



Maskwacîs Education Schools Commission Executive Summary

Creating an education system that works for Maskwacîs

Introduction

Maskwacîs Education Schools Commission (MESC) was developed based on Maskwacîs Cree values and focused on the needs of students. Extensive consultation, research, planning and negotiations took place leading up to the inception of MESC.

MESC is owned & operated by Ermineskin Cree Nation, Louis Bull Tribe, Montana First Nation and Samson Cree Nation. MESC is the education authority for the Maskwacîs Cree. The MESC head office is located in Maskwacis 70 KM South of Edmonton, AB in the Treaty No. 6 Territory.

MESC offers Indigenized curriculum, by embedding Cree culture, language, and traditions into 11 Maskwacîs schools with emphasis on Wâhkôhtowin, Nehiyawewin, Nehiyaw Pimâtisôwin, and Îyinîw Mâmitonehickan. This document will summarize key factors that are unique to the establishment of MESC.

Background

For 129 years, residential schools were an attempt by the Government of Canada to assimilate First Nations people. There was a mission school in Maskwacis as early as 1894. Ermineskin Indian Residential School was one of the largest residential school in Canada and operated in Maskwacis from 1916 until 1975. From 1975 until 1990, the Canadian Government assumed the responsibility for running Ermineskin Schools.

MESC began as a collaboration between the education authorities in Maskwacîs. The purpose was to examine ways of improving student achievement. By focusing on students, we have been able to continually improve the quality of Cree education for children. The number of students going to school on reserve has increased significantly when local control of education began.

Spirit and Intent of the Treaty

Maskwacîs amalgamated 11 schools from 4 separate authorities to create the Maskwacîs Education Schools Commission (MESC). MESC believes the main step that Canada can take to uphold the spirit and intent of our Treaty right to education is properly funding schools controlled by First Nation communities. As Maskwacîs Cree, we determine how to best implement our Treaty right—and the best way to implement the Treaty right to education is to achieve a high degree of success within our Maskwacîs schools based on community priorities and Maskwacîs Cree beliefs.

Creating a Cree Education System

Prior to the amalgamation each Nation controlled their education authorities through a board or the Nation's Chief and Council. The following are events of significance leading up to the amalgamation:

- 2013-2014- Developed MESC strategic plan
- January-June 2015- Developed MESC action plan
- May 2015- MESC was directed by the Maskwacis Cree Chiefs and Councils to research the development of a single education system
- February 2016- MESC is incorporated Federally to be eligible to receive funding
- June 2016-Maskwacis Cree Chief and Councils sign letter of intent with the Government of Alberta
- November 2017- Maskwacis Chiefs and Councils delegated MESC to manage the 11 Maskwacis schools
- November 2017- The Maskwacis Chiefs signed the Maskwacis Cree Declaration on Education.
- March 2018- The Maskwacis Chiefs signed the Maskwacis Education Schools Commission Resource and Development Agreement with Canada's Ministry of Indigenous Services.
- April 2018- The Maskwacis Leadership passed the Maskwacis Education Law.
- June 2018- The Maskwacis Chiefs signed the Maskwacis Cree - Government of Alberta Framework Agreement.
- July 2018- MESC formally assumes responsibilities for all 11 schools in Maskwacis.
- September 2018- Inaugural school year- 2150 students enrolled in MESC schools

Wâhkôhtowin Governance Model

MESC has created a governance system based on the Cree value of Wâhkôhtowin. The MESC board is required by law to consult with and report to key stakeholders; Leadership Circle (Maskwacis Chiefs and Councils), Circle of Elders, School Parent Advisory Committees & the Student Leadership Program.

Maskwacis Schools

Ehpewapahk Alternate School (Ermineskin Cree Nation)
Ermineskin Kindergarten (Ermineskin Cree Nation)
Ermineskin Elementary School (Ermineskin Cree Nation)
Ermineskin Jr/Sr High School (Ermineskin Cree Nation)
Grace Marie Swampy Memorial Primary School (Samson Cree Nation)
Kisipatnahk School (Louis Bull Tribe)
Maskwacis Outreach (4 Nations)
Meskanahk Kanipawit School (Montana First Nation)
Mimiw Sakahikan School (Samson Cree Nation)
Nipisihkopahk Elementary School (Samson Cree Nation)
Nipisihkopahk Secondary School (Samson Cree Nation)
Louis Bull, Ermineskin and Pigeon Lake Head Start Programs

Key Documents- Building the foundation for the future of Maskwacis Education

MESC had engaged three levels of government to create a unified Maskwacis education system; locally, Federally and Provincially. The following documents were instrumental in the development of MESC.

