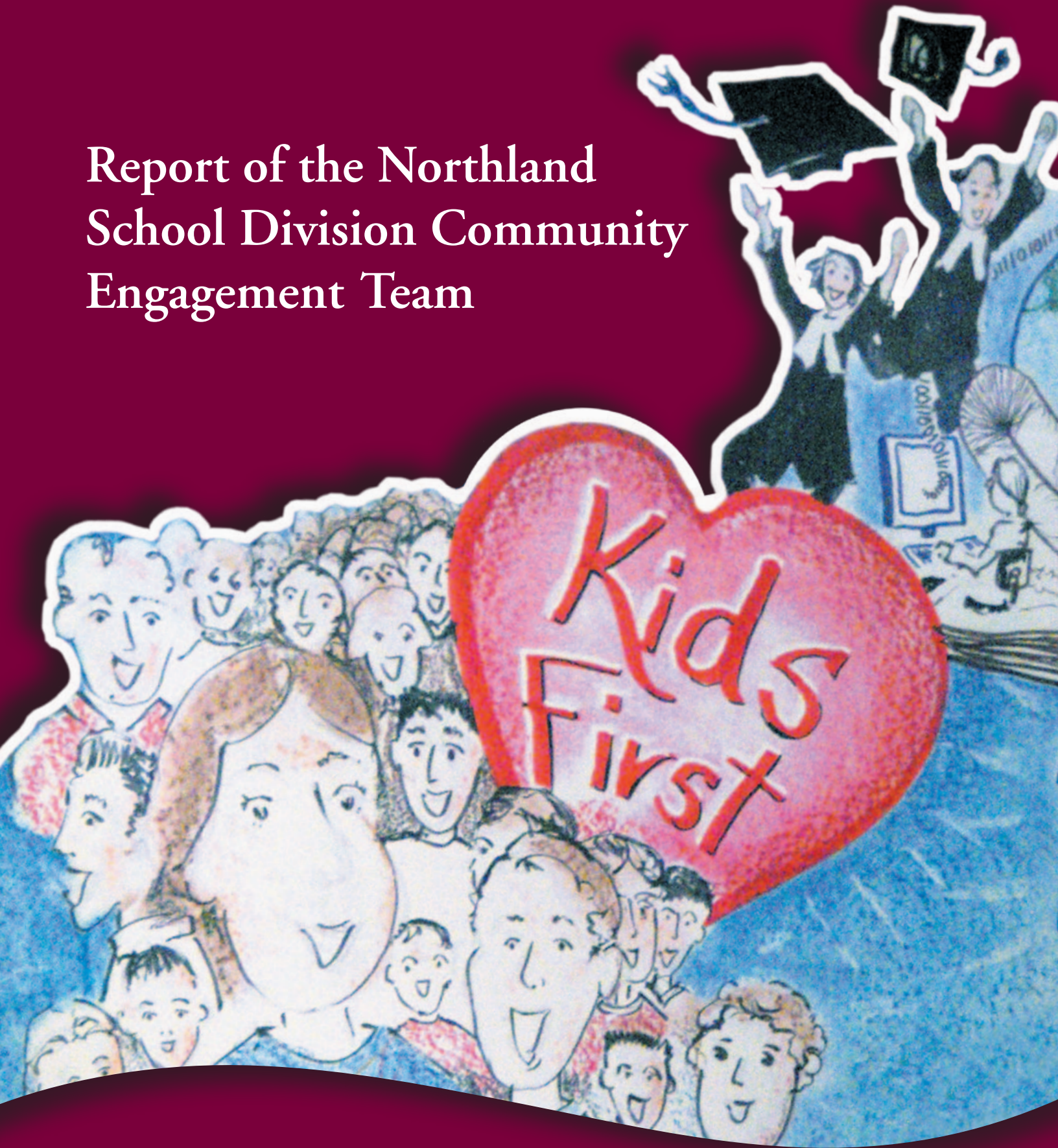


Report of the Northland  
School Division Community  
Engagement Team



January 2012

**ALBERTA EDUCATION CATALOGUING IN PUBLICATION DATA**

Kids first : report of the Northland School Division Community Engagement Team.

ISBN 978-0-7785-9912-8 (Print)

ISBN 978-0-7785-9913-5 (PDF)

1. Indians of North America – Education – Alberta.
2. School boards – Alberta – Northland School Division.
  - I. Alberta. Northland School Division. II. Alberta.

E96.65.A42 K468 2012

371.9797

The Creator loans us children to raise  
them to be the best they can be.

Elder Pauline Ominayak,  
Northland Community Engagement Team

## Transmittal Letter

*Kids First*, the report from the NCET describes a process for engaging communities in Northland School Division No.61. In addition to the Community Engagement Framework, *Kids First* sets out a vision for excellence in Aboriginal education and responds to five priority recommendations contained in the *Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report*.

In presenting this report, we acknowledge all those who contributed to its development, most notably the Department of Education and Northland School Division personnel and our meeting facilitators. We also want to acknowledge the support of Dave Hancock, the former Minister of Education, who appointed us to this important task.

Above all, we thank individuals from our communities who took the time to talk to us about their hopes and dreams for our children. Their input contributed to our discussions and our vision for excellence.

To the Minister of Education we believe our work is not done. This report is just the beginning. We are willing to do what is necessary to make the recommendations work.

We believe this report sets the stage for excellence in Aboriginal education. With the support of our communities, we believe Northland School Division No. 61 can become a showcase for Aboriginal education, both at home in Canada and in the world.

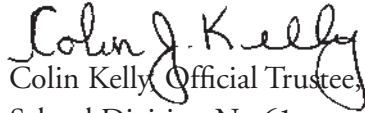
Signed by all members of the Northland Community Engagement Team

## Northland Community Engagement Team

### Co-chairs

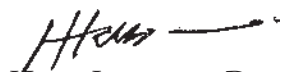


Pearl Calahasen, MLA for Lesser Slave Lake



Colin Kelly, Official Trustee, Northland School Division No.61

### Elders



Harry Lawrence, Duncan's First Nation



Joyce Parenteau, Paddle Prairie

Métis Settlement



Pauline Ominayak, Sucker Creek

First Nation

### Treaty 8 Communities



Paula Giroux, Driftpile First Nation



Rita Marten, Mikisew Cree First Nation



Nora Yellowknee, Bigstone Cree

First Nation

### Métis Communities



Dave Lambouche, Gift Lake

Métis Settlement



Jeff Chaloup, Grouard

### Communities-at-large



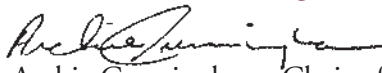
David MacPhee, Susa Creek, Aseniwuche

Winewak Development Council



Laurie Thompson, Kikino Métis Settlement

### Northern Lakes College



Archie Cunningham, Chair of the Board of

Governors, Northern Lakes College

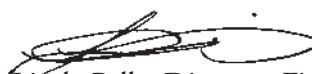
### Partnership Council Liaison Member



Inier Cardinal, First Nations, Métis and

Inuit Education Partnership Council

### Alberta Education



Linda Pelly, Director, First Nations, Métis and Inuit Services



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In January 2010, then-Education Minister Dave Hancock dissolved the corporate board of Northland School Division No. 61 and appointed an official trustee to oversee the jurisdiction amid long-standing concerns over weak student learning outcomes and issues related to governance.

The Minister also appointed a three-member inquiry team to review and make recommendations related to the operations of Northland School Division No. 61. The team's report, the *Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report*, made 48 recommendations for improvement.

On January 11, 2011, the Minister named a community-based team to provide strategic advice, direction and leadership in securing community engagement in Northland School Division No. 61. The Northland Community Engagement Team was also directed to make recommendations, as appropriate, on key issues arising from the development of a community-based response to the *Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report*.

*Kids First*, the report of the Northland Community Engagement Team, develops a framework to guide community engagement. In addition it presents a vision for Aboriginal education excellence and makes recommendations in five priority areas arising from the *Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report*.

*Kids First* is illustrated with graphics that capture the team's discussions, in keeping with the unique format of its meetings. The report is also illustrated with memories and experiences of team members, most of whom come from Northland communities.

Northland Community Engagement Team members strongly support keeping Northland School Division No. 61 intact. The Team noted that the *Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report*, released in November 2010, confirmed that communities in the jurisdiction have a clear desire to keep their school division as an entity. It said that "in spite of many concerns, a spirit of enthusiasm and regard for the organization endures."

## Vision

The primary focus of the team’s deliberations was “*Kids First*.” The needs of children were foremost throughout its discussions. With “*Kids First*” as a guiding principle, the Northland Community Engagement Team crafted a vision for Aboriginal education excellence. The vision defines a number of elements essential to achieving excellence: self-determination, family support, community empowerment, collaboration, and a culturally-rich, learner-focused approach.

## Five priorities

The vision established the foundation for the Northland Community Engagement Team’s review of Inquiry Team recommendations. It reviewed, all of the recommendations of the Northland Inquiry Team and in depth, five priority recommendations — Recommendations 12, 17, 20, 36, and 37 – 43 (grouped as governance). It offers the following feedback to the Government of Alberta:

These 5 priorities areas are not in any level of importance as presented.

### Priority 1: Aboriginal content infusion (curriculum development)

**Recommendation #12 of the Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report:**  
*That Northland School Division strengthen the Aboriginal cultural content within the curriculum; and further that more emphasis, including staff development and support, be placed on Aboriginal content infusion as provided for in the Alberta curriculum.*

## Northland Community Engagement Team Response

The Northland Community Engagement Team supports Recommendation 12. It further recommends:

### Resources

12 (1) Resources be allocated to Northland School Division No. 61 to use the Community Engagement Framework as a means of seeking advice and input on the development of Aboriginal resources to support curriculum.

12 (2) Alberta Education has acknowledged that Aboriginal communities have excellent cultural resources that can be mobilized to support the development of community-based content to reflect Aboriginal history, language, culture, beliefs and world views. It is essential to weave this content into the resources that support the curriculum.

### Language and cultural training

12 (3) Through legislation, Alberta Education formally recognize the strength and value of respected Elders and knowledge keepers who share their knowledge of Aboriginal languages and subject matter within the education system, regardless of whether they hold a teacher's certificate.

