Desmoulin with Guest Speakers

The Niigaan Gdizhaami Fund (NG Fund) is an annual grant established by the KEB and EDU to invest in community-based and joint school board projects that advance the objectives of the MEA. This session highlighted several exceptional NG Fund projects that have been taking place across the AES over the 2020-2021 school year.

Participants were inspired to hear about the projects being implemented in featured communities – many of which have the partnership and collaboration of local school boards. Participants were openly impressed and pleased to see how the projects were approached and carried out.

2020-2021 Community Project Sharing:

Indigenous Academic Tutor and Advocate
Biinjitiwaabik Zaaging Anishinaabek

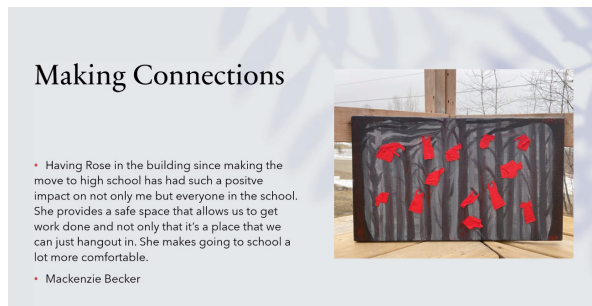
Supporting Successful Education Journeys
Chippewas of Georgina Island

Revitalizing Culture and Language through Innovative Strategies
Nipissing First Nation

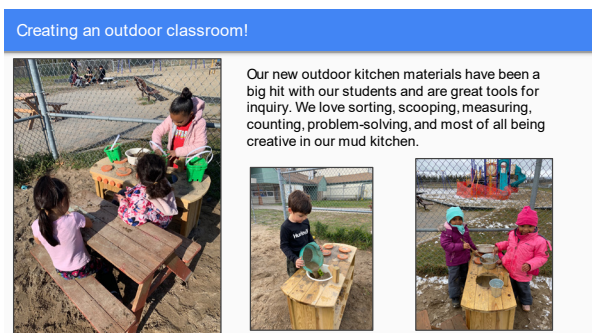
Education Support Hubs
Wahnapiatae First Nation

Curiosity in Kindergarten
Whitefish River First Nation

Each year, the NG Fund presents an important opportunity for the PFNs to pursue innovative projects that directly benefit Anishinabek students, as a community or in partnership with local school boards. There is immense value in sharing and highlighting these projects as they exemplify successful best practices in Anishinabek education, shedding light on potential for future core programming, possible application in other locations, or serving as a means to inspire other educators who are looking for ways to increase student success.



Project: Indigenous Academic Tutor and Advocate, Biinjitiwaabik Zaaging Anishinaabek



Project: Curiosity in Kindergarten, Whitefish River First Nation



Project: Education Support Hubs, Wahnapiatae First Nation

Moving Forward

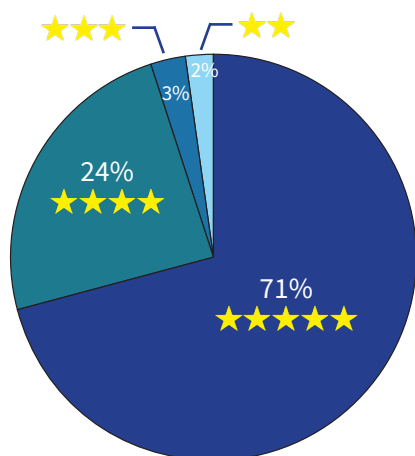
- Continue sharing highlights and best practices of NG Fund projects with all partners.
- Analyze annual trends in projects to identify opportunities for new pilot and core programs.

