

**Head Office**

Swan Lake First Nation 200-200 Alpine Way, Headingley, Manitoba R4H 0B7

---

**Winnipeg Sub-Office**

1572 Dublin Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3E 0L4

Phone: 204.946.1869 Fax: 204.946.1871 Toll Free: 1.866.876.9701

[www.scoinc.mb.ca](http://www.scoinc.mb.ca) Facebook: @SCOIncMB



## **SCO CONCERNED BY PROPOSED LEGISLATION, Bill 64, AND THE '*BETTER EDUCATION STARTS TODAY*' STRATEGY**

### **Risk of First Nation Students Being Further Left Behind – Grand Chