



CHIEFS COUNCIL

MEDIA RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MATAWA CHIEFS' COUNCIL IN OPPOSITION TO REMOVAL OF INDIGENOUS CONTENT FROM ONTARIO'S SCIENCE CURRICULUM STARTING IN SEPTEMBER 2022

[Thunder Bay, ON:] – Following the Matawa 34th Annual General Meeting (AGM) that took place during the last week of July 2022 in Webequie First Nation—the Matawa Chiefs Council are calling for the Ontario Ministry of Education to immediately stop the planned implementation of the new Ontario elementary science curriculum for the 2022-2023 school year that removes Indigenous content. Since announced in March of 2022, Indigenous Nations and education bodies in Ontario have been expressing similar concerns. “Attempting to minimize or erase Indigenous knowledge to Ontario’s curriculum further divides and perpetuates the roots of systemic racism at the elementary school level—the education system should be building bridges and understanding between all cultures,” said David Paul Achneepineskum, CEO of Matawa First Nations Management.

With regards to educational reform and curricula that acknowledges the role of the country’s First Peoples, both the *2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) and the *2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission* have made clear calls to action. “The removal of the overarching theme that teaches students the connections between Indigenous and Western science in Ontario’s science and technology curriculum against the wishes of Indigenous Nations and educational bodies in Ontario, is unacceptable,” said Matawa Chiefs’ Spokesperson for Education and Neskantaga First Nation Chief Wayne Moonias. “The government of Ontario needs to stop regressing in their relationship with First Nations in Ontario—they need to acknowledge that Indigenous science, within the education system, is just as much a contribution to Ontario students and the general public, as western science is.”

In addition to concerns already raised over the past four-months by other Indigenous Nations and education bodies in Ontario—some other specific implications for students identified by Sharon Nate of the [Matawa Education Authority](#) and discussed by the Matawa Chiefs Council at the 34th AGM included:

1. Without Indigenous science content in the elementary curriculum, gaps in learning will be created for students who move between First Nation and provincial schools. This includes students who attend a provincially funded elementary school before enrolling at the Matawa Education and Care Centre (MECC) who will not have the Indigenous science foundation or understanding of the necessary background for the MECC science curriculum.
2. The Ontario Government has stated [they] are committed to working with Indigenous partners and the education sector to improve access to education for Indigenous students in Ontario and support First Nation, Métis and Inuit student achievement and well-being. This includes: closing the achievement gap between Indigenous students and all students; and, increasing every student’s knowledge and awareness of Indigenous histories, cultures, perspectives and contributions. Such decisions made to the provincial elementary curriculum demonstrate a lack of commitment to increasing awareness of Indigenous histories and culture and closing the achievement gap experienced by Indigenous students.





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3. With an expectation that provincial elementary students are required to learn about emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and coding, First Nation elementary schools, should they wish to follow the curriculum, are already disadvantaged due to the lack of connectivity in remote communities. Further, accessing professional development for educators on topics such as artificial intelligence and coding requires significant planning time and funding.
4. Students may become disengaged from their learning if they lack personally relevant content in their school's curriculum. With regard to science, Indigenous contributions to science and technology, both past and present, will have been removed. For some Indigenous students and their families, eliminating Indigenous content from courses may negatively affect student academic achievement and feelings of safety and community within provincial schools.
5. There will be a lack of connection to students' environment, their communities, and the land. There will be fewer opportunities to utilize local Knowledge Keepers in the classroom and Elders in land-based and cross-curricular approaches as teachers emphasize the new jobs- and trades-related content. In turn, it will fall upon parents, communities and First Nation education authorities to strengthen indigenous connections to the scientific world for their children and youth.
6. Indigenous history and culture will be taught in relation to social issues, while the current and future contributions of Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous ways of knowing and understanding will not be included in the curriculum. As a result, students will not be exposed to many ongoing contributions of Indigenous people involved in the science community and the impact that indigenous scientific knowledge and ways of knowing can have in the future. This includes programs such as *Prairie to Pharmacy*, which incorporates traditional knowledge of plants and their uses in the development of new pharmaceuticals, the [Aki Kikinomakaywin](#) program being offered through Lakehead University, and the collaborative project involving Weenusk First Nation and Lakehead University in a study of the impact of climate change in the Hudson Bay Lowlands, amongst others.
7. Teachers will not be required to include Indigenous content in the science curriculum and may not have the background or direction from the administration to include Indigenous content. As a result, elementary students of all backgrounds may not be exposed to Indigenous ways of learning and understanding scientific principles purposely ignoring recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

Further to a Matawa Chiefs Council [resolution](#) recently passed, Matawa Education is willing to work with the Ontario Ministry of Education and other First Nation education organizations to develop a framework that will ensure the ongoing incorporation of Indigenous content and ways of learning in all areas of the Ontario elementary and secondary curricula and will continue to work with Matawa First Nations' education leadership and provincial education leadership to minimize the impact of these changes on Matawa students and schools. The Matawa Chiefs Council also calls on Nishnawbe-Aski Nation and the Chiefs of Ontario to advocate in the best interest of its member First Nations by challenging the Ontario Ministry of Education's efforts in implementing the new Ontario elementary science curriculum for the 2022-2023 school year.

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