1) Highlights of the MESC Resource & Development Agreement

- Cree culture, language and Treaty rights recognition and protection
 - Non-derogation clause
 - Nation-to-Nation relationship
 - Cree is the language of instruction
 - Commitment to implement UNDRIP and TRC
 - Cree values legally recognized
 - Recognition of Maskwacis Education Law
 - Reporting based on Maskwacis performance measures and audit
 - Maskwacis Cree Declaration on Education included in Agreement
- Maskwacis Funding Model Features
 - Transfer payment directly to MESC
 - Developed using the Alberta and British Columbia funding manuals
 - 10 year core funding agreement (no proposal driven funding)
 - Ability to carry forward any surplus and create reserve funds
 - Clause to protect against funding decreases
 - Full funding for ages 4-21
 - \$2,400 enhancement/student (Cree programming)
 - Standardized pension and benefit contributions factor
 - 10 year transition plan funding
- Management of Education Service Agreements with Provincial Schools
 - Funding is based on provincial funding manual
 - 5% admin fee and an additional \$500/student
- Additional Features
 - Band support funding secured for each Nation
- Future discussions clause
 - Statutory protection and legislation
 - Post Secondary student funding
 - Student transportation
 - Capital and infrastructure funding
 - Early Childhood (head start)

2) Highlights of the Maskwacis Cree-Government of Alberta Framework Agreement

- Non-derogation clause
- Alberta's commitment to acts of reconciliation
- Commitment to implement UNDRIP and TRC
- \$500,000 establishment grant
- \$2,000 per pupil enhancement grant annually
- Explore opportunities for further commitments
 - Facilitate new partnerships
 - Maskwacis Composite High School
- 10 year agreement

3) Maskwacis Education Law

The Maskwacis Education Law establishes the Maskwacis Cree Education System and governance structure. The law was passed on April 26, 2018. Property, business and operation of the authority will be managed through regular meetings of the Board of Governors. The Maskwacis Education Law sets out the;

- Purpose of MESC
- Board of Governors selection process
- Board of Governors qualifications
- composition of the Board of Governors
- obligations and responsibilities of the Board of Governors
- powers and removal of the Board of Governors
- Circle of Elders
- Members at large
- Parent Advisory Circle
- accountability to the Maskwacis Chiefs and Councils
- roles and responsibilities of the Board Officers, Superintendent (CEO), Senior Financial Officer
- official language of instruction, Cree
- inherent right to operate schools founded on Cree culture and beliefs
- Nehiyaw teaching methods and perspectives relevant to Maskwacis will be included in all aspects of the education system
- dispute resolution

4) Maskwacis Declaration on Education

Maskwacis Declaration on Education is our understandings, beliefs and values about education - and a guide for the Maskwacis Cree School System. The Maskwacis Declaration on Education was collectively created and reviewed by citizens of the Maskwacis Cree in the winter and spring of 2017. The process was led by the Maskwacis Education Schools Commission, reviewed by a panel of Elders, recommended by the MESC Board and approved by a Maskwacis Cree motion on June 13, 2017. The Declaration was formally signed by the Maskwacis Chiefs on November 29, 2017. It has been translated into Cree and written Syllabics by a committee of Maskwacis Elders.

Financials

The Maskwacis Funding model is a 10-year funding agreement directly between MESC and Indigenous Services Department (ISD). Currently, the funding received for 2018-2019 is based on the 2017-2018 student enrollment of 2147 students which provides a total of \$54.5M to MESC to support on reserve school operations and public and private tuition and ancillary payments for students who reside on reserve attending off reserve schools. In addition to ISD funds, MESC also receives Provincial enhanced funds of \$2000/student for a total of \$4.3M which is also based on the 2017-2018 nominal roll.

MESC Annual funding summary:

MESC total Federal and Provincial Funds:	\$65.6M
Transportation:	(\$3.3M)
Public/Private Tuition:	(\$13.8M)
Provincial Grants:	(\$1.8M)
Transition Planning Grant:	<u>(\$5M)</u>
Total MESC operational funds:	\$41.7M

In summary, MESC receives \$41.7M for the district annual operations which averages to **\$19,400**/student based on the nominal roll from 2017-18 of 2147 students for 2018-2019 school year.

Conclusion

Creating a community Wahkohtowin movement that told a story of unity focused on children.

Many factors were paramount in the development of MESC:

- engagement with Nation members and Elders
- Maskwacis Chiefs and Councils
- the spirit and intent of the Treaty
- MESC transition Board
- the negotiation team
- work of research consultants
- local leadership capacity
- key documents
- MESC Board of Governors
- continued dedication of teachers, instructors, support staff and administration

Maskwacis Education School's Commission first day of school commenced September 4, 2018. 2175 students are currently enrolled in 11 MESC schools.