

Brainstorming Improvements for Special Education Programming

**SPECIAL EDUCATION INFORMATION
SHARING FORUMS – TORONTO/THUNDER
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In March 2011, the Ontario First Nations Special Education Working Group (OFNSEWG) hosted a focus group to identify challenges associated with INAC High-Cost Special Education Program (HCSEP). The Focus Group included front line service providers, senior First Nation Administrators, Provincial-Territorial Organizations personnel, and INAC/AANDC representatives.

2011 FOCUS GROUP

Focus Group Findings

- Tuition agreements;
- Limited resources;
- Communication at all levels;
- Accurate coding of revenue and expenditures; and surplus and deficit situations.

Addressing Concerns

Voluntary Work Plan Process (2011)

- A tool to aid in accurate codification of expenses
- Allows redirection of funding from communities anticipating a surplus to those anticipating a deficit
- Provides a system to collect important Program data that can be used to better understand high cost special education needs and support advocacy efforts

Toolkit / Train the Trainer Sessions (2014)

The Chiefs in Assembly have mandated the Ontario First Nation Special Education Working Group (OFNSEWG) to analyze the federal High Cost Special Education Program (HCSEP) that has been in place for almost 15 years. This report reflects on the deep challenges associated with the Program and provides some recommendations on next steps from the FNECU.

CHARTING OUR OWN PATH FORWARD: A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF THE HCSEP 2015

Analysis

Findings/Recommendations

1. Low-cost funding levels
2. High-cost funding levels
3. Low-cost – High-cost split
4. Funding Formula
5. Timeline
6. Reporting
7. Communication
8. Lack of Analysis – First Nation Access to Data
9. Need for Support

Low-Cost Funding Levels

- BOFF not updated since 1996-97 at which time it was capped at an annual 2% increase
- The BOFF formula has not been indexed for rises in the cost of living and teachers' salaries
- 2% cap also limits the ability to support changes in program needs

High Cost Funding Levels

- No cost escalator
- Rising Deficits
- Analysis of Work Plan process over several years provides some evidence that the increase required is in the 40% range

Low-Cost – High-Cost Split

- The HCSEP addresses the needs of students with moderate to profound needs as something separate and apart from “regular” education. This is something that must be addressed if we are to develop an inclusive education system.

Funding Formula

Too rigid and does not address:

- Wide variances in incidence rates (the rate of high needs students within the student population) among HCSEP recipients
- The need for recipients to access additional funding when needs suddenly increase
- The need for a process to redirect funding from recipients with low needs to recipients with higher needs
- Wide year-to-year fluctuations in nominal roll between schools
- Significant changes in the numbers of special education students attending provincial schools as opposed to council-operated schools

Funding Formula cont'd

- The reality of significantly higher costs for remote and northern communities to serve the needs of their students
- The need for aggregate organizations to access higher levels of base funding as they service more than one community
- Wide variances in school size
- The difference in the amount of funding required to support students attending provincial schools (where tuition fees cover the majority of special education needs)
- Additional costs required for second and third level support services
- The rising incidence rate. (Between 2007 and 2014 the average HCSEP incidence rate rose by almost 50%).

Timeline

- Set contribution
 - The limitation of an annual allocation does not enable First Nations to effectively plan for the best use of the funding.
- Fiscal year does not align with school year
- Nominal roll (previous year)
 - Not working with accurate student numbers
 - school boards are billing First Nations based on current student numbers (student lists are submitted to First Nations by boards twice a year)

Reporting

- Complicated by the need to report on 3 months of HCSEP information from the previous school year and 7 months of HCSEP information from the current school year
- There is also the complexity of possible recovery of surplus funds regardless of whether the funding could be utilized in the remaining 3 months of the school year

Communication

- Often changes are made to the program guidelines or how the funding allocation amount is communicated to recipients but the pertinent information does not flow to those who require this information directly for the actual delivery of services within the community.
- OFNSEWG has attempted to address communication challenges through the Work Plan Process, the development of the HCSEP Toolkit and train the trainer sessions, however, much more needs to be done.

Lack of Analysis – First Nation Access to Data

- Although INAC collects copious amounts of data in the form of yearly reports and audits they have not produced any analysis on the effectiveness of the current program
- Most data analysis to date has been conducted by the First Nation representatives of the OFNSEWG based on data obtained through the Work Plan process
- Recent mandate from the Chiefs in Assembly provides approval for the FNECU to obtain aggregate data at the recipient level for analysis purposes

Need for Support

First Nations require a network and structure for capacity building where First nations can provide:

- Coordinated Student Assessments;
- Special Education Professional Services;
- A Special Education Resource Line;
- Professional development/learning, and;
- Bulk Purchasing of Resources.

Special Education Support Technicians are currently collecting information via an evaluation tool designed to capture evidence-based data to inform improvements to the First Nation Special Education Programming

CURRENT STATUS

Brainstorming Activity

- 10 topic posters are posted on the walls
- Workshop participants walk around to the various posters and add their suggestions/comments/solutions (20 min)
- Workshop participants review posters and vote with sticky dots on suggestions/comments/solutions they are in agreement with (20 min)

Concluding Discussion

- All participants are encouraged to discuss what they have shared and learned through the brainstorming process (as time permits)