12 (4) Building on the success of the Aboriginal Teacher Education Program model, Alberta Education and post-secondary institutions make a concerted effort to train Aboriginal language teachers for Northland School Division No. 61 and its neighbouring schools. Further, adequate resources are required to create a language certification for teachers.

### Residential school curriculum

12 (5) The goal of residential school education is to bring about awareness of events that led to decisions that created the legacy of residential schools, and to help develop understanding. The impact of residential schools cannot be ignored; it is evident in our Aboriginal communities today. In the spirit of truth and reconciliation, and to facilitate the process of healing, the residential school story must be told. The Northland Community Engagement Team recommends that

Alberta Education, First Nations, Métis and Inuit Branch, to develop curriculum and resources about residential schools and make it mandatory throughout Alberta. As well, it recommends Alberta Education develop tools on the history of residential schools to support the orientation of teachers and administrators.

### **Assessment**

12 (6) Educators and communities work together to develop strategies to determine how to best assess a student's Aboriginal knowledge, including understanding of cultural practices, language and protocols.

## **Priority 2: Combined regional and virtual high school**

### **Recommendation #17 of the Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report:**

*That Northland School Division give planning consideration to establishing a combined regional and virtual high school to serve students in the smaller communities as an alternative to existing boarding arrangements.*

### **Northland Community Engagement Team Response**

The Northland Community Engagement Team supports Recommendation 17. It further recommends:

### **Resources**

17(1) Resources be allocated to Northland School Division No. 61 to move beyond planning consideration for a combined regional and virtual high school, and to use the Community Engagement Framework as means of seeking advice and input on potential partnerships, wraparound services, facilities and locations from northern communities within and outside Northland School Division No. 61.

### School programs

17 (2) A regional high school(s) must include the following components: a trade and technical program; a strong physical education program; arts and drama; Aboriginal language development and grounding in First Nations, Métis and Inuit culture. We believe an Aboriginal high school that is built on a community-based foundation and integrates all of these components has the potential of making an immediate impact on high school attendance and completion.

17(3) A homework help hotline be created to provide support and assistance to students and parents.

### Priority 3: Orientation program

**Recommendation #20 of the Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report:**  
*That Northland School Division re-establish an effective orientation program for new hires, with a substantial emphasis on community and cultural components and further, that the placement of new employees into communities be arranged with sufficient time for them to experience community-level orientation and settling-in prior to the start of teaching duties.*

### Northland Community Engagement Team Response

The Northland Community Engagement Team supports Recommendation 20. It further recommends:

#### Stages of orientation

20 (1) Orientation be comprised of three stages: general division-wide; cross-cultural awareness; and local community orientation that is ongoing.

#### Resources

20(2) Resources be allocated to Northland School Division No. 61 to:

- seek advice and input from communities on the development of an orientation resource for cross-cultural awareness and ongoing local orientation.

- develop and implement the orientation package.
- support ongoing in-service and orientation.

20 (3) Utilizing the fourteen (14) steps of the Community Engagement Framework involve communities in the processes described in 20(2).

#### **Residential schools orientation**

20 (4) Resources on the history of residential schools be developed to support the orientation of teachers and administrators (as referenced in Recommendation 12(5)).

### **Priority 4: Alberta Education establish a regional service and support consortium**

**Recommendation #36 of the Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report:** *That Alberta Education take a leadership role in the establishment of a regional service and support consortium for First Nations and Métis education, involving Northland School Division with neighbouring school jurisdictions and the First Nations education authorities operating in northern Alberta; further, that funds from the First Nations, Métis and Inuit grant\* be considered to enable initiatives in this area.*

#### **Northlands Community Engagement Team Response**

##### **Centre of Excellence**

36(1) Rather than refer to it as a regional service and support consortium, the Northland Community Engagement Team recommends the establishment of a centre for Aboriginal learning excellence.

36(2) The Northland Community Engagement Team supports Recommendation 36 in principle and further recommends that Alberta Education:

- Develop a plan to establish a Centre of Excellence for regional services for northern and Aboriginal schools.

- Use the Community Engagement Framework as a means of seeking advice and input on a Centre of Excellence from northern and other communities. The engagement would consider what exists now, what resources are required, what the challenges are, and who potential partners are.
- Consider the potential to partner with Treaty No. 6, Treaty No. 7, Treaty No. 8 and the federal government on the MOU initiatives when discussing and making decisions related to the Centre of Excellence and regional services.

## Priority 5: Governance

**Recommendation #37 of the Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report:**  
*That Alberta Education entrench Northland School Division governance policies and protocols in a Ministerial Order or similar arrangement to ensure that those in governance roles focus on governance activities and delegate management activities to staff, subject to effective accountability, reporting and oversight processes.*

**Recommendation #38 of the Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report:**  
*That the provincial government amend the Northland School Division Act to establish a nine-member Board of Trustees; seven elected by direct election (ward system), one other a First Nations' representative nominated pursuant to an Education Agreement (with Treaty 8) and one other a Métis representative nominated by Métis Settlements General Council, both of the latter appointed to the board by the Minister of Education.*

**Recommendation #39 of the Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report:**  
*That a term limit of not more than two consecutive three-year terms be established for members of the Board of Trustees to ensure effective representation from throughout the system over time and to minimize the potential of factional politics and inappropriate concentrations of power.*

**Recommendation #40 of the Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report:**  
*That an ex officio (non-voting) member of the Board of Trustees be appointed by the Minister of Education as a process observer and coach to facilitate organizational change and ensure that the participants of the new structure remain true to intent.*

**Recommendation #41 of the Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report:**  
*That Alberta Education support a governance structure that fosters a sense of ownership at the community and parent levels without impinging unduly on school operations and teachers' professional practice.*

**Recommendation #42 of the Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report:**  
*That the provincial government amend the Northland School Division Act to expand Local School Board Committee membership to include parent and teacher representation and that its role be consistent with that of a School Council as set out in the School Council Regulation.*

**Recommendation #43 of the Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report:**  
*That a council of Chairs of the newly constituted Local Boards meet twice yearly with the Board of Trustees in a legislative advisory role.*

### **The Northland Community Engagement Team Response**

The Northland Community Engagement Team supports Recommendations 37 – 43 with the exception of Recommendations 39, 40 and 42 and a proviso on Recommendation 38:

39(1) Recommendation 39 — the team does not support a term limit for members of the Board of Trustees; members should be allowed to serve for as long as they are elected.

40 (1) Recommendation 40 — an ex-officio member of the Board of Trustees should be appointed only at the request of the Board of Trustees.

42(1) Recommendation 42 — The Northland Community Engagement Team recommends retaining a Local School Board Committee in its current form, rather than operating like a school council reporting to the school principal. Each Local School Board Committee would be elected from within the community. The Local School Board Committee would then select its own chair. All chairs would meet once per year as an advisory to the Corporate Board and for professional development purposes.



42(2) The Northland Community Engagement Team emphasizes the need to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of Local School Board Committees. These roles and responsibilities need to be decided in consultation with Alberta Education and local communities using the Community Engagement Framework.

38(1) The Northland Community Engagement Team supports Recommendation 38 with one change: there must be a formal role for respected Elders in governance.

38(2) Further, to ensure students are represented in a fair way, the Northland Community Engagement Team recommends Northland School Division No. 61's seven wards be established using geography and student population as guides:

- Ward 1 — Conklin, Fishing Lake Métis Settlement, and Elizabeth Métis Settlement
- Ward 2 — Desmarais
- Ward 3 — Wabasca and Calling Lake
- Ward 4 — Susa Creek, Little Buffalo, Keg River and Paddle Prairie Métis Settlement
- Ward 5 — Grouard, East Prairie Métis Settlement, Gift Lake Métis Settlement, and Peavine Métis Settlement
- Ward 6 — Chip Lake, Sandy Lake, Trout Lake\* and Peerless Lake\*
- Ward 7 — Anzac, Fort Chipewyan, Fort McKay, and Janvier

## Community Engagement Framework

The Northland Community Engagement Team also developed a framework to ensure Aboriginal communities are fully engaged in initiatives that affect their school and communities. The Community Engagement Framework, grounded in an understanding of the community and its cultural practices, is an inclusive model that enables broad community participation. It relies on assembling a “key informant” team to provide advice on how to best consult with respected Elders, leaders and community members. The Community Engagement Framework is an interactive process, one that seeks continual input from the community as the idea or plan takes place. Once validation is received from the community,

\*The schools at Trout Lake and Peerless Lake are presently within the boundaries of KeeTasKeeNow Tribal Council.

other resources can be engaged to make the plan a success. The Community Engagement Framework can be customized to meet the needs of individual communities. It can also be used by government, industry and other groups to engage Aboriginal communities.

The Northland Community Engagement Team recommends that its response to the recommendations of the *Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report* be reviewed by Northland communities using the Community Engagement Framework.

### Next Steps

The Northland Community Engagement Team recommends the Government of Alberta take immediate action on the following:

1. The Government of Alberta establish a Board of Trustees as soon as possible to lead Northland School Division No. 61. Members of the Northland Community Engagement Team are prepared to support the interim trustee of Northland School Division No. 61 in a transitional process.
2. The Government of Alberta adopt and implement the Community Engagement Framework when consulting with First Nations, Métis and Inuit people and with anything to do with Aboriginal Education.
3. The Government of Alberta accept and implement the Northland Community Engagement Team's recommendations in the five priority areas.
4. Alberta Education, Northland School Division No. 61, and communities work together to establish measures of success that weave FNMI world views and local perspectives.

In conclusion, *Kids First* captures the desire for change in how we educate our Aboriginal children; our passion for our young people and their future. It is not a stand-alone document; there are other projects, other initiatives underway which will impact Aboriginal education. *Kids First* is part of a broader process to improve Aboriginal education in Alberta, and beyond.