Day Three Overview

Session	Presenter(s)	Number of Participants	Average Rating out of 5
Regional Priorities: Addressing Racism and Inequity in Schools	Nancy O'Donnell	127	4.7
Enhanced Graduation Coach Program	Lisa Wabegijig with Guest Presenters	110	4.7
Relationship Building: REC #1 Engagement Framework	Nancy O'Donnell with Guest Presenters: Lisa Michano-Courchene & Nicole Morden-Cormier	89	4.7

Overall satisfaction rate = 92.8%

Based on 55 survey respondents



Participant Feedback

"Excellent discussion, sharing of experiences, and suggestions for moving forward. AES definitely needs to take an active role here and possible ways to do that were identified."



"This was another amazing day of information sharing. Highlighting all the work being done by the AES should not just be shared with the PFNs, the partner Boards and EDU. This work should also be shared on a Provincial level."



Daily Prize Pack Winner

Serge Levac, Conseil scolaire catholique franco-nord



"I really enjoy hearing the personal stories. It really puts things into perspective."



"The presentations were awesome. One doesn't realize all the good work being done until its 'seen.'"

Day Three Session Summaries

Regional Priorities: Addressing Racism and Inequity in Schools

Presented by Nancy O'Donnell and the Addressing Racism Committee (supported by Elder Marlene Pierre)

This presentation began with an introduction to the Addressing Racism Committee which includes representatives from the KEB, the RECs, and EDU. Although this work stems for a regional priority identified in REC #1 at the 2020 REC Fall Meetings, the committee's ongoing work is strongly connected to past calls for action that are recorded in important documents such as:

- *Indian Control of Indian Education* (1972);
- the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal People* (1996) *The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action* (2015);
- Niigaan Gdizhaami Forom Youth input (2018, 2019, and 2020); and
- the guiding advisement of many Elders and Knowledge Keepers over time.

The Ministry of Education shared with attendees its recent provincial strategies to address racism for minority students in provincially-funded schools. Information on these strategies was followed by an update on the work of the Addressing Racism Committee, which has been active since the fall of 2020. This committee was born out of the understanding that anti-racism is a shared responsibility that cannot belong only to one party.

The community provided the following feedback and questions :



“The interaction and conversations were appropriate, heartfelt, moving and presented legit concerns. We, as a species, need to empower our youth to stand up against racism. That message was very clear in this presentation today.”

- It is difficult to report racialized incidents without the contacts, procedures, tools, etc.
- Entire families and communities are impacted by racism in schools.
- Parents do not trust the schools' collection of data, and feel that community should be part of the process.
- People often do not hear back about how incidents of racism were addressed, or their reports go unacknowledged.
- How are AES priorities such as this aligned with the priorities that are identified in school board action plans?
- The teachers' unions should be involved in these discussions.
- What are AES partners prepared to do in order to prioritize addressing the issues that our children experience daily?

Addressing racism and inequity in schools is a significant priority for the AES. The ramifications of racism have consequences and impacts that reach beyond the victim, extending to families and communities. The development of anti-racism training for all AES staff was identified as a clear priority, along with the development of tools, mechanisms, and processes that help to ensure accountability in addressing racialized incidents.

Moving Forward

- Develop anti-racism training for AES staff that includes supports for parents and families to access.
- Determine the requirements to develop a customized AES racism reporting tool.

Enhanced Graduation Coach Program

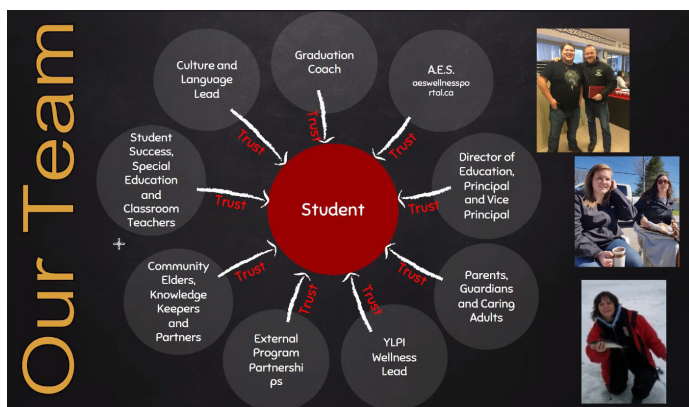
Lisa Wabegijig and Guest Presenters: Monique Sawyer, Darwin Legarde, and Claire Onabigon

