

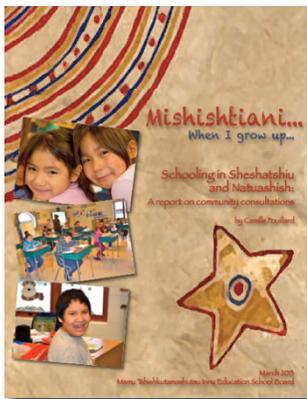


# Let's talk school!



Natuashish community forum

January 29, 2014



## A plan to help our kids succeed in school

The Mamu Tshishkutamashutau Innu Education School Board held a **Let's Talk School** community workshop in Natuashish on January 29th.

This forum was held to build on information gathered during a community consultation about education held in 2012-13. Elders, parents, students, school staff, Band and Innu Nation workers, and school board staff came together to review and discuss the results, to identify what was missing, and to vote on the most important issues and the best strategies to tackle these. About 60 people participated in the workshop. The information from the consultation report and this forum will be used by the school to develop a school success plan to help all Innu children in Natuashish get the education they need. We started the day by talking about what students said they like, disliked and wanted for their school.



*Cecilia and Philomena*

### Our Vision

Our dream is to have a safe and welcoming school that all children attend regularly. The children will learn about their language and culture as well as the provincial curriculum. Staff will be well trained and caring and many will be Innu. All students will graduate and pursue their dream. Many will learn trades to take over jobs in the community. Our children will be proud to be Innu and ready to take on self-government.

### Students' advice to parents:

Parents should support their kids, such as wake up calls every morning. Scold children that don't go to school, look at things from their perspective. Never repeat that child's mistakes because eventually that child will learn every kid is smart. Reward that child after school. Show happiness every time they go to school. Give them a ride to school. Be a role model.

**Angela Gregoire and Charlene Andrew**



# Language and culture

When asked about what should happen to help children learn more Innu-aimun and culture in school, people voted for these strategies: 1) train Innu and non-Innu staff in Innu language and culture, 2) field trips to nutshimit, 3) change the school calendar so students can go to nutshimit in the spring and fall, 4) set up an Innu curriculum centre, and 5) test students on Innu learnings.

In group discussions people shared other ideas about how to make sure the kids are learning more Innu culture and language, some that were discussed during the consultation and some new ones. What should happen in school? There was disagreement about the amount of Innu-aimun that should be taught, but many wanted more regular instruction every day at all levels. Some wanted to see Innu-aimun immersion in K to 3, and others wanted a credit course in the high school.

People said Innu culture should be incorporated in all classes. Specific ideas were put forward: history classes; Innu legends taught in English class; Innu social studies; elders' storytime and history classes; hunting practices and spiritual beliefs; Innu language word and number games; hands-on skills and craft classes; Innu humour to pass on the culture. To support this, people said there is a need for: certified Innu teachers; more Innu curriculum and resources; tests to evaluate Innu learning; as well as training to help teachers learn about the language and culture and how to adapt the existing curriculum. Elders and artists, as well as books, films and posters are valuable resources, and books and materials could be translated into Innu-aimun. Non-Innu teachers need to be involved in more cultural events and parents could get involved to teach them about Innu culture.

There was talk about how families need to take responsibility to teach culture and talk to their children in Innu-aimun all the time.

"Elders should tell legends to the students, showing the way of the Innu culture and how to hunt with respect for the animals."



"To learn about our culture, Innu kids need to experience what it is like living in the country back in the day... Have kids teaching the teachers Innu language and culture."

Kids in my family mostly learn about Innu culture from (pick your top answer):

1. an elder
2. nutshimit
3. home
4. school
5. books and films
6. internet
7. none of the above
8. all of the above
9. other



## School and nutshimit

People at the workshop talked about how the children need to learn about their culture by experiencing it in nutshimit. The school needs to organize more cultural fields trips, day trips and longer canoe and ski-doo trips. There was talk of changing the school calendar to allow whole families to go and giving students credit for spending time in nutshimit. Trips to nutshimit would allow teachers to learn about the Innu culture.

## Strengths and challenges

**What will help us strengthen our culture and language?** We still have elders and our Innu language. Many aspects of the traditional culture, like foods, stories and legends, hunting practices and spiritual beliefs still exist. **What challenges do we face in keeping the language and culture strong?** It is hard to live the Innu culture because in the old days there was no school.

