

Our Gifted Children

Iakhinorónhkwa Iakhiio'okòn:a



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MESSAGE FROM CHIEFS OF ONTARIO ACTING DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION

Greetings, as the year 2020 is approaching the end, I would like to thank all First Nations educators that have done a tremendous job supporting students through the Covid-19 pandemic. All of us in education are navigating the pandemic and doing our best to ensure that students have opportunities to learn in a safe environment.

Chiefs of Ontario is committed to the oversight of special education funding through the Interim Funding Approach. With the OTTIFA table's assistance, we are continuing to host meetings with our First Nation partners throughout Ontario to ensure that special education needs and special education funding are looked at.

The Assembly of First Nations has recently conducted a comprehensive research report on High-Cost Special Education both on a regional (Ontario) and a national level. This report looks closer at the costing gaps under the current program and new models for high-cost special education and provided recommendations for policy to support the needs of high cost special education.

Finally, we have throughout the pandemic also worked collaboratively with the Ministry of Education to ensure that the needs of First Nation students are reflected in the provincial system.

As we are fast approaching Christmas, on behalf of the education unit at Chiefs of Ontario, I would like to wish everyone a safe and wonderful holiday.

M. Maracle

Murray Maracle,

Acting Director of Education

WHO WE ARE

The **Chiefs of Ontario** is a political forum and secretariat for collective decision-making, action, and advocacy for the 133 First Nations communities located in Ontario.

Guided by the Chiefs in Assembly, we uphold self-determination efforts of the Anishinaabek, Mushkegowuk, Onkwehon:we, and Lenape Peoples in protecting and exercising their inherent and Treaty Rights.

Keeping in mind the wisdom of our Elders, traditional knowledge keepers, and the future for our youth, we continue to create the path forward in building our Nations as strong, healthy Peoples respectful of ourselves, each other, and all creation.



Strengths-Based Strategies for Challenges at School

WORKSHOP IS FULL

Tools for Educators Who Support At-Risk Indigenous Children and Youth in First Nations Schools

Challenging Behaviour:

- Puts a learner and those around them at a risk of harm and can contribute to poor social and educational outcomes.
- Is the result of a complex relationship between each learner's biological, personal, and community histories, and their interactions with the environment.
- May be associated with adverse childhood experiences and personal, intergenerational, and/or collective trauma.
- Can be supported through the development of social, cultural, and adaptive skills.

We want to learn from you!

Shkaabe Makwa and Chiefs of Ontario are offering this workshop as part of a pilot that will inform the development of a comprehensive curriculum which will be available in 2021. Participants will be expected to engage and provide feedback that will be used to improve upon course content.

What is it?

This interactive pilot workshop will explore the meaning of "challenging behaviour", its risk and protective factors, the role of trauma and adverse childhood experiences, cultural considerations and approaches, and practical strategies for strengthening healthy relationships and behaviour.

Who is it for?

This pilot workshop is intended for teachers, educational assistants, special education coordinators, and other education professionals who provide direct support to Indigenous children and youth.

When is it?

Friday, December 11, 2020 - 9:15 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. EST

CLICK HERE TO REGISTER

Having issues with registration? Contact

Kathleen.Williams@camh.ca

This workshop is accredited by the Indigenous Certification Board of Canada.



 @SHKAABEMAKWA

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USING LAND BASED LEARNING TO OVERCOME THE CHALLENGE OF COVID-19 IN LAC SEUL FIRST NATION

Submitted by: Alisha Dasti-Hill, Principal Waninitawingaang Memorial School

The communities making up the Lac Seul First Nation have been working to keep our community members safe since the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic. We have successfully kept the virus out of our communities. Our Pandemic Plan ebbs and flows with the number of COVID-19 cases in the surrounding area. Our plan features four alert levels of hazard: green, yellow, orange, or red. The alert levels of hazard signal to the community the health and safety risk present in the community, and indicate the measures taken to prevent transmission (Ex. level red is considered 'critical,' meaning a complete shutdown of the community). Since the beginning of the school year, we have been in alert level yellow (low to moderate risk), wherein two cohorts of students alternate days at school.

Weslie Wabano and Joe Wesley, our outdoor education teachers, have been working with students and their families, both in and out of school. The teachers take groups out on the land to partake in traditional activities, based on the rotating schedule currently in place.