The Enhanced Graduation Coach Program is one of 17 projects outlined in the MYAP. The goal of the program is to empower Anishinabek students by providing supports and access to resources that assist in establishing and achieving graduation paths. The Graduation Coach model allows PFNs to advocate for Anishinabek student well-being and academic achievement by interacting with and assessing students in need of extra support.

Since 2019, three schools have been implementing a pilot Graduation Coach Program throughout the AES:

1. Nbisiing Secondary School, Nipissing First Nation
2. Migizi Miigwanan Secondary School, Long Lake #58 First Nation
3. Manitoulin Secondary School, Rainbow District School Board

Overall, the Enhanced Graduation Coach program is showing strong benefits for students. Particularly, there is better communication with parents, more connection with students, a focus on individual student needs, and a sense of safety for students who are gravitating to these spaces and staff. Program implementation has identified greater need for staff development, especially with regard to trauma-informed practices. The sentiment that these types of programs should remain a permanent fixture in the schools was discussed.



As the Graduation Coach for Nbisiing Secondary School in Nipissing First Nation, Monique Sawyer gave a heartfelt presentation on the school's Grad Coach program. Nbisiing is in its 3rd year of the pilot program, and the current graduation rate for the school is 74-75%. Nbisiing uses a team approach in supporting students in pathway planning that includes: Prior Learning Assessment & Recognition (PLAR), credit rescue and recovery, language, ceremonies, land-based learning, connecting with Elders and cultural programming. A dedicated Grad Coach room in the school helps to support critical program elements such as parent engagement, relationship building with students, and transitions to post-secondary education.

CON'T RELATIONSHIPS & MENTORING

In addition to meeting with students to support their well being, the Graduation Coach maintains a communitive relationship with their teachers to keep informed of student progress to date, any social issues or attendance concerns.

MyBlueprint is used as a way for students to learn about themselves but also a tool to help students begin thinking about and planning for their future through:

- Surveys that help to identify student's learning style, personality, interests, knowledge, and motivations
- Compatible career surveys
- Career Cruising
- Goal Setting
- A Year At A Glance Implementation Guide
- Resume making
- Family Guide with activities to support student success
- Cover Letters
- Post Secondary options
- Action Plans
- Teacher Guide for creating remote learning activities
- Creating a budget plan

Darwin Legarde is the Graduation Coach for the Migizi Schools in Long Lake #58 First Nation. The Grad Coach program is still relatively new to Long Lake #58, as it was launched in January 2020, but COVID-19 had an impact on the program's first year. Darwin and Claire Onabigon, Long Lake #58's Education Director, highlighted some of the focus areas of the program to date, such as relationship building and mentoring, transitions, career planning, parental engagement, course planning, student pathways, and culture and ceremonies. In January 2021, COVID-19 once again impacted in-person learning in the community and the Grad Coach program. The program will continue in the 2021-2022 academic year.

Moving Forward

- Support communities with access to professional development opportunities that address the unique circumstances that Graduation Coaches work in.

Relationship Building: REC #1 Engagement

Framework

Nancy O'Donnell and Patti Pella with Guest
Presenters: Lisa Michano-Courchene & Nicole
Morden-Cormier

Project 16 under the MYAP is dedicated to building relationships between the First Nations and partner school boards that are affiliated with the AES. The mandate of the project was reviewed, which spoke to some of the new activities that will be implemented throughout the remainder of the current MYAP.

One of the initiatives that lends to the objectives of Project 16, is the development of an engagement framework in REC #1. Lisa Michano-Courchene, of Biigtigong Nishnaabeg, and Nicole Morden-Cormier, of Superior-Greenstone District School Board, introduced the framework to participants, and described the process that the PFNs and school boards undertook to develop it.

The Engagement Framework is intended to support and enhance collaboration between the parties, with the paramount goal of providing optimal support to AES students attending provincially-funded schools within the region. Strong partnerships and mutual accountability are necessary to achieve this goal.

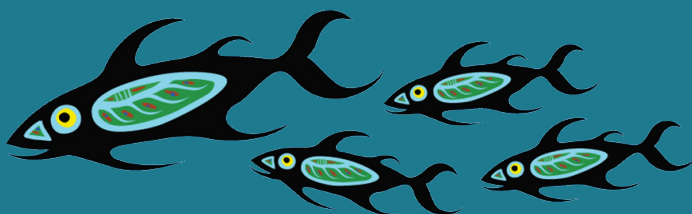
The Engagement Framework, once complete, will set out a meaningful and effective consultation process for four AES communities and two partner school boards.

Nicole Morden-Cormier spoke to the impact that the engagement work has already had on the school board by providing the example of the recent de-streaming of Grade 9 Math. The school board openly engaged with REC #1 First Nations to enable discussions on the curriculum changes. By creating space that allowed for listening and learning, the school board was able to approach the curriculum changes in ways that are responsive to the needs of the students.

Tracking and evaluating the development of this Engagement Framework will be beneficial to the establishment of similar practices in other regions. Challenges and successes, as well as the impacts on student well-being and achievement, will be key factors to monitor.

Moving Forward

- Finalize the development of the Engagement Framework for implementation in REC #1.
- Track and evaluate the implementation of the Engagement Framework to connect to student well-being/success and to support best practices for similar engagement frameworks in other regions.

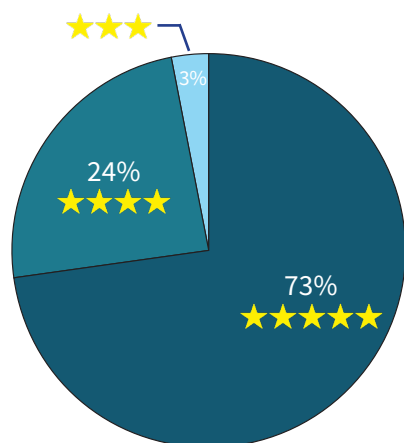


Day Four Overview

Session	Presenter(s)	Number of Participants	Average Rating out of 5
Youth Session	Alicia Cameron & Brandon Petahtegoose	36	4.8
Mental Health Keynote	Dr. Brenda Restoule	93	4.7
REC Networking Session	Nancy O'Donnell Tammy Moreau Lisa Wabegijig Alicia Cameron	94	4.5
Closing Ceremony	Christine Dokis & Taunya Paquette	120	4.6

Overall satisfaction rate = 93.8%

Based on 59 survey respondents



Daily Prize Pack Winner

Donna Genereux, Parry Sound



Participant Feedback

“Engaging, creative, informative while building technology capacity and gathering important information - outstanding for a Friday and the last day of a four-day virtual conference. Well done!”



"So much good information!!! Excellent!"



"The interactive tools and opportunity to hear from each of the RECs helped keep participants actively involved and not feeling as though we aren't actually in a room together."



"I particularly enjoyed the closing by the Elder. When she began to smudge I could feel it, smell it, and see it around me - I followed along and smudged myself."

Day Four Session Summaries

Youth Session

Alicia Cameron with Guest Facilitator Brandon Petahtegoose

The Youth Session took place on the final day of the Niigaan Gdizhaami Forum. The session had a great turnout with more than 35 participants joining from Nbisiing Secondary School, Shawanosowe School, Northern Secondary School, Wasauksing First Nation, Biinjitiwaabik Zaaging Anishinaabek, Alderville First Nation, Parry Sound High School, Georgina Island First Nation, and from EDU programming.

Brandon Petahtegoose joined the Youth as a co-facilitator for the session. He shared a welcome song and reflected on his own story while also integrating cultural teachings. Brandon was followed by a panel of outstanding youth who shared parts of their own stories, and words of wisdom about learning who you are and stepping into your own identity.

There were three Youth panelists in total:

- Hannah Morningstar, Atikameksheng Anishnawbek
- Tia Kennedy, Walpole Island First Nation and Oneida Nation of the Thames
- Zeegwon Shilling, Wasauksing First Nation

Their participation in the session truly enabled the Youth to engage and openly discuss their own matters in their own way. Themes that shone through clearly in this session included the power of song, connection to culture and language, mino bimaadziwin (living a good life), and uplifting and honouring youth. Anishinabek Youth are strong and participants in this session were fortunate to witness the talents and gifts of such young speakers. This session was a good reminder of why the AES exists and for whom the AES was created: our children, our Youth, our future generations.



The AES Youth Session was advertised throughout the PFNs in advance of the forum. The Youth in attendance were energetic and motivated, with keen interest to participate in more AES events.

Moving Forward

- Integrate youth more prominently into future AES gatherings and events.
- Build youth participation into the opening of future Niigaan Gdizhaami Forums and increase youth participation throughout the event.

Mental Health Keynote Address

Dr. Brenda Restoule

The theme of this year's forum was centred on Anishinabek student well-being. While each of the sessions throughout the event touched on the many areas of education that support overall student well-being, the keynote address on the last day of the forum spoke specifically to the critical element of mental health. Dr. Brenda Restoule, Chief Executive Officer of the First Peoples Wellness Circle, gifted attendees with an inspiring talk on youth mental health.

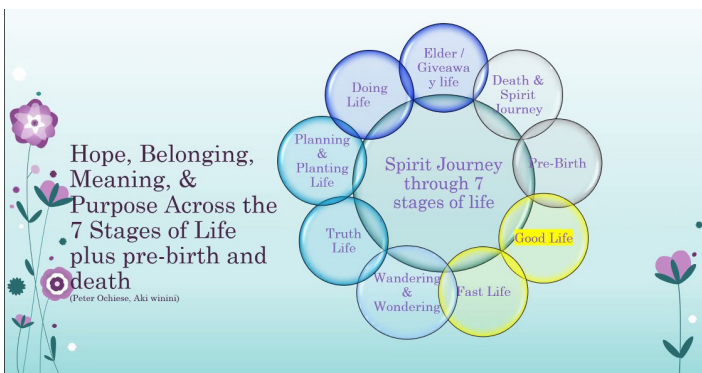


Dr. Brenda Restoule is the CEO of the First Peoples Wellness Circle.

The presentation noted the stark statistics of mental health for Indigenous youth, before moving into discussions around common and concerning mental health behaviours in youth. Dr. Restoule spoke frankly about some of the most commonly diagnosed disorders in children and youth, and the added challenges experienced by Indigenous youth related to loss of language and culture, along with racism and inequitable access to resources and supports. With approximately 70% of mental health disorders cultivating in childhood or adolescence, early intervention is very important and often occurs in a school setting.

One of the points made by Dr. Restoule identified that over 75% of students don't access mental health services, turning instead to the support of parents, friends, and mentors. When discussing restorative practices that can help to support mental health, Dr. Restoule emphasized that in addition to equitable access to services and resources, Anishinabek youth need healthy adults, social circles, community mentors, and youth empowerment. They need collaboration and partnership with all levels of government, better relationships with law enforcement, and culturally-responsive services, like sharing circles.

Participants in the session shared their own challenges and experiences that come with the collective responsibility of supporting mental health in education, particularly through a global pandemic. A number of resources, tools, and services were highlighted by Dr. Restoule as starting places to seek support for students presenting mental health concerns. There was a general consensus among participants that ongoing discussions about mental health should always be a priority for the AES.



Dr. Restoule shared the philosophy of the Spirit Journey through the seven stages of life with participants. At the centre of this philosophy is the need for all people to nurture, achieve, and maintain a sense of hope, belonging, meaning, and purpose throughout each stage of life.

Moving Forward

- Maintain mental health as an overarching priority in the development of AES programs and services.
- Add mental health as an element when reporting on student well-being and achievement.

Regional Networking Sessions

Nancy O'Donnell, Tammy Moreau, Lisa Wabegijig, and Alicia Cameron

This year's Regional Networking Sessions were facilitated as a virtual collaboration, bringing all four regions together in one large session. After several days of viewing and listening to presentations, the KEB's team of Regional Education Council Coordinators (RECC) wanted to take advantage of the online format to facilitate large-scale participation in the session.

Using an interactive tool called [Menti](#), participants were able to submit robust and honest responses to numerous questions instantly and anonymously. A question-and-answer format was used that combined fun and playful questions about the audience with more serious questions about the AES. Responses were displayed on the screen in real-time, which encouraged participation.

The information gathered throughout the session will contribute to the RECC team's ability to improve methods of communication and apply recommended approaches for working together to improve education for all AES students.

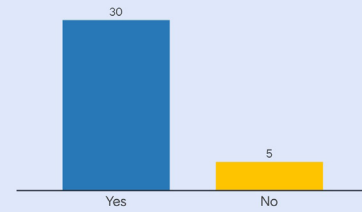
One of the largest takeaways from the survey was the importance of language and culture in numerous responses. Questions that referred to language and culture received the highest number of responses with considerable insight and feedback provided.

Other significant feedback:

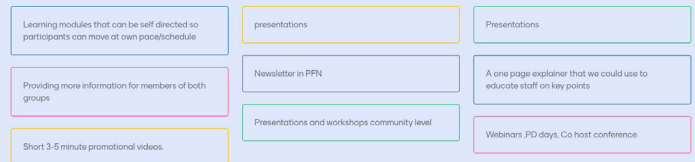
- Email, phone calls, and in-person meetings are the best forms of communication.
- Presentation and written documents are viewed as the best ways to support awareness of the AES.
- Engagement opportunities provided by the KEB have helped to build relationships between PFNs and DSBs.
- Language and culture should support the provision of language classes, curriculum resources, human resources, and development for language teachers.
- Land-Based Learning should be an AES-wide priority.

Mentimeter Survey Questions

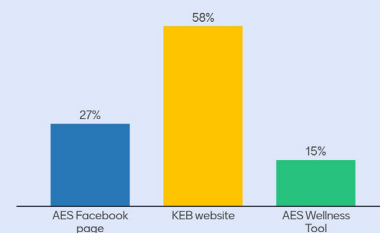
Have the engagement sessions (Fall Meeting, February Forum, other) organized by the KEB helped to build the partnership between your PFN and your DSB?



How can the KEB promote awareness of the AES in PFNs and DSBs?



Which of the following AES tools have you used?



What role should AES have in supporting student well-being?



Moving Forward

- Increase focus on language and culture throughout the educational work of the KEB.
- Support communities in accessing land-based learning resources.
- Create a dedicated Language and Culture position at the KEB to support initiatives throughout the AES.

Closing Ceremony

Even though the 2021 Niigaan Gdizhaami Forum was hosted completely online during a year of unprecedented circumstances, the event was a resounding success. Closing remarks were provided by Christine Dokis, Taunya Paquette, and Andrea Crawford, followed by a pre-recorded message from Elder Beatrice Twance-Hynes. There was a general hope that next year’s gathering will return to its original format in-person, but participants expressed clear gratitude for the opportunity to carry on the annual event in a virtual format that created inclusivity and connection for all parties.