## A safe and welcoming school

People had a number of ideas about how to make the school safe and welcoming and how to help everyone get along better, including: teaching kids how to love and respect each other and about boundaries, tolerance and how to work together; positive reinforcement; anti-bullying program; drugs and addictions (RCMP Dare) program; clear and consistent rules and discipline; hands off policy; don't kick kids out; consequences for good and bad behavior; all staff and students know safety and emergency policies; stop the gossiping; teach religion; strict hall monitors; regular classroom visits by the principal; ways for levels students to interact with younger children; and help for people to get the treatment they need. Some challenges discussed were the lack of communication and high staff turnover.

People had suggestions about ways to create school spirit: theme events like bad hair day, button day, twins, hats, backwards clothes, fun days, thumb buddy, spelling bees, awards days, student or athlete of the month; displays of kid's work; sleepovers at school; karaoke nights; and glee club.

Some suggestions had to do with how staff work together: the need for more team-building; and for a close and positive relationship between teachers and CAs

As well people said more communication between home and school and a better relationship with parents and the community would also improve the overall school climate.

*"The relationship and communication between CAs and teachers is key. It can cut down on the need for training of teachers and CAs. They can teach each other to better teach the children."*



## Attendance

Almost everyone at the workshop agreed that attendance – getting kids to go to and stay in school – is one of the most important issues facing the school and the community. Apart from children who miss a lot of school, there are 29 children who are not registered and never come to school. People at the workshop said the top reasons why children did not go to school were: 1) bullying, 2) lack of support from home, 3) drugs, drinking and sniffing, and 4) they don't understand English. When asked what were the top 3 ways to get and keep kids in school, participants said:

1. More Innu outings, and language and culture classes
2. More support and help from parents and guardians
3. Role models speaking to students
4. More extra-curricular activities like sports and drama

Other ideas to get and keep kids in school were: attendance policy; attendance awards; give kids a say in what happens in the school; make sure kids succeed; enthusiasm, support and encouragement; make courses challenging, relevant and interesting; have guest speakers like local graduates and other First nations people with successful careers talk to students; career sessions to set goals with the students; weekly allowance given on Fridays; cut down on internet so kids go to sleep early.

*"As a guardian I take and pick up my kids to school everyday I'm in town and when I'm away on business I let somebody like my son or daughter do it. And for the whole community there are other ways like having the school bus again."*





## Curriculum

Voting with their keypads, people said the biggest challenges to teaching and learning the provincial curriculum were: kids passing to the next grade when they fail; English is a second language; the Innu culture is not reflected in the programs; and not enough support for kids with FASD. When asked about the best ways to improve the quality of education, people voted for these strategies: better attendance and more focus on language skills. In group discussions, people said there was a need for more early childhood programs to help develop language skills in both English and Innu-aimun. Some said full Innu immersion from K to 3 would help build language skills. People also wanted more support for teaching English as a second language, access to experts and translators in every class, a mentoring program, and more interactive classes. Students need more responsibility and to be held accountable. Students said they want more options such as gym, art, music and crafts and to change the block system so that 2 courses are offered at the same time.

## School and community working together!

Almost everyone agreed that the school will only get better when the community is more involved. Parents and teachers need to get to know each other and work as a team. How to make this happen? People voted for these actions: 1) volunteer to teach Innu culture or help with breakfast program, drama or sports and 2) visit your kid's classroom. In group discussions people had these ideas: show you care about your kids' education and attend parent-teacher and school board meetings; invite teachers to community and cultural events; do fundraising for the school; have parent-teacher outings; invite elders and other community resources to help in the school; get involved in fishing and camping trip.

How can the school engage the community? People said the school could: organize meet and greet fun nights for parents and teachers; invite parents to family days, concerts, science fairs, teas and games, karaoke, spirit week activities, gym and sports activities; hold meetings for parents to find out what

## Follow-up to this workshop

Workshop participants had both good and bad feedback about the session. Most people thought the voting keypads were useful for this kind of session and most also enjoyed the small group discussions. However, only a little more than half thought all the important issues had been covered and less than half felt their voices and views had been heard. This forum and the consultation have gathered a lot of information to help the school and the community come together to plan for the future of Natuashish children, but the dialogue needs to continue. More forums like this one are needed. The process for developing the school success plans should provide opportunities for both school and community voices to come together and talk. Whether all these great ideas bear fruit will depend on everyone doing their part to help the children get the education they need.



their kid is learning and how to help them at home; unlock the front door; work with parents around bullying problems; meetings to get input from community and students into curriculum; teachers work with parents to develop education plans for students; bring in elders and parents to teach culture; elders helping kids; teachers learn more about the community and culture before coming; keep website up to date; community calendar; and more workshops like this one.

Some people said learning to talk to each other will help the community and school work together: listen, learn to care for each other, patience, respect and kindness.

*Our strengths? The kids have tons of potential, and we can use the resources we have available.*

