

SUMMARY

Kwayaciiwin Education Resource Centre has grown from its original mandate in 2002 into a stable, respected education service to district First Nations schools. It has the ability to widen its scope to better assist schools and communities to improve their students' success, but lacks the resources and authority.

The Grassroots Exploratory Process, initiated with the support of district Chiefs, successfully reached its goal of widely sharing information on possible new directions in education, and gathering input from communities. The organization received clear, yet cautious support from the grassroots to strengthen second level education services by evolving into a Regional Education Organization and eventually a District Education Authority.

Over a period of six months, the consultation process reached at least 1,500 on-reserve community members, with the endorsement of 145 First Nations. Presentations and materials in Oji-Cree gave people a full picture of the current education system and possible future directions. More importantly, this was a rare opportunity for First Nations parents and community members to have their views on education documented. Extensive, valuable information was gathered that can be used to guide the way for strengthening second level services and creating a possible third level of authority.

Family, leaders, educators and Elders want their children to succeed in life and recognize the value of a good quality education, grounded in their culture and language as part of that success.

Most people agree that the current state of First Nations' education in the district is lacking in many ways. Their students lag behind academically, often facing weighty challenges at home, at school and in the community. Parents and community members lack knowledge and confidence in how their education system works. Leaders grapple with how to keep schools operating with limited resources. And educators make do with what is given to them to assist students' every day learning.

Everyone agrees changes for the better are needed.

People want change but are wary about whether new structures will turn out to benefit their children and communities. There are understandable concerns about how a District Education Authority might affect their ability at the local level to guide their children's education.

Nonetheless, there is support for Kwayaciiwin to move ahead with its proposals, at the direction of the district Chiefs and in partnership with tribal councils and other organizations.

Over and over again the message from communities was for Kwayaciiwin, the tribal councils and Chiefs to work together as leaders, to focus on helping children succeed. *"Make what is better for all of us"*, as it was put by one participant, echoing many voices across the district.

Now that the door has been opened to so many community people by inviting them into the Exploration Process, it is clear that they want to keep it open, to be more informed and involved in the future of First Nations education.