Event Statistics



Daily evaluation submissions	75%
Total number of registrants	300+
Highest peak attendance	127
PFNs in attendance	20
DSBs in attendance	16
Number of presenters and facilitators	40+

Grand Prize Pack Winner

Hillary Freeburn, Superior Greenstone DSB



Participant Feedback

“Chi Miigwech to everyone who had a hand in arranging this informative and engaging conference! Job well done.” :)



“This Forum was excellent and absolutely successful. It included a healthy balance of presentations and opportunities to network and engage in larger groups discussions, eliminating screen burnout.”



“These were excellent days. Congratulations to all of the organizers and presenters. Miigwech!”



“We may have been gathered virtually, but I felt the presence and connection to my colleagues and FN brothers and sisters. Miigwech, miigwech, miigwech, miigwech.”



“Loved and appreciated the planning that went into this!!! Keep up the good work of bringing us together toward this generational common goal - ensuring our young people have access to barrier free education.”

Moving Forward: A Summary of Next Steps

The following chart provides a summary of the Next Steps that have been noted throughout this report for focused attention over the next year.

	Action Items	Page Reference
1.	Continue developing Anishinaabe-centred approaches to evaluation that support Learning As We Go.	11
2.	Create customized tools that enable the evaluation of PFN priorities.	11
3.	Ensure that Anishinabek cultural perspectives and wholistic approaches are foundational in all of the work that is forthcoming.	12
4.	Create tools that help PFNs and families to mitigate funding issues around assessments for IEPs.	12
5.	Address inquiries from Special Education Guideline Tutorial sessions through a plain-language Question & Answer document.	12
6.	Make significant progress in the areas of Anishinaabe language and culture.	14
7.	Address professional development and learning priorities for language.	14
8.	Release the Call for Expressions of Interest for participation in the EKAN program.	15
9.	Continue expanding on the AES Learning Series.	15
10.	Establish an AES Parent Council to provide a platform for parental voice.	15
11.	Continue to share Niigaan Gdizhaami Fund best practices with school board partners where possible.	16
12.	Analyze annual trends in projects to identify opportunities for new pilot and core programs.	16
13.	Develop anti-racism training for AES Staff.	18
14.	Develop a racism reporting tool.	18
15.	Provide professional development opportunities specific to Graduation Coaches.	19
16.	Finalize the development of the Engagement Framework for implementation in REC #1.	20
17.	Track and evaluate implementation of Engagement Frameworks to connect to student well-being and to establish best practices.	20
18.	Integrate youth more prominently into future AES gatherings and events.	22
19.	Build youth participation into the opening of future Niigaan Gdizhaami Forums and increase youth participation throughout the event.	22
20.	Maintain mental health as an over-arching priority in the development of AES programs and services.	23
21.	Add mental health as an element when reporting on student well-being and achievement.	23
22.	Increase focus on language and culture throughout the educational work of the KEB.	24
23.	Support communities in accessing land-based learning resources.	24
24.	Create a dedicated Language and Culture position at the KEB to support initiatives throughout the AES.	24

Supporting Documents & Links



Supporting Documents and Links

The following documents and links are provided as additional reference materials to support the content and the findings of this report.

A. Forum Registration Booklet

https://anishinabekes-my.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/personal/andrea_crawford_a-e-s_ca/ERmD-BNwt9LL0XXpFUVS8kBuFz6inLUtCKDiJiMOjSOrg?e=KpfM29

B. Anishinabek Education System/Kinoomaadziwin Education Body Website

<https://aes-keb.com/>

C. Anishinabek Education System Wellness Portal

<https://aeswellnessportal.ca/>

D. First Peoples Wellness Circle

<https://www.fpowc.ca/>

E. Youth Session Crisis Support Document

https://anishinabekes-my.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/personal/andrea_crawford_a-e-s_ca/ERTWwERC_UNIUFTTrV9sxIBDwH7kDWKDCuXUcFALcPqrQ?e=3caR9F