Parents are always welcome to join for the day, as it is an opportunity to spend time with their kids and actively role model. Such was the case when Councilor Wade Bull joined his son's outing, making it his son's "favourite day of school ever," out on the land as a family!

The goals of the land-based activities are family engagement, the sharing of traditional knowledge and teachings (such as storytelling, showing gratitude to the land, sharing the fruits of our hard work with Elders and community), and the preservation of natural resources for future generations.

While the weather is still sunny and warm, Weslie and Joe take students and their families fishing. They often bring the families to have shore lunch during the day. This is an opportunity to teach them about sustainable fishing in the lake of Lac Seul. This has opened a door for families to fish for lake trout; an activity many have not done for decades. Some of the catch is brought back to



Gage Wabano

the community to smoke and share with families and Elders.

Another activity that is being shared through our outdoor education program is the sustainable harvesting of firewood. Students and their families are working collaboratively to safely collect wood for the winter months; something that is often necessary in this northern community. Wood cutting is a practical life skill that will benefit students and their families throughout their lives.

In the winter months, we hope to continue collecting wood for families and Elders in the community. Some of our future outings for this winter include: ice fishing, hunting, net setting, rabbit snaring, drumming, and cooking. So far our COVID-19 Pandemic Plan is proving to be successful, and we can't wait to see how our outdoor education program continues to evolve and improve!



Pictures clockwise:

Charity Ningewance, Dakota Trout, Urijah Trout-Goodwin, Antonio Trout

Jon Quequish, Mercy Quequish-Quezance, Bishop Quequish-Quezance, and Cruz Binguis-Johnston

Smoked Trout Fish

Gage Wabano, Weslie Wabano, Lucius Bone, April Bone, Percious Kirchen, Joe Wesley

ELDER'S CORNER

Diane Hill (Katsitsawaks) is a member of the Mohawk Nation, Bear clan from the Six Nations of the Grand River Territory. For the past 30 years Diane has been consulting in numerous Aboriginal education initiatives such as the R.E.A.L. School Program which focuses on personal transformation & leadership development for youth.

What is the importance of education?

In many Indigenous peoples' creation stories, human beings are the last to be created in this earthly realm and so they have the most to learn! So, I believe that education on many levels and in many forms is extremely important and needs to be a centred on the development of the "whole-person"; mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually. Education for me involves much more than formal classroom learning, education is learning about one's inner being and how one perceives one's self, others and life in general. Learning about one's unique language, cultural beliefs and practices combined with learning about the greater social mainstream milieu and the overall global environment that we share with other races and cultures of people completes my view of the life-long and spiraling process of education. But, most importantly, my spiraling view of education has a starting point that begins with learning how to connect with one's inner being and knowing how to tap into the inner peace and the guidance that flows from and through that inner space into my outer consciousness and awareness of myself and others. Learning to listen to the inner voice that knows who you are and why you have come into existence on this planet is paramount to successfully engaging with your soul's purpose and mission that can one day become manifest and provide you with much satisfaction and contentment during your current lifetime.



How important is the connection to success in education and your culture, traditions, and language?

Success in education does not necessarily mean that there is a strong connection to how one will or can experience his/her culture, traditions and language. Nor does a strong connection to one's cultural heritage and language mean that an individual will experience success in education. However, the two conditions are not mutually exclusive. They can be linked together depending upon the knowledge and experience that both education and culture can provide. In my world, I have met many people in my work as a community-

based educator in healing and wellness who are simply just not happy. Regardless of their level of education and whether they are or have been culturally-immersed or not, many of the people with whom I work, often feel angry or fearful and describe themselves as sad or depressed. Many of the people that I see are struggling with an addiction or struggling with their work, their relationships or with life in general. These are the people who are in search of something else that will help them to feel successful, to be happy and to find some inner peace. These are the people who if they had an education that included the relevant cultural teachings for showing them how to achieve the inner peace and happiness they are looking for, would be successful in life in general and not just successful in culture or education, specifically.

How can we support and promote Special Education and its success in our First Nation territories?

For a long time, I have been an advocate and promoter of teacher training programs that encompass a wide array of teaching methods and styles that could meet the differentiated and varied learning styles of learners in general and not just First Nation learners, in particular. I studied the pedagogy of adult education when I was in university and I came to understand and to see that adults and children do learn similarly. I'm not sure why the pedagogy associated with special education is labelled as "special" when the methods and practices of teaching associated with it can be useful and beneficial for learners of all ages and levels.

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In my own teaching experience, I developed a practice of "learning by doing" believing that experiential learning processes were by far the most effective and easiest way to help a learner to develop and to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes associated with any given program, course or subject of study. I also came to believe that learners needed help to develop the essential skills (reading, writing and basic arithmetic) that can be coupled with the kind of applied life skills (emotional intelligence, self-esteem & self-confidence) that are needed for navigating through life and that are espoused by many of the employment and training agencies today. I see this focus on acquiring both the essential skills and the applied life skills as a more practical approach to education especially for those learners who are not doing well in the current educational system. So, perhaps, we can come to see special education not as special but as vital and necessary; a more preferred approach to education for learners of all ages.

What would you say/do for a student who is struggling with a class, fellow student, or personal conflict?

My passion which is also the focus of my community-based work in healing and wellness centres on assisting people of all ages to understand that you can't change anyone or anything else but yourself! So I would ask the learner to consider how the class, the fellow student or the personal conflict with a teacher or parent or anyone else for that matter is affecting him or her.

I would ask the learner to identify what feelings and emotions are getting stirred up inside of you and together, let's see if we can discover the original source of your reaction or response by allowing yourself to really feel the feelings/emotions so they can inform you of the deeper meaning. There is a reason for why you feel and respond in the way that you do. And if you can discover its source, then you have all the power in the world to change how you feel and in doing so, you will change how you are experiencing this struggle or conflict. And here's the best news, when you can ➡

transform how you feel, oftentimes the struggle or the conflict disappears.

In short, if you change the way you look at things, then the things you look at change.

In short, if you change the way you look at things, then the things you look at change.

Final thought: What advice would you give to someone as they are trying to achieve their educational goals?

Learning is a life-long journey. You will be learning right up until the day you die. So, don't get discouraged if you think that you aren't learning anything or moving fast enough in achieving the goals that you have set out for yourself. The journey should not focus on IF I meet my educational goals, but WHEN I meet them. And, always, always remember that the sign of an intelligent human being is that you get to change your mind, especially when you receive new information. So, don't be afraid to change your goals when you need to. There is no such thing as failing to achieve. If we have learned something, then we have achieved.

DON'T BE A COUCH POTATO!

Sedentary behaviour and low levels of physical activity can have negative effects on the health, well-being and quality of life of individuals. **Our bodies are built to move!** To maintain or develop healthy habits, go outside and play at least for one hour each day. Be sure to supervise young children playing in groups and during the pandemic discourage the use of sporting equipment or jungle gyms to minimize direct contact with each other and surfaces.



TECHNOLOGY AS A TOOL...NOT A TOY!

With more special education students in the regular classroom, the need for assistive technology has become crucial. Assistive technology increases functional capabilities for students and supports them as they acquire new skills that allow them to become more independent learners. Two such technologies available to our students are “Speech to Text” and “Text to Speech” software. These technologies can be easily obtained and are often free. Speech to text software is a support tool that allows students to have their voice recorded and their words transferred into a written document. This is very useful for students who find keyboarding difficult, and is advantageous to those who struggle to convey and transfer their thoughts onto paper. This technology allows students to express themselves with dramatically increased fluency and confidence and allows struggling writers to concentrate on learning tasks, rather than mechanical tasks. Students become empowered, motivated, and develop a high level of self-esteem and confidence.



Text to speech programs are another tool that can be utilized as a stand-alone student support, or in

Speech recognition allows you to speak aloud to your device and have words typed as you speak.

conjunction with the speech to text software combined. Text to speech software converts words on a computer or other digital device into audio. This “Read Aloud” software recites words, passages, and whole documents. Many have a highlighting feature that makes it easy to follow along, and students can access picture dictionaries and create vocabulary lists as they go. Students who are easily distracted by advertising and banners on the internet can remove them by using the “Simplify” mode to eliminate them. Spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar checks are all incorporated into these user friendly programs. This software is beneficial to students who may be visually impaired, have language deficits, non-verbal, or a learning disability. Learning becomes accessible, barriers are removed, and levels of frustration decline.

Current technology that is available for use by our special education teachers to support student learning include, but are not limited to, Dragon Naturally Speaking, Dragon Mobile Assistant, Microsoft Speech to Text/Text to Speech, and Google Read and Write. The latter two, developed by Microsoft and Google, combine Speech to Text and Text to Speech software. All are software tools that can be used to provide student support, allow them to express themselves with increased fluency and confidence, gain motivation, foster increased demonstration of learning and independence, and make educational content more accessible and inclusive for all!

Image by mcmurryjulie from Pixabay

OTITIS MEDIA IN THE CLASSROOM

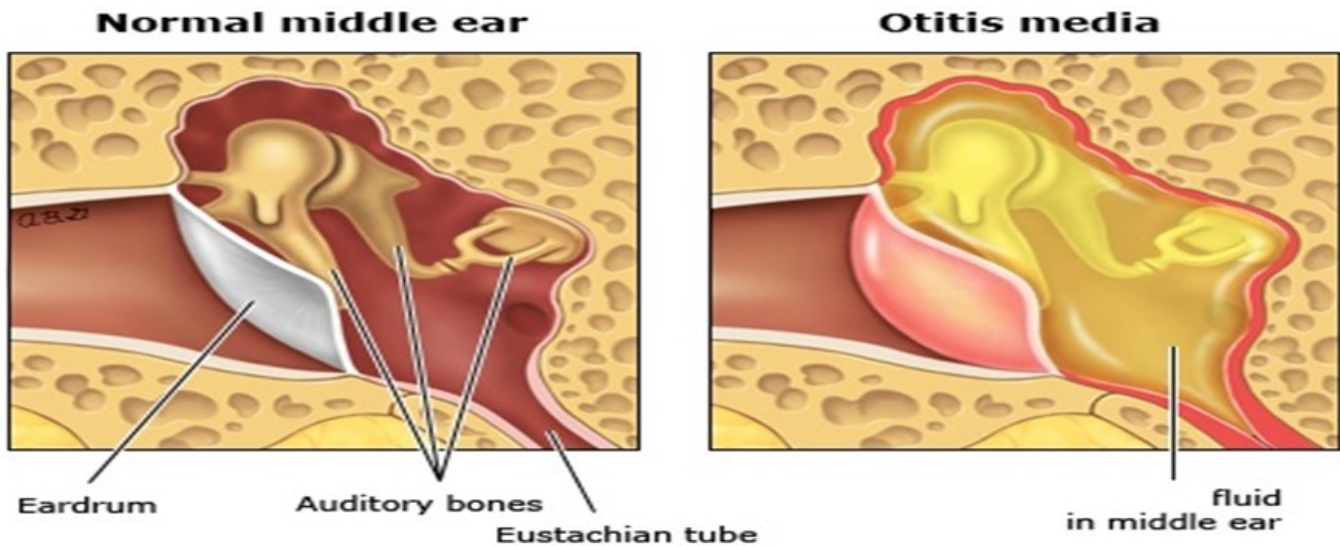
Submitted by: Kristi Stano, Educational Resource Consultant for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Resource Services-Outreach Programs

There are several different types of ear infections that we often see in children. Otitis Media means inflammation of the middle ear. In some instances, it will resolve on its own, and as a result more doctors are taking a ‘watch and wait’ approach in order to avoid the over prescription of antibiotics. Acute Otitis Media (AOM) appears very quickly, often in children with allergies or who have a cold and is often accompanied by pain and fever. This type of infection typically lasts 2-4 weeks. Otitis Media with Effusion (OME) is defined as “the presence of non-infectious fluid in the middle ear for more than three months” (Seawright 2020).

OME might not present with symptoms of an ear infection however, the fluid in the middle ear prevents the auditory system from working optimally. The three little bones in the middle ear cannot move freely or transmit sound properly, which can result in speech sounding unclear and muffled. There is rarely pain with OME. Since the most common middle ear pathology in First Nations children is OME (Langan et al. 2007), parents and educators should be aware of the potential effect it can have on language and learning.

Effects on Speech and Language	Prevention	Possible Indicators
<p>Children learn speech and language skills by listening. OME may be undetected for weeks or months resulting in a child not being able to listen optimally for long periods of time.</p> <p>Children with OME or who get frequent ear infections, may be accused of ‘not listening’ or ‘not paying attention’. This can have detrimental effects on self-esteem and mental health.</p> <p>Children with OME are working much harder to listen, even if they don’t always realize it. This can become exhausting and if working harder does not yield results, children may stop putting extra effort into the task.</p> <p>For children who are experiencing hearing loss related to OME it will be difficult for them to hear word endings, consonants and unstressed words. Early reading skills may be delayed.</p>	<p>Exclusively breastfeed infants for a minimum of 6 months results in lower rates of otitis media</p> <p>Avoid exposure to second-hand smoke</p> <p>Keep childhood vaccinations up to date</p> <p>Consume a diet high in fruits, vegetables and whole grains</p>	<p>Seem more tired than usual</p> <p>Misunderstand instructions or directions</p> <p>Seem to ignore the speaker</p> <p>Mishear words that are similar (e.g. wish/witch)</p> <p>Request audio sources to be turned up louder</p> <p>Turn head to one side to listen</p> <p>Exhibit attention difficulties</p> <p>Exhibit difficulty listening with background noise</p> <p>Move around to be able to see you better</p>

Otitis media may result in decreased hearing levels in children. Fluctuating hearing loss occurs when fluid comes and goes, and permanent hearing loss can result from recurring ear infections which results in fatigue, difficulty hearing speech sounds and possibly affecting reading skills.



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Bowd, Alan. (2005 March). Otitis media: health and social consequences for Aboriginal youth in Canada's north. *International Journal of Circumpolar Health*, 64, 5-15.

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Seawright FT, Singh R, Peterson DC. Otitis Media With Effusion. [Updated 2020 Aug 10]. In: StatPearls [Internet]. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing; 2020 Jan. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK538293/>

UPCOMING WEBINARS

Shkaabe Makwa CAMH

December 1, 2020

Indigenous Youth and Well-Being
During COVID-19
Assembly of Seven Generations

December 8, 2020

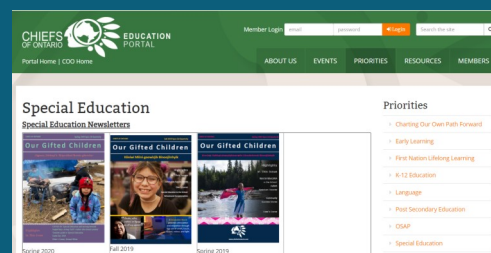
Mother Earth's Families: Health in
Mind, Body, and Spirit
Shkaabe Makwa & Creators Garden

**SPECIAL EDUCATION
RESOURCES AND TOOLS**

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Education Portal

<http://education.chiefs-of-ontario.org>



MAKING CONNECTIONS AND FOSTERING WELLBEING ON THE LAND

Our Gifted Children would like to extend a special thank you to educator Alex Tawpism and principal Brenda Ahenakew of Kihiw Waciston School in Muskeg Lake Cree Nation for sharing their experiences with land-based learning and special education for the purpose of this publication.

As we head into our ninth month of social distancing, personal protective equipment, and the steady flow of news surrounding novel coronavirus, it is more important than ever for staff and students to find ways in which to decompress and connect with each other. A school in Saskatchewan has found their land-based learning program to be a therapeutic outlet that helps foster positive connections between student and teacher- in a way that cannot be duplicated in the classroom.

Kihiw Waciston School (or, Eagle's Nest School) is a private First Nations school in Muskeg Lake Cree Nation, located roughly 100 kilometers north of Saskatoon. On a nearby peninsula, the community has built a cultural camp where land-based learning teacher, Alex Tawpism, takes students to learn traditional skills and teachings. Students participate in seasonal activities, such as harvesting sweet grass, Saskatoon berries, muskeg tea, and rat root. For the winter season, students look forward to rabbit tracking and snaring, moose harvesting, meat smoking, building lean-tos and ice fishing. Alex incorporates traditional teachings, like offering tobacco, giving thanks, and using every part of the animal. "We don't do it for fun," explains Alex, "if we catch a rabbit, we skin and eat it." Students enjoy learning and practicing skills, many of whom have become "little experts." They take initiative to teach other students, taking pride in their capabilities and knowledge. The students are also very proud to see themselves printed on posters hung around the school and cultural camp, participating in land based learning.

For special education students, this increase in confidence and engagement is a major victory. "When

you're out on the land, as soon as you get out there, their demeanour changes. They're more willing to ask questions because it's hands-on and there is no right or wrong, only learning. There is a higher focus on logic and intuition, not academics. You're not going to fail making a snare, you just try again." Alex reflects on one student who struggles with a cognitive delay and anxiety when asked to speak in the classroom. "We go out on the land to look at things we're learning about, and it's as if his anxiety goes from a 10 to a 2. This same student will open up, make connections between academic concepts and what he's learning on the land, and speak freely. It's as if the delay goes away for a little bit."



Making connections between land-based learning concepts and academic curriculum has proven to be a successful strategy in Alex's

classroom. By drawing on his students' existing knowledge and passion for traditional activities, he makes learning accessible and relatable. "We take those experiences on the land, come back to school and incorporate technology. Students use Jamboards and visual organizers to describe the sequence of events in rabbit snaring, for example. They can use talk-to-type to articulate thoughts and create sentences about the activity. Traditional knowledge is fun, and we're teaching skills they can use in the future" (both in academics, and on the land).

Land-based learning gives students and teachers an opportunity to connect with each other in nature. Alex remarks on the positive relationship building that land-based learning fosters between himself and his students. "You form a bond, a relationship that we can't duplicate in the classroom. We get to see each other in another light." Connection is particularly important in our current public health climate to break up Covid-19 fatigue and anxiety. "We're wearing masks, we're surrounded by plastic shields, we're sanitizing everything, there is no sharing. It creates an institutionalized, almost hospital-like setting with the kids. That, in itself, creates fear and anxiety. 'Am I sick, is

my teacher sick?' When we go out onto the land, we can see smiles, can interact – we're not trapped within our 6-foot bubble trying to stay away from each other. When we go out in the bush, they can be kids again. It's therapy, it's good for students and staff."

Land-based learning can be a fantastic tool to ease Covid-19 fatigue and fear. It has proven to be profoundly beneficial for staff and students at Kihiw Waciston School in Muskeg Lake Cree Nation. Their land-based program promotes wellbeing, self-confidence, and social connection, especially with their special education students. Getting out on the land can be an effective strategy for students and staff to reconnect and have some fun in the fresh air.



Traditional knowledge is fun!

ONTARIO FIRST NATION SPECIAL EDUCATION WORKING GROUP

In 2005, the Ontario First Nations Special Education Working group (OFNSEWG) was formed as a subcommittee to the First Nations Education Coordination Unit (FNECU). It is a joint technical and advisory body mandated by the FNECU to provide recommendations on issues and specific strategies for political review and/or approval for action. The OFNSEWG is made up of representatives from the First Nations Education Coordination Unit and Indigenous Service Canada.

Ontario First Nation Special Education Working Group	
Name	Organization
Denise Lofstrom	Chiefs of Ontario
Sherry Britton	Nishnawbe Aski Nation
Murray Waboose	Anishinabek Nation
Kyla Stonefish	Association of Iroquois Allied Indians
Yolanda Fobister	Grand Council Treaty #3
Debbie Terrance	Independent First Nations
Shelley Knott-Fife	Indigenous Services Canada

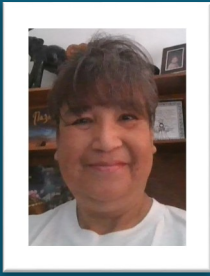
THE SPECIAL EDUCATION TECHNICIANS

What is a Special Education Support Technician (SEST)?

There are three SESTs providing support to the First Nations in Ontario. They are based out of the Kenora, Thunder Bay, and Southern Ontario. The role of the SESTs is to support and assist First Nations with:

- effective use of HCSEP funding;
- understanding and addressing capacity issues around Special Education;
- collection and analysis of information related to improving the First Nations Special Education programs;
- liaise and strengthen relationships with First Nations, Tribal Councils, Chiefs of Ontario, school boards and other organizations;
- identifying and addressing barriers and challenges in the delivery of Special Education services;
- support with policy development, and tuition service agreements;
- organize Special Education Sharing Forums across Ontario.

SPECIAL EDUCATION SUPPORT TECHNICIAN COMMUNITY LISTING



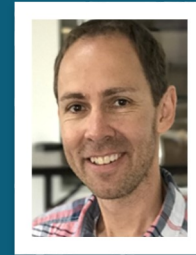
North Eastern Region
Patricia Magiskan
416-970-0521
 Patricia.magiskan@coo.org

Aroland First Nation
 Attawapiskat First Nation
 Bearskin Lake First Nation
 Cat Lake First Nation
 Constance Lake First Nation
 Eabametoong First Nation
 Fort Albany First Nation
 Fort Severn First Nation
 Fort William First Nation
 Ginoogaming - Long Lac #77
 Kasabonika First Nation
 Kashechewan First Nation
 Kiashke Zaaging Anishinaabek
 Kingfisher Lake First Nation
 Marten Falls First Nation
 Moose Cree First Nation
 Muskrat Dam First Nation
 Nibinamik First Nation
 Neskantaga - Lansdowne House
 North Caribou Lake
 Ojibways of Saugeen #258
 Pays Plat First Nation
 Red Rock First Nation
 Sachigo First Nation
 Sandy Lake First Nation
 Shibogama First Nations Council
 Taykwa Tagamou Nation (New Post)
 Wawakapewin First Nation
 Webequie First Nation
 Weenusk First Nation
 Wahgoshig - Abitibi #70
 Whitesand First Nation
 Keewaytinook Okimakanak Tribal
 Council
 Independent First Nations Alliance
 Northern Nishnawbe Ed Council
 Mattagami First Nation



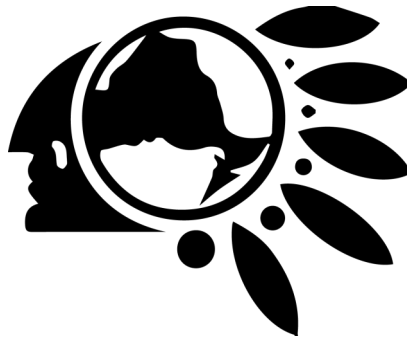
North Western Region
Susan Deley
807-407-6233
 Susan.deley@coo.org

Anishnaabe of Naongashing
 Big Grassy First Nation
 Couchiching First Nation
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 Eagle Lake First Nation
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 Lac Seul First Nation
 Keewaytinook Okimakanak
 Keewaywin First Nation
 Kitchenuhmaykoosib
 Mishkeegogamang
 Mitaanjigaming First Nation
 Naicatchewenin First Nation
 Naotkamegwaning
 Nicickousemenecaning Nigigoo
 siminikaaning
 North Spirit Lake First Nation
 Northwest Angle #33 First Nation
 Animakee Wa Zhing
 Obashkaandagang
 Ochiichagwe'babigo'ining
 Ojibways of Onigaming
 Pikangikum First Nation
 Poplar Hill First Nation
 Rainy River First Nation
 Seine River First Nation
 Shoal Lake #40
 Slate Falls First Nation
 Wabaseemoong First Nation
 Wabauskang First Nation
 Wabigoon Lake Ojibway
 Wapekeka First Nation
 Washagamis Bay
 Wauzhushk Onigum
 Wunnumin First Nation



South Central Region
Patrik Lowen
519-717-0161
 patrik.lowen@coo.org

Alderville First Nation
 Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation
 Batchewana First Nation
 Bkejwanong
 Chippewas of Kettle & Stony Point
 Chippewas of Nawash - Cape Croker
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 Moravian of the Thames - Delaware
 Nation
 Oneida Nation of the Thames
 Sagamok First Nation
 Serpent River First Nation
 Shawanaga First Nation
 Sheguiandah First Nation
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 Temagami First Nation
 Thessalon First Nation
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Toronto Administration Office

Location: 468 Queen St E, Suite 400,
Toronto, ON
M5A 1T7

Toll free: 1 877 517 6527

Phone: (416) 597 1266

Fax: (416) 597 8365

Political Office

Taykwa Tagamou Nation
RR#2 Box 3310
Cochrane Ontario
P0L1C0