*Ikosih Maka*

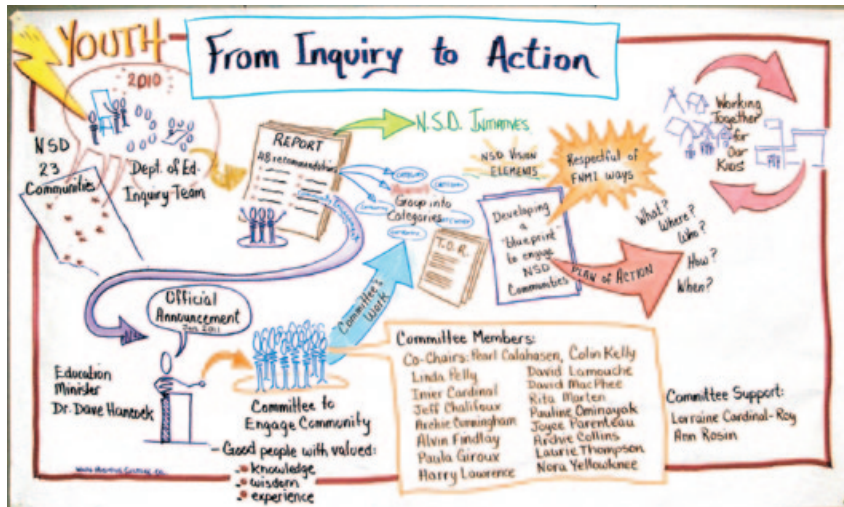
# The Northland Community Engagement Team

## Purpose

In January 2010, then-Education Minister Dave Hancock dissolved the corporate board of Northland School Division No. 61 and appointed an official trustee, Colin Kelly, to oversee the jurisdiction amid long-standing concerns over weak student learning outcomes and issues related to governance.

The Minister appointed a three-member inquiry team comprised of Dave van Tamelin, Nathan Matthew and Keith Wagner. The team's report, *Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report*, was presented to the Minister in November 2011. It urges Northland School Division to implement an improvement strategy through 48 recommendations.

Figure 1: From Inquiry to Action



The creation of the Northland Community Engagement Team marks the first time a group of people from within Northland School Division No. 61 were brought together to make recommendations on education within the division.

On January 11, 2011, the Minister named a community-based team to provide strategic advice, direction and leadership in securing community engagement in Northland School Division No. 61. He said, “Communities need to be involved in determining the governance of their schools. Working with Northland’s communities is fundamental to developing a transformative solution.”

The Northland Community Engagement Team was also directed to make recommendations, as appropriate, on key issues arising from the development of a community-based response to the *Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report*.

## Who are we?

The Northland Community Engagement Team was drawn primarily from local community and education leaders in the jurisdiction’s mainly Aboriginal municipalities. The team also had representation from division administrators, Alberta Education, and communities outside of the school division. This diverse group of individuals worked hard to be a team, listening to one another, seeking common ground and, at times, agreeing to disagree. See Appendix 4 for brief biographies of Northland Community Engagement Team members.

I am a firm believer of self first, family, community and nation. I believe that everyone is the same physically, but each one of us has unique attributes to bring to this world. I bring compassion, passion and hard work to everything I do. I believe that when a person understands their true identity, they will overcome any obstacle in their path. I believe we all have a purpose on this earth, and sometimes it takes a lifetime to figure it out.

*Paula Giroux, Northland Community Engagement Team Member*

## Protocol

The Northland Community Engagement Team followed traditional Aboriginal protocol of listening, respecting the perspectives of others and approaching discussion with an open heart and mind. Meetings were opened and closed with prayers led by respected Elders. The meetings included singing, storytelling, tears and laughter as a means of keeping the team fresh and focused.

Nora Yellowknee (Apsici Nocikwes), Northland Community Engagement Team member, explains the Aboriginal protocol of sharing and giving, including the giving of tobacco, at a team meeting with Alberta Education:

- We hope that with our sharing there is learning and understanding. We will also be listening and learning from you. We are learning from each other – we don't all have the same knowledge – we have both male and female knowledge which is quite different.
- We have people who come from Métis, First Nation and Indigenous backgrounds, as well as people from different ethnic backgrounds.
- We have what we call apprentice and master teachers and that role is reciprocal.
- The gift of tobacco is key to accessing greater, deeper knowledge and information from our Elders, our wise people and our teachers.
- We ask that you listen with an open mind and an open heart. In our listening, we are doing a lot of learning.

## Process for meetings

In addition to following Aboriginal protocol for team meetings, the Northland Community Engagement Team employed the methodology of the World Café for hosting large group dialogue. The World Café is a way for people to come together and have conversations about important topics and subjects. This process involves participants in small rotating conversation groups. Open-ended questions are carefully designed to elicit deep, passionate discussion that is inclusive and respectful and results in participants coming to consensus of understanding, consensus of direction, and often consensus of action.

In support of the above, The Positive Culture Company provided facilitation that was uniquely graphic by visually recording highlights of the team's conversations. As the Northland Community Engagement Team discussed the issues, the facilitators drew landscapes on wall murals. Over these landscapes they sketched ideas into the sky; challenges, resources and support on the grass; pros for issues on mountains; and cons for issues deep underground. Examples of this format are included throughout this document. The large, colourful charts not only summarize discussions, but can be shared with others through digital photographs.

Northland Community Engagement Team meetings were held in Slave Lake, Edmonton and High Prairie on April 29 – 30, May 8 – 9, May 13 – 14, May 27 – 28, June 10 – 11, July 11 – 12, August 9 – 10, August 15 – 16, which included a presentation to Minister Dave Hancock, and October 4 – 5, which included a presentation to the Implementation and Support Teams for Northland School Division No. 61. Further smaller group meetings to draft the report were held on November 29, December 10 and January 20 – 21, 2012.

Illustrations from the meetings can be viewed at [www.positiveculture.ca/NSD-CET/](http://www.positiveculture.ca/NSD-CET/). Figure 1, which follows, shows the development of the Northland Community Engagement Team.

# A Vision for Northland School Division No. 61

Because of the diverse population represented within the Northland School Division No. 61, the Northland Community Engagement Team was challenged to develop a common vision. Two distinct principles emerged to guide them:

- ***Kids First*** — The team was adamant that any discussion about education has to start with children. *Kids First* reflects a desire to ensure children are strong and safe and interested in school, while they strive for excellence. Throughout its discussions, if the way became unclear, a reminder to put “*Kids First*” would clear the path ahead. The needs of children and youth were foremost throughout discussions. At the same time, the team was very aware that its vision and recommendations would not only affect the children of Northland School Division No. 61, but all of the northern communities.
- **Use a First Nations, Métis and Inuit lens** — issues were viewed from an Aboriginal perspective. The team’s work had to reflect Aboriginal interests, perceptions and expectations. It had to consider the social realities and history experienced in the communities of Northland School Division No. 61. (The biographies of the committee members, contained in the Appendices and excerpted throughout this report, provide illustrations of what these are.)

In a relatively short time, the Northland Community Engagement Team identified seven components of a shared vision for education in Northland School Division No. 61, always beginning with *Kids First*:

Figure 2: The Vision



## Vision Elements Overview

Northland School Division No. 61 will be known for **Aboriginal Education Excellence**. It will have high academic achievement and increased high school graduates. Northland students will be known as strong competitors in the world. They will develop the competencies of 21st century learners: to think critically and solve problems; to create and innovate; to communicate with others, to understand and use technology, to accept social and environmental responsibility, to collaborate and lead, and to become lifelong learners. Aboriginal language, history and culture will be woven into their programs of study. An understanding of the Aboriginal experience, coupled with other world views, will provide a strong grounding for Aboriginal graduates. The majority of Northland teachers will be First Nations, Métis and Inuit, role models who lead by example. People will say that Northland has influenced what is taught in First Nations, Métis and Inuit schools elsewhere.

A world-class education will encourage **self-determination**. Students will be empowered to have a vision of where they come from, who they are, and where they want to go. Students will carry their education beyond Grade 12.

### Two personal visions from team members:

I was born in Sucker Creek. I attended Jouvassard Indian Residential School for 11 years. I had a passion for teaching and had wanted to be a teacher since Grade 6. At age 37, I graduated from the University of Alberta with a teaching degree. I have taught in several communities in Northland School Division No. 61 and am still teaching at Driftpile School today.

*Pauline (Calliou) Ominayak*

When I look at my daughter Emma, inside this little head I see a rocket scientist, a doctor, teacher, Prime Minister — the list is endless. We desire the same opportunities for our children as everyone else. This is the one chance my daughter has for education. If we fail her, we are destroying a teacher, scientist or maybe a Prime Minister.

*Inier Cardinal*



Northland School Division will **support students and families** to help them achieve Aboriginal Education Excellence. Parental participation will be strengthened and input encouraged. The participation of families will be welcomed and valued.

All of these vision components will, in the NCET opinion, lead to **community empowerment**, portrayed here by a family sitting on an eagle, itself a representation of strength and vision. The community will take responsibility for the education of its children through a shared vision and decision-making. First Nations, Métis and Inuit will no longer be on the periphery of the education system. Their voices will be heard. Further, the contributions of respected Elders and community cultural experts will be welcomed in the education of children.

It takes a village to raise a child.

*African proverb*

Many stakeholders will work together **collaboratively** to ensure children are equipped to overcome challenges and experience success. They will blend their perspectives, expertise, and resources toward achieving this common goal. For Northlands School Division No. 61, stakeholders include parents, teachers, staff, leaders, service providers, Alberta Education, First Nations of Alberta, the Métis Settlements General Council, the Métis Nation of Alberta, and neighbouring educational jurisdictions.

The children of Northland School Division No. 61 will be **culturally rich**. They will have an understanding of their own languages, cultures and histories, as well as that of other peoples.

Northland School Division No. 61 will be **learner focused**. Decision makers will consider the needs of children and youth first and foremost.

The above components of the vision are supported by research. Together they speak to what it takes to achieve Aboriginal student success, where every student is engaged, has a voice, and is supported by caring families and communities.

## Five Priority Areas

The Northland Community Engagement Team reviewed all 48 recommendations in the *Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report* and identified five priority areas that they considered would have the most impact on student attendance and achievement. These they reviewed in depth:

- Recommendation 12: Aboriginal content infusion (curriculum development)
- Recommendation 17: combined regional and virtual high school
- Recommendation 20: orientation programs
- Recommendation 36: regional service and support consortium (Centre of Excellence)
- Recommendations 37 – 43: the team grouped these together under governance

The Northland Community Engagement Team noted that Northland communities never had an opportunity to see the recommendations of the *Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report* before they were released. While the communities were consulted early on in the Inquiry Team process, there was never a return visit to validate the Inquiry Team findings; to ask the question: did we get it right?

The Northland Community Engagement Team also acknowledged it hasn't had an opportunity to explain its own recommendations to Northland communities. However, the team has put together a process to fully engage communities in the future. It is discussed following this section. The Northland Community Engagement Team recommends that its response to the five priorities be reviewed by Northland communities using the Community Engagement Framework.

## Priority Area Recommendation 12 — Aboriginal Content Infusion (Curriculum Development)

Figure 3: Illustration of Northland Community Engagement Team discussion on Inquiry Recommendation 12



**Recommendation 12 of the Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report:** *That Northland School Division strengthen the Aboriginal cultural content within the curriculum; and further that more emphasis, including staff development and support, be placed on Aboriginal content infusion as provided for in the Alberta curriculum.*

Strengthening Aboriginal cultural content within the curriculum, including instruction in Aboriginal languages, cultural values and community practices, is key to improving student performance.

Currently all the schools in northern Alberta use the Alberta Education K-12 curriculum. Without validation of their own local histories, cultures and languages, Aboriginal students have to make connections to concepts that are not part of their life experience. Unfortunately, this gap is compounded by teachers and administrators who often do not understand and value the culture or the language, and some Aboriginal communities that do not see the importance of learning their language.

Grandparents have cherished roles in Aboriginal culture as keepers of knowledge and wisdom. For example, taking a grandchild on a field trip to look at medicinal plants, a grandmother might teach her grandchild about numbers, colours, textures and smells of plants in the first language. The child learns about plants, one at a time — and is expected to be able to name the plant, describe the color, texture and smell and to identify how plants are used, or could be used. Only after the child has acquired knowledge about the first plant, and can identify its qualities will she move on to a second. This method weaves science, math, health and wellness into teaching and learning.

The teaching of language and culture begins at home. However, government, schools, and educators must recognize and acknowledge that language and culture are an essential part of educating the whole child. There is a role for the community and the school together to reinforce the teaching of language and culture.

The teaching of language and culture in the classroom is critical to increase the competencies (knowledge, skills and attributes) of the school community. Working together, respected Elders, teachers, families and students will revitalize the importance of the language and culture.

### Northland Community Engagement Team Response

The Northland Community Engagement Team supports Recommendation 12. It further recommends:

#### Resources

12 (1) Resources be allocated to Northland School Division No. 61 to use the Community Engagement Framework as a means of seeking advice and input on the development of Aboriginal resources to support curriculum.

12 (2) Alberta Education has acknowledged that Aboriginal communities have excellent cultural resources that can be mobilized to support the development of community-based content to reflect Aboriginal history, language, culture, beliefs and world views. It is essential to weave this content into the resources that support the curriculum.

#### Language and cultural training

12 (3) Through legislation, Alberta Education formally recognize the strength and value of respected Elders and traditional knowledge keepers who share their knowledge of Aboriginal languages and subject matter within the education system, regardless of whether they hold a teacher's certificate.

12 (4) Building on the success of the Aboriginal Teacher Education Program model, Alberta Education and post-secondary institutions make a concerted effort to train Aboriginal language teachers for Northland School Division No. 61 and its neighbouring schools. Further, adequate resources be identified to create language certification for teachers.

### Residential school curriculum

12 (5) The goal of residential school education is to bring about awareness of events that led to decisions that created the legacy of residential schools, and to help develop understanding. The impact of residential schools cannot be ignored; it is evident in our Aboriginal communities today. In the spirit of truth and reconciliation, and to facilitate the process of healing, the residential school story must be told. The Northland Community Engagement Team recommends that Alberta Education, First Nations, Métis and Inuit Branch, develop curriculum and resources about residential schools and make it mandatory throughout Alberta. As well, it recommends Alberta Education develop tools on the history of residential schools to support the orientation of teachers and administrators.

In Manitoba residential school history is a mandatory part of the school curriculum. Other provinces and territories are adopting a similar approach.

### Assessment

12 (6) Educators and communities work together to determine how to best assess a student's Aboriginal knowledge, including understanding of cultural practices, language and protocols.

*Many of the team members have devoted their careers to the integration of their language and culture into the regular program of studies:*

**It so happens that all of my teaching experience has required the integration of language and culture into the regular program of studies. I firmly believe that the young Indigenous/First Nation people need to develop and have a strong sense of self to ensure greater success in completing and getting their education. They need to hear positive things about themselves, hear the true and authentic version of their story as told by their own people!**

*Nora C. Yellowknee (Apsici Nocikwes)*

## Priority Area Recommendation 17 — Combined Regional and Virtual High School

Figure 4 — Illustration of the Northland Community Engagement Team discussion on Inquiry Recommendation 17



**Recommendation 17 of the Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report:** *That Northland School Division give planning consideration to establishing a combined regional and virtual high school to serve students in the smaller communities as an alternative to existing boarding arrangements.*

The delivery of high school education continues to be a challenge within Northland School Division No. 61. Some community high schools have limited options which contribute to high drop-out rates. And some communities do not have high schools, resulting in long bus rides or boarding-home arrangements.

One of the main advantages to a regional school is the opportunity for students to develop a student community, in contrast to living with strangers while attending school. Not only would the school experience be more enjoyable, the transition to post-secondary education would be easier. Students could be bussed home on the weekends to spend time with families.

Parents have expressed a wish to have somewhere for their kids to live and attend school.

*Northland Community Engagement Team Member*

A virtual high school program with on-site facilitation would be available to all students. The facilitator on site at the virtual high school would deliver a variety of programs not normally offered in rural communities, like trades training, while incorporating elements of Aboriginal philosophy and learning.

In discussing the regional high school, The Northland Community Engagement Team recalled the success of Grouard Vocational School, a regional school in the 1960s. It graduated many Aboriginal students who are now successful professionals, business people, trades people and leaders in communities.

### **Northland Community Engagement Team Response**

The Northland Community Engagement Team supports Recommendation 17. It further recommends:

#### **Resources**

17(1) Resources be allocated to Northland School Division No. 61 to move beyond planning consideration for a combined regional and virtual high school, and to use the Community Engagement Framework as means of seeking advice and input on potential partnerships, wraparound services, facilities and locations from northern communities within and outside Northland School Division No. 61.

#### **School programs**

17 (2) A regional high school(s) must include the following components: a trade and technical program; a strong physical education program; arts and drama; Aboriginal language development and grounding in First Nations, Métis and Inuit culture. An Aboriginal high school that is built on a community-based foundation and integrates all of these components has the potential of making an immediate impact on high school attendance and completion.

17(3) A homework help hotline be created to provide support and assistance to students and parents.

*The families of Northland School Division No. 61 have made sacrifices to provide their children with an education. Many would be receptive to a combined regional and virtual high school:*

In 1971, Northland School Division introduced a new Teacher Assistant Program in Grouard. I got lucky and was selected by our community to take the required training. I was employed at my local school for 26 years (1971-1997) working mainly with Grades 1 and 2. I feel very rewarded to have been part of the children’s education. Being raised in a small remote community, I can appreciate the struggles and difficulties of all involved, as parents, students and teachers relocate to accommodate education for our children.

Joyce Parenteau

## Priority Area Recommendation 20 — Orientation Program

Figure 5 — Illustration of the Northland Community Engagement Team discussion on Inquiry Recommendation 20





**Recommendation 20 of the Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report:** *That Northland School Division re-establish an effective orientation program for new hires, with a substantial emphasis on community and cultural components and further, that the placement of new employees into communities be arranged with sufficient time for them to experience community-level orientation and settling-in prior to the start of teaching duties.*

It is essential that Aboriginal communities participate in teacher orientation. While universities have intercultural education classes, they are limited in preparing teachers to work in Aboriginal communities.

An effective orientation program must include three stages:

- General division-wide: new teachers must be oriented to the overall organization, including the program of studies, policies, procedures, protocols and resource use.
- Cross-cultural awareness: new teachers must be oriented to Aboriginal historical perspectives, Aboriginal and Treaty rights, and world Indigenous rights.
- Ongoing local orientation: every community in Northland School Division No. 61 has local people who could introduce new teachers to the community including its history, cultural practices and protocols, and local resources. This community support would enable teachers to build relationships within the community, to better understand local culture, and to recognize the unique gifts and abilities Aboriginal students bring to class.

As such, there should be a personalized orientation process that is based on shared cultural knowledge between the individual (teacher) and the community. Time should be allocated for teachers to interact with the communities in which they live, draw on their own cultural experiences to bridge between cultures. This would help remove the “boxes” from the teaching and learning experience — it would open doors, eyes and hearts as part of the education process.

Protocol development (orientation) is needed — who we are, what we eat and why we act the way we do.

*Northland Community Engagement Team Member*

## Northland Community Engagement Team Response

The Northland Community Engagement Team supports Recommendation 20. It further recommends:

### Stages of orientation

20 (1) Orientation and Cross-Cultural awareness be comprised of two stages: general division-wide teacher orientation and local community orientation that is ongoing.

### Resources

20(2) Resources be allocated to Northland School Division No. 61 to:

- seek advice and input from communities on the development of an orientation resource for cross-cultural awareness and ongoing local orientation.
- develop and implement the orientation package.
- support ongoing in-service and orientation.

20 (3) The Community Engagement Framework must be used to involve communities in these processes described in 20 (2).

### Orientation of Residential Schools

20 (4) Resources on the history of residential schools be developed to support the orientation of teachers and administrators (as referenced in Recommendation 12(5))

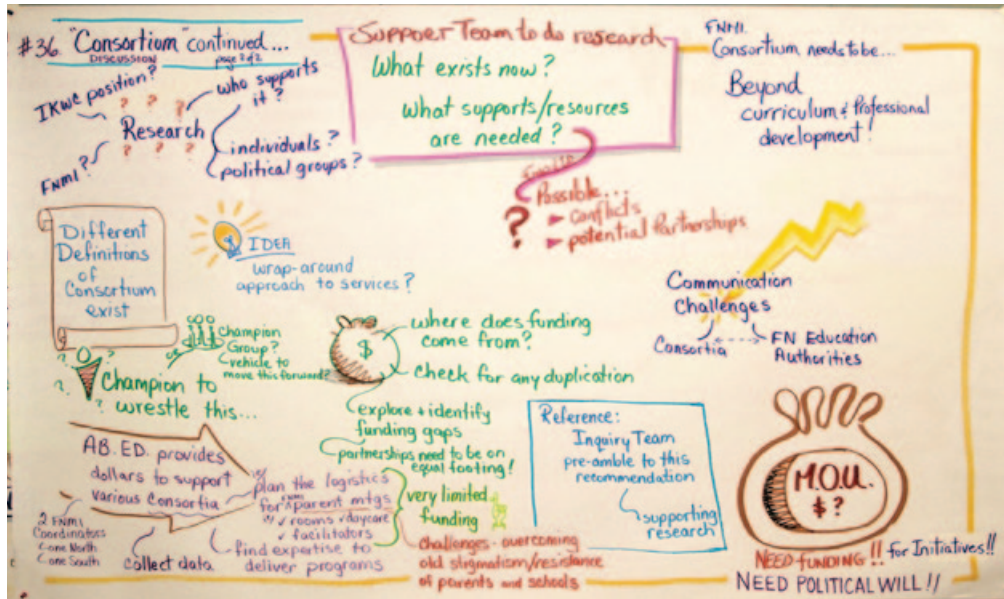
*Cross-cultural awareness is possible; cultural values can be shared:*

Through leadership and adherence to the philosophy “as caretakers of the earth we commit to work together . . . in unity, in faith, for life,” the Aseniwuche Winewak Nation today is held up by the province, the local government and industry as an example of a group with a clear sense of place and destiny, one that all want to be associated with.

*Dave MacPhee, President, Aseniwuche Winewak Nation*

## Priority Area Recommendation 36 — Regional Service and Support Consortium (Centre of Excellence)

Figure 6 — Illustration of the Northland Community Engagement Team discussion on Inquiry Recommendation 36



**Recommendation 36 of the Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report:**  
*That Alberta Education take a leadership role in the establishment of a regional service and support consortium for First Nations and Métis education, involving Northland School Division with neighbouring school jurisdictions and the First Nations education authorities operating in northern Alberta; further, that funds from the First Nations, Métis and Inuit grant\* be considered to enable initiatives in this area.*

A key principle of the regional service centre is that it would be a centre for Aboriginal learning excellence. The Northland Community Engagement Team suggested the regional centre be located outside of a major community and reflect the identity of northern communities.

The establishment of a Centre of Excellence for regional services would provide the necessary infrastructure to support First Nations and Métis education in the north. There are already good education-related initiatives in the north; however, these initiatives are spread throughout the region. If resources were pooled in one

“We need to work together for the good of the kids in all northern Alberta schools.”

“How do we get a synergetic process going?”

“Pilot a new structure in the north.”

*Northland Community Engagement Team Members*

centre, the region could better provide instructional, technology, orientation and training resources to schools within northern communities. It could also offer a suite of program (wraparound) services including, but not limited to, health services, policing and day care.

\*The First Nations, Métis and Inuit grant refers to additional funding school divisions receive for students who declare themselves Aboriginal under the Aboriginal Learner Data Collection Initiative. The grant does not provide funding for students in on-reserve schools. However, this does not preclude school jurisdictions from working with neighboring First Nation School authorities to work in a collaborative approach to improve education for First Nations students on reserve schools. For example, the partnership agreement between Northland School Division 51 and the Kee Tas Kee Now Tribal Council sets out a formal arrangement for supporting First Nations students.

## Northlands Community Engagement Team Response

### Centre of Excellence

36(1) Rather than refer to it as a regional service and support *consortium*, the Northland Community Engagement Team recommends the establishment of a *centre* for Aboriginal learning excellence.

36(2) The Northland Community Engagement Team supports Recommendation 36 in principle and further recommends that Alberta Education:

- Use the Community Engagement Framework as a means of seeking advice and input on a Centre of Excellence from northern communities. The engagement would consider what exists now, what resources are required, what the challenges are, and who potential partners are.
- Consider the potential to partner with Treaty No. 6, Treaty No. 7, Treaty No. 8 and the federal government on the MOU initiatives when discussing and making decisions related to the Centre of Excellence, regional services, and other school jurisdictions.

- Develop a plan to establish a Centre of Excellence for regional services for northern schools, and with other school jurisdictions.

I believe in order to be truly educated you need to know who you are before you can decide what you want to be. I advocate that an ideal education system provides a student with a strong understanding of their language, culture as well as academic excellence. I feel that partnerships between First Nations and levels of government, education stakeholders, and communities are an effective means of achieving this end.

*Rita Marten, Northland Community Engagement Team Member*

### Priority Area Recommendations 37 to 43 — Governance

Figure 7 –Illustration of the Northland Community Engagement Team discussion on Inquiry Recommendations 37 – 43



**Recommendation 37 of the Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report:** That Alberta Education entrench Northland School Division governance policies and protocols in a Ministerial Order or similar arrangement to ensure that those in governance roles focus on governance activities and delegate management activities to staff, subject to effective accountability, reporting and oversight processes.

**Recommendation 38 of the Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report:** That the provincial government amend the Northland School Division Act to establish a nine-member Board of Trustees; seven elected by direct election (ward system), one other a First Nations’ representative nominated pursuant to an Education Agreement (with Treaty 8) and one other a Métis representative nominated by Métis Settlements General Council, both of the latter appointed to the board by the Minister of Education.

**Recommendation 39 of the Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report:**  
*That a term limit of not more than two consecutive three-year terms be established for members of the Board of Trustees to ensure effective representation from throughout the system over time and to minimize the potential of factional politics and inappropriate concentrations of power.*

**Recommendation 40 of the Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report:**  
*That an ex officio (non-voting) member of the Board of Trustees be appointed by the Minister of Education as a process observer and coach to facilitate organizational change and ensure that the participants of the new structure remain true to intent.*

**Recommendation 41 of the Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report:**  
*That Alberta Education support a governance structure that fosters a sense of ownership at the community and parent levels without impinging unduly on school operations and teachers' professional practice.*

**Recommendation 42 of the Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report:**  
*That the provincial government amend the Northland School Division Act to expand Local School Board Committee membership to include parent and teacher representation and that its role be consistent with that of a School Council as set out in the School Council Regulation.*

**Recommendation 43 of the Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report:**  
*That a council of Chairs of the newly constituted Local Boards meet twice yearly with the Board of Trustees in a legislative advisory role.*

Effective community engagement requires the participation of the community in governance. While the Northland Community Engagement Team supports the proposal of a seven-ward system with two appointed members (Recommendation 38), it strongly recommends respected Elders be involved as the keepers of Indigenous knowledge to provide wisdom, advice, and guidance. The Northland Community Engagement Team also unequivocally supports a local role in governance, with clearly-defined roles and responsibilities, to:

- Effectively engage the community in local decision-making.

- Empower community members to take an active role in the education of their children.
- Develop leadership in the community.

The Northland Community Engagement Team believes that the following are essential to effective governance in Northland School Division No. 61:

- Corporate Board (Board of Trustees)
- Local governance body (i.e., Local School Board Committees)
- Elders Senate

### The Northland Community Engagement Team Response

The Northland Community Engagement Team supports Recommendations 37-43 with the exception of Recommendations 39, 40 and 42 and a proviso on Recommendation 38:

39(1) Recommendation 39 — the team does not support a term limit for members of the Board of Trustees; members should be allowed to serve for as long as elected.

40 (1) Recommendation 40 — an ex-officio member of the Board of Trustees should be appointed only at the request of the Board of Trustees.

42(1) Recommendation 42 — rather than operate like a school council reporting to the school principal, the Northland Community Engagement Team recommends retaining a Local School Board Committee in its current form. Each Local School Board Committee would be elected from within the community. The Local School Board Committee would then select its own chair. All Chairs would meet once per year as an advisory to the Corporate Board and for professional development purposes.

42(2) The Northland Community Engagement Team emphasizes the need to clearly define the roles and responsibilities of Local School Board Committees. These roles and responsibilities need to be decided in consultation with Alberta Education and local communities using the Community Engagement Framework.

38(1) The Northland Community Engagement Team supports Recommendation 38 with one change: there must be a formal role for respected Elders in governance.

Effective school boards have a collaborative relationship with principals, teachers and the community. By working together, communities can make better decisions and achieve their goals.

38(2) Further, to ensure students are represented in a fair way, the Northland Community Engagement Team recommends Northland School Division No. 61's seven wards be established using geography and student population as guides:

- Ward 1 — Conklin, Fishing Lake Métis Settlement, and Elizabeth Métis Settlement
- Ward 2 — Desmarais
- Ward 3 — Wabasca and Calling Lake
- Ward 4 — Susa Creek, Little Buffalo, Keg River and Paddle Prairie Métis Settlement
- Ward 5 — Grouard, East Prairie Métis Settlement, Gift Lake Métis Settlement, and Peavine Métis Settlement
- Ward 6 — Chip Lake, Sandy Lake, Trout Lake, Peerless Lake, and Janvier
- Ward 7 — Anzac, Fort Chipewyan, and Fort McKay

*All of the team members have extensive experience in governance: I have worked in college education for over 35 years. In my other activities, I was involved with Northland School Division as a local school board member at Bishop Routhier School in Peavine for many years. I was also very involved in community sports and recreation, for example, coaching fastball, and minor hockey, as well as helping in fund-raising for them. I retired from Northern Lakes College in June 2008. Since then I was appointed chairperson for the Board of Governors of Northern Lakes College. I continue to involve myself in adult education.*

*Archie Cunningham, Chair of the Board of Governors, Northern Lakes College*

I am a home grown Gift Lake Métis Settlement member. I am married and have three beautiful children. I have served my community in various capacities for the past 20 years and am currently the Vice-Chairman of the Gift Lake Métis Settlement.

*Dave Lamouche, Vice-Chair, Gift Lake Métis Settlement*



The Community Engagement Framework provides a model or a “frame” that can be used by communities to engage their residents. While it provides the essential structure, it can be customized to meet the particular needs of communities, so they are truly represented in the engagement process. This model can also be used as a guide to Aboriginal consultation for government, industry and other groups.

The principle of “*Kids First*” is the driving force for community engagement. It is at the centre of the Community Engagement Framework (Figure 4) and is depicted by a child and a heart. The Community Engagement Framework, grounded in an understanding of the community and its cultural practices, is an inclusive model that enables broad community participation. It relies on assembling a “key informant” team to provide advice on how to best consult with respected Elders, leaders and community members. The Community Engagement Framework is an interactive process, one that seeks continual input from the community as the idea or plan takes place. Once validation is received from the community, other resources can be engaged to make the plan a success. The Community Engagement Framework can be customized to meet the needs of individual communities. It can also be used by government, industry and other groups to engage Aboriginal communities. A full written description of the process for Community Engagement Framework is included in Appendix 2.

The Community Engagement Framework was visited several times over the course of the Northland Community Engagement Team meetings to validate the notations and to ensure its usefulness to those who will continue to implement this important work in the future.

There was always a way of doing business. And now we have created a process where anyone can successfully engage our communities.

*Inier Cardinal, Northland  
Community Engagement  
Team Member*

Never limiting yourself is a belief of mine. Even when things get hard, keep trying because you never know what capabilities you have until you try. I further believe that Elders have a large role to play when education is talked about. Elder views have to be listened to, and Elders must stand up for their children. I believe that Elders lead by example; if Elders, parents, and communities work together, the future will be bright for First Nation people.

*Harry Lawrence, Elder, Duncan's First Nation,  
Northland Community Engagement Team Member*

Figure 8: Community Engagement Framework



## Community Engagement Framework — An Implementation Plan

Laurie Thompson is the principal of Kikino School, located 40 kilometres south of Lac La Biche on Highway 36.

Kikino School prides itself on mixing industrial arts, trades and fine arts, including Métis jigging, fiddling and guitar. It used to be that Laurie would create a three-year school plan, circulate the information through the usual means and then hear nothing back. “Everything’s okay,” she would guess.

Last year, however, Laurie decided to test the Community Engagement Framework as a means to get feedback on her school plan:

- The first thing she did is assemble a key informant team to serve as a sounding board for her ideas. She recruited community members — parents, teachers, and community leaders including the local RCMP member — both supporters and critics. This group provided differing perspectives, but all shared a common interest in furthering the success of the community and its children.
- With the support of her key informants, she then approached respected Elders for their feedback on the ideas contained in her three-year plan and asked for their advice on the best ways to consult the broader community. One of their key suggestions was to not leave students and teachers out of the consultation process.
- She then broke up her three-year plan with each informant assuming responsibility for an individual piece. The informants then collected advice from the community to ensure the plan is crafted with a community and Aboriginal perspective.
- With the collected information, Laurie developed a draft action plan for broader community consultation. With the support of the key informant team, a community communications strategy was drafted.
- The group started to spread word about the three-year plan in the community through a variety of activities including coffees, home visits and posters.

Laurie’s team (now 20 members) is still working on its final plan, including roles and responsibilities of all involved. It is also exploring the best ways to validate the new plan. It will close the loop by going back to community leaders, respected

We talk about community engagement, we talk about collaboration, but we don’t talk about relationships.

*Laurie Thompson*

Elders and eventually the broader community with the question: did we get this right? Once this is completed, Laurie and her team will reach out to other resources in the community — groups like the Métis Settlements General Council, oil and gas companies, other schools and communities — to make the three-year plan a reality. And once all that is done, it's time for a community celebration.

### **How Laurie came to know the Community Engagement Framework works**

One evening in September 2011, Laurie's 16-year-old daughter Dayna was walking her dog when she was hit by a car. Laurie stayed that night with her daughter at Lac La Biche Hospital awaiting transport to University Hospital in Edmonton.

Within minutes of Laurie's arrival at Lac La Biche hospital, all the teachers and aides from Kikino School arrived to support Laurie. They stayed with her until the ambulance took Laurie and her daughter to Edmonton.

What followed were countless hours of medical attention, sleepless nights and unbelievable stress. While Laurie was supporting her daughter, the community was quietly supporting her. When Northern Lights School Division offered counsellors to the school, the key informants said no. Instead, community members sent daily home-cooked meals to the school and Elders supported classes. When Laurie returned to the school a week later, instead of facing a backlog of paper, her desk was entirely clean. Teachers had assumed her responsibilities during her absence.

The school had built a relationship with the community and the community stepped up during a time of crisis. The Community Engagement Framework worked!

(Dayna survived the accident, but has a long road to recovery. She will need further surgeries and treatment in Edmonton throughout the school year. This will require absences by Laurie, but she knows the school is in good hands.)

## Next Steps

*Kids First is the start of a longer process toward achieving excellence in Aboriginal education. It sets out a vision, a community engagement framework and recommendations for improving Aboriginal education in Northland School Division No. 61 and beyond.*

Seeking more community engagement promotes greater Aboriginal participation in our education system. It sets the stage for transformational change and supports many other government initiatives like *Inspiring Education and Action on Inclusion*.

The Northland Community Engagement Team recommends the Government of Alberta take immediate action on the following:

1. The Government of Alberta establish a Board of Trustees to lead Northland School Division No. 61. Members of the Northland Community Engagement Team are prepared to support the interim trustee of Northland School Division No. 61 in a transitional process.
2. The Government of Alberta adopt and implement the Community Engagement Framework with any consulting on First Nations, Métis and Inuit people that affects them directly or indirectly.
3. The Government of Alberta accept and implement the Northland Community Engagement Team's recommendations in the five priority areas:
  - Aboriginal content infusion (curriculum development and curricular resource development)
  - Combined regional and virtual high school
  - Orientation program
  - Regional service and support consortium (Centre of Excellence)
  - Governance
4. Alberta Education, Northland School Division No. 61, and communities work together to establish measures of success that weave FNMI world views and local perspectives.

Every recommendation that we deal with has to go through the Community Engagement Framework. If we don't take control of that, someone else will.

*Northland Community Engagement Team*

- The measures must reflect elements of our vision — Aboriginal education excellence, self-determination, family support, community empowerment, collaboration, and a culturally-rich, learner-focused approach.
- The Northland Community Engagement Team acknowledges the need for both quantitative and qualitative success measures, and urges Alberta Education to consider cultural ways of knowing in their development. Aboriginal cultural skills and competencies currently are not considered when measuring student success.

*Measures must acknowledge community culture:*

**The Northland School Division No. 61 Board of Trustees was dismantled because of low student achievement, as shown on Provincial Achievement Tests, and low high school graduation rates. We need to incorporate those measuring devices (achievement tests), but we have to have some dialogue as to what success means to us and we have to document this.**

**Let's make sure that whatever success measures we use — let's do qualitative as well as quantitative.**

*Northland Community Engagement Team*

The time span of a student in the education system is relatively brief. For many Aboriginal students, it is even shorter. And the time spent in school can be frustrating for them. Often the education Aboriginal students receive is not culturally relevant, and there is little involvement from their communities, and fails to address students with complex needs. This deprives them of an education that opens the doors to a chosen career and a healthy, happy, culturally rich life.

The Northland Community Engagement Team recommends the Government of Alberta take to heart what communities have told us, as reflected in our vision, framework and recommendations. By taking immediate action, the government will demonstrate its commitment to a better education system for Aboriginal youth.

After years of reports, now is the time for action. We can't afford to lose another generation of students.

**Ikosih Maka**

Ikosih Maka Ikosih

Ikosih Maka Ikosih

Ikosih Maka Ikosih Maka Ikosih Maka

Ikosih

Ikosih

*Pauline Ominayak*

We do not say goodbye in the Cree culture.  
We say “Ikosih Maka,”  
-- “That`s it for now.”





## Community Engagement Framework

The Community Engagement Framework provides a model or a “frame” that can be used by communities to engage their residents. While it provides the essential structure, it can be customized to meet the particular needs of communities. This model can also be used as a guide to Aboriginal consultation for government, industry and other groups.

The principle of “*Kids First*” is the driving force for community engagement. Any idea can be reviewed using the community engagement process:

### Assemble a key informant team

In communities there are leaders all over the place, not just elected ones. It is important to find the right people to provide guidance and support. These people – key informants – will know what is culturally appropriate in their community, who to talk to, who is an Elder and what would be the best way to communicate with the community.

A key informant team is the first sounding board to test an idea. Does it have merit? Who will like the idea? Who will oppose the idea? “Opponents” will provide a different perspective and may become the greatest advocates, if they can start to see how the idea will benefit their community and their children.

### Consult with community Elders and leaders

Be aware of the community protocol and then respectfully (as defined by key informants) share in conversation about the idea. Community Elders and leaders will also direct you to people in the community you should be speaking with.

### **Meet key community informants**

Invite and meet with the key community informants to further discuss the idea.

### **Collect and consider advice received from respected Elders, leaders and key informants**

This is where the original idea will be looked at through a community/Aboriginal lens. The idea will grow into something that best serves the community.

### **Develop a draft action plan**

Draft an action plan based on the advice received.

### **Inform and invite**

Start to spread the word about the draft action plan within the community. Use the key informants to explain the best way to generate interest within the community: food, personal invites, home visits, posters, etc.

### **Hold public meetings**

Use this process to share information about the draft action plan. Honestly discuss its benefits and challenges to the community. Take criticism and ask for guidance.

### **Develop a plan of action**

Based on all the information received, revise the draft and create a plan of action that best represents the community voice.

### **Consult again with community respected Elders and leaders**

Ask “Is this what you said?” and “Did I stay true to the vision originally shared?” This stage helps develop trust with these important community figures and with trust, engagement.

## **Validate with the community**

Similarly, ask community members, “Is this what you said?” and “Did I stay true to the vision originally shared?” Explain what was done with the information the community shared and how it links to the development of the plan.

“Your input helped me shape this part of the plan. Are these the correct key resources? Am I missing anyone?”

## **Engage key resources**

With validation from the community, you can now move forward to engage all the resources needed to make the plan a success.

## **Take action**

Implement the plan.

## **Inform and celebrate**

Communicate with the community any successes generated by the plan. Advertise the success in local papers, newsletters, e-mails or whatever the best ways are of communicating in the community. Celebrate with a special event, possibly a feast or dance.

## **Practice continuous community engagement with the Community Engagement Framework**

Return to the community when issues arise, when there are reasons to celebrate or when there is need for a new idea or direction.



## Overview of Northland School Division No. 61

Northland School Division No. 61 serves approximately 2,900 Kindergarten to Grade 12 students located in remote and rural communities in northern Alberta. It is comprised of 23 schools, 20 of which have fewer than 100 students. Northland School Division No. 61 serves students across vast distances.

It serves students from mainly First Nations and Métis cultures. Approximately 57 per cent are provincially-funded students and 43 per cent are federally-funded First Nations students. Several schools serve a student population comprised of First Nations students from more than one band as well as Métis and/or non-status Indians living off-reserve.

### Governance

Northland School Division No. 61 has had a history of increasing self-governance up to 2010:

- Northland School Division No.61 was governed initially by a provincially appointed official trustee and superintendent.
- In 1960, Northland School Division No. 61 was created as an operating entity by the provincial government.
- In 1965, the Alberta Legislature proclaimed the first *Northland School Division Act*. The Act called for the provincial appointment of five trustees who would replace the Official Trustee. They represented several ministries, Education, Municipal Affairs and Public Welfare, to provide for the co-ordination of various government services to the students of Northland School Division No .61.
- In 1968, the Act was amended to call for the appointment of seven trustees, five of whom were to be residents of Northland School Division No. 61.

We are many different families, many different communities, with many different histories.

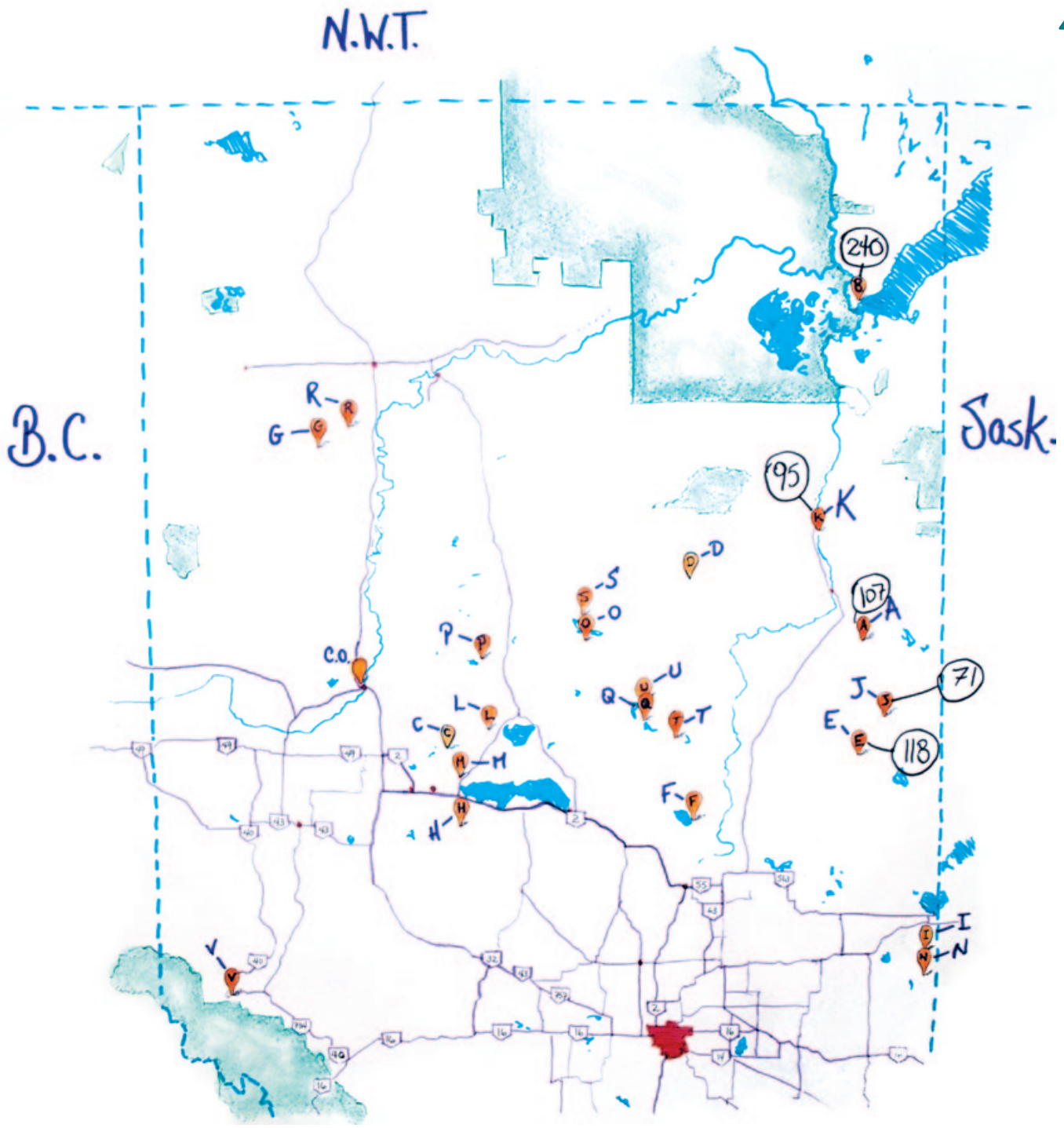
*Northland Community  
Engagement Team*

- In 1970, the *Alberta School Act* replaced provincially appointed superintendents with local ones appointed by the board. Northland School Division No. 61 appointed its first local superintendent.
- In 1976, the Act was amended to allow for the creation of subdivisions within the school division, but trustees continued to be appointed.
- In 1983, the Alberta Legislature passed the current *Northland School Division Act*, creating the governance and operating structure in place until 2010. In those years, schools that had primarily non-Aboriginal student populations moved under the administration of other neighbouring systems and some other schools moved to administration by First Nations bands such as those at Loon Lake (Loon River First Nation) and Cadotte Lake (Woodland Cree First Nation). By 2010, the Northland School Division No. 61 was comprised of 23 schools.
- Until the Minister's intervention in 2010, the structure of Northland School Division No. 61 featured Local School Board Committees (LSBCs) for each of its 23 schools. It also featured a corporate board of 23 members comprised of the elected chairs of the LSBCs with the provincial Auditor General as the auditor of the board.

In January 2010, Education Minister Dave Hancock dissolved the corporate board and appointed an official trustee to oversee the jurisdiction amid long-standing concerns over weak student learning outcomes and issues related to governance.

The Minister appointed a three-member inquiry team comprised of Dave van Tamelin, Nathan Matthew and Keith Wagner. The team's report, *Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report*, was presented to the Minister in November 2011. It urges Northland School Division No. 61 to implement an improvement strategy through 48 recommendations that focus on three central priorities:

- English and Aboriginal language, culture and numeracy development
- Improving student attendance
- Strengthening parental engagement with schools by improving communication and trust



The *Northland School Division Inquiry Team Report* also made seven recommendations related to effective governance and leadership for Northland School Division No. 61, requiring the establishment of a new governance structure. The *Report* noted that “in spite of many concerns, a spirit of enthusiasm and regard for the organization endures.” All the communities visited as part of the review expressed a clear desire to keep their school division as an entity.

*Some thoughts from the Northland Community Engagement Team on the successes of Northland School Division No. 61:*

Before we got our school, we attended the town education system and in the 30 years we had two high school graduates. Twenty years later, we had more than 20 graduates.

Community empowerment — Northland School Division gave us that — gave us an education system within our own community.

Northland School Division could be the vehicle to transform Aboriginal education not only in the division but elsewhere in the province.



## Biographies of Northland Community Engagement Team Members

### **Pearl Calahasen, Co-chair**

Pearl Calahasen was elected to her sixth term as the Member of the Legislative Assembly for Lesser Slave Lake on March 3, 2008.

### **Dr. Colin Kelly, Co-chair**

Dr. Colin Kelly is the Official Trustee of the Northland School Division No. 61. He has extensive experience as an educator in northern communities.

## Harry Lawrence, Elder, Duncan's First Nation

Never limiting yourself is a belief Harry holds dear. Even when things get hard, keep trying because you never know what capabilities you have until you try.

When Harry was a child, his mother had a vision for his future. She told Harry that if he stayed on the reserve he would just go round and round and never go anywhere. When the opportunity came for Harry to go to Edmonton, live in a group home and continue his education, his mother encouraged him to do it. As a result, Harry finished his GED and worked and travelled in the Northwest Territories for the territorial government for the next 32 years before finally settling back home.

Harry was the appointed Elder for the Memorandum of Understanding for First Nations Education in Alberta Working Group as agreed upon by the Treaty 6, 7 and 8 Grand Chiefs. He believes that the Elder's role is to ensure that the diverse identity of the Treaty First Nations history, culture and language is promoted, protected and respected. In that meeting he based his role on the traditional teachings in four areas (spiritual, mental, physical and emotional) that have been passed on from generation to generation.

He further believes that Elders have a large role to play when education is talked about. Elder views have to be listened to, and Elders must stand up for their children. He believes that Elders lead by example; if Elders, parents, and communities work together, the future will be bright for First Nation people.

## Joyce Parenteau, Paddle Prairie Métis Settlement

My parents, Joe and Grace McGillivray, moved to the newly opened Métis settlement of Paddle Prairie in the spring of 1939 –one of the first Métis families to arrive and settle. We attended a one-room school with only one teacher, and my dad was a bus driver/custodian for the two school houses. Our parents were firm believers that obtaining an education was a key factor to be successful in life.

I did some of my high school at what is now Fairview College, boarding in a dormitory. In later years, I met and married my husband Tom, who is also a settlement member, and we have been blessed with three daughters, six grandchildren and one great-grandson. We are proud that all of our three children completed Grade 12, in triumph over their challenges.

In 1971, Northland School Division introduced a new Teacher Assistant Program in Grouard. I got lucky and was selected by our community to take the required training. I was employed at my local school for 26 years (1971-1997) working mainly with Grades 1 and 2. I feel very rewarded to have been part of the children's education. Being raised in a small remote community, I can appreciate the challenges faced by parents, students, and teachers.

I have been involved on many boards and advisory groups, and I was very honoured to be selected and appointed to the Community Engagement Team as an Elder. I believe that the strength of leadership comes not in your position but in your presence. You need to lead from your presence, not your position.

As Aboriginal people, we have to ensure that our traditions and values are included in the educational curriculum so our children will not lose their language and identity and history.

### **Pauline Ominayak, Sucker Creek First Nation**

Pauline (Calliou) Ominayak was born in Sucker Creek. She attended Jossard Indian Residential School for 11 years. Pauline had a passion for teaching and had wanted to be a teacher since Grade 6.

At age 37, Pauline graduated from the University of Alberta with a teaching degree. She has taught in several communities in Northland School Division No. 61 and is still teaching at Driftpile School today.

As well, she married E. Joe Ominayak. Together they had five sons and one daughter.

Pauline is wife, mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, teacher and Elder. She believes strongly in, and advocates for, families being involved in Cree language and culture.

### **Paula Giroux, Driftpile First Nation**

My birth name is Pauline Bellerose, but many people know me as Paula, and I prefer the latter. I was born in High Prairie on January 25, 1953. My parents were Henry and Maggie Bellerose, now deceased. I have two brothers and four sisters. I had four sisters, but recently my oldest one has joined my parents in the spirit world.

I am a proud member of the Driftpile Cree First Nation. I married John Henry Giroux and moved to Grande Prairie to start our family. We lived there for 18 years and decided to introduce the reserve life to our wonderful daughters, Henri and Daisy, as it was part of our heritage. I have always encouraged my children and my relatives to learn our heritage. I especially encourage the culture because in my opinion it signifies one's identity, and, without knowing your identity, the world becomes a struggle and a challenge of survival. The language is just as important, but unfortunately we did not give our girls the opportunity to learn their language.

But they know their culture. They are kind and good people. Today we are proud to say we have been married for 38 years. Our girls blessed us with four beautiful grand children, three boys and one girl.

I started my working life in the service field such as dry cleaning, laundry work, seamstress and secretary/receptionist. I found this to be very hard work, so I decided to go back to school for an office administration diploma and then worked as a native liaison worker for two schools in Grande Prairie. We decided as a family to move back to the reserve in 1989. I worked for Slave Lake Regional Council in child welfare and for Driftpile First Nation as an education counsellor. I decided to go to university and received my B.Ed degree in 1994. I taught for a number of years at the Driftpile Community School and again took the opportunity to obtain my Masters in Education, received in 2000. I worked as a guidance counselor and then director of education for Driftpile School until the school became the responsibility of the Northland School Division. This was a political decision. Then, self-employed as a consultant for First Nations of Treaty 8 of Alberta, I obtained contracts working in different fields such as health, education and self-government. I received a great deal of experience in dealing with First Nations in all of these fields.

I am a firm believer of self first, family, community and nation. I believe that everyone is the same physically, but each one of us has unique attributes to bring to this world. I bring compassion, passion and hard work to everything I do. I believe that when a person understands their true identity, they will overcome any obstacle in their path. I believe we all have a purpose on this earth, and sometimes it takes a lifetime to figure it out.

### Rita Marten, Mikisew Cree First Nation

Rita Marten was born in the small, predominantly Cree and Dene First Nation community of Fort Chipewyan, located in northeastern Alberta. Her parents instilled her with the valuable knowledge of the Cree language, culture and traditional skills to live off the land. Her upbringing has strongly influenced her work as educator, chief and now director of education for the Athabasca Tribal Council.

She believes in order to be truly educated you need to know who you are before you can decide what you want to be. Rita advocates that an ideal education system provides a student with a strong understanding of their language, culture as well as academic excellence. She feels that partnerships between First Nations and levels of government, education stakeholders, and communities are an effective means of achieving this end.

Rita has worked in the education system for the past 25 years as a Cree language teacher K-12, supervisor of native language program, family liaison advisor, director of education and education portfolio with the Mikisew Cree First Nation Leadership.

She brings to the team her greatest strength — knowledge that language and culture are as important as the pursuit of academic excellence in a student's educational journey. This provides students with a strong identity, pride and the ability to advance in mainstream society.

## Nora Yellowknee, Bigstone Cree First Nation

My real name is Apsici Nocikwes. Translated, my Cree name means 'Little Grandmother.' I was given this name by my paternal grandmother (my dad's mom). We all had Cree names as far as I can remember. Some people refer to our Cree names as nicknames and that shouldn't be! Our Cree names are our real names and the names given to us for registration purposes for vital statics are our nicknames.

Having lived when our community had minimal outside socio-cultural, socio-linguistic interference, we were of the last generation of children that had the closest and intimate knowledge and experience of our traditional Indigenous Sakaw Cree lifestyle.

Our transitional stage was the schooling experience that first came to us in the form of the residential schools. All of my siblings experienced being in residential school. The oldest up to the eighth child experienced at least nine years of residential school. Our youngest sister and our youngest brother experienced a lower number of years. We experienced schooling that imposed a program that mandated the deconstruction of our 'self', during our formative years to 'forget who we are and where we come from.'

I had worked in education for some years before I graduated with my Bachelor of Education in 1980 with an Art Major and Social Studies Minor. I took my time to complete the program. I worked with the Edmonton Public School Board until 1984 and taught in the Awasis Program at Prince Charles for four years. I taught with the High Prairie School District also for four years before I decided to return and start graduate studies at the University of Lethbridge in 1990, receiving my Masters in Education in 1997.

It so happens that all of my teaching experience has required the integration of language and culture into the regular program of studies. I firmly believe that the young Indigenous/First Nation people need to develop and have a strong sense of self to ensure greater success in completing and getting their education. They need to hear positive things about themselves, hear the true and authentic version of their story as told by their own people!

I was appointed to the Northland Community Engagement Team as a Treaty 8 representative from the Bigstone Cree Nation by the Minister of Education, Mr. Dave Hancock.

### **Dave Lamouche, Gift Lake Métis Settlement**

Dave Lamouche is a home grown Gift Lake Métis Settlement member. He is married and has three beautiful children. He has served his community in various capacities for the past 20 years and is currently the Vice-Chairman of the Gift Lake Métis Settlement. He has also been involved in mentoring and coaching the youth, especially in sports-related activities.

After graduating from E. W. Pratt High School in 1984, He went on to a forestry training program and subsequently to more academic training in self-government and management. He also took on some challenges as an owner and employee in small business — retail, construction, oil and gas and trucking. Dave is a big promoter of health, education and community development; you will find him mostly in the political arena advocating for change and the well-being of Aboriginal youth and communities.

It was an honour and a privilege for him to serve and be a part of the Community Engagement Team.

### **Jeff Chalifoux, Grouard**

Jeff is from the Grouard and is a private consultant. He has served on numerous boards and committees and has in-depth understanding of First Nations, Métis and Inuit communities.



## David MacPhee, Susa Creek, Aseniwuche Winewak Nation

David was raised in a small isolated community north of Grande Cache by his grandparents, who maintained a traditional native lifestyle throughout his childhood. In addition to possessing a formal education, David is a trained counsellor, experienced logger and skilled translator.

David is a family man and shares his life with his loving wife Yvonne and five children, Clyde, Bonnie, Yvette, John and Iris. He is also president of the Aeniwuche Winewak Nation of Canada — the Rocky Mountain People (AWN).

Not unlike other Aboriginal communities throughout the country, the Grande Cache Aboriginal people faced many hardships, but, through Dave's leadership and adherence to the philosophy "as caretakers of the earth we commit to work together . . . in unity, in faith, for life," the Aseniwuche Winewak Nation today is held up by the province, the local government and industry as an example of a group with a clear sense of place and destiny, one that all want to be associated with.

As CEO of the Aseniwuche Development Corporation (ADC) Dave MacPhee is placing resource development in perspective, effectively balancing the protection and preservation of the land with economic development for his community. AWN, through its development company ADC, has established a very successful and widely recognized track record of fulfilling the contract needs of the resource industry. The company has earned a reputation for good work, delivered on time, within budget.

### **Laurie Thompson, Kikino Métis Settlement**

Laurie has been teaching for 17 years and for four of those years has been principal of Kikino School, which incorporates Métis culture into its curriculum.

Laurie brings a number of perspectives to the committee, including that of rural Albertan; Métis Settlements; single parent; educator; advocate for special needs children and families, as well as children and families at risk. She also served on the steering committee for Inspiring Education.

Laurie lives on the Kikino Métis Settlement with her daughter; she has a B.Ed from the University of Alberta and a masters of arts in leadership degree from Royal Roads University in Victoria.

### **Archie Cunningham, Chair of the Board of Governors, Northern Lakes College**

I have lived in the community of Peavine most of my life. My mom and dad moved here from the Grouard area when I was at a very young age. I continue to live here at Peavine. I met my wonderful wife Yvonne, and we started a family after we got married. We have five children, and now they are all grown up. As a result, we are now proud grandparents.

I have worked in college education for over 35 years. In my other activities, I was involved with Northland School Division as a local school board member at Bishop Routhier School in Peavine for many years. I was also very involved in community sports and recreation, for example, coaching fastball, and minor hockey, as well as helping in fund-raising for them. I retired from Northern Lakes College in June 2008. Since then I was appointed chairperson for the Board of Governors of Northern Lakes College. I continue to involve myself in adult education.

## **Inier Cardinal, First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Partnership Council**

Inier has been a student, a teacher, and a trustee of the Northland School Division 61. Inier has been involved in the Community of Gift Lake as the Education Director, Councilor, and now in his role as the Project Coordinator of the *When We Are Healthy Project*.

Inier is involved with First Nations, Métis and Inuit Services Education Partnership Council and is proud to represent this group on the Community Engagement Team.

## **Linda Pelly, Alberta Education**

Linda is Director of the First Nations, Métis and Inuit Services Branch of Alberta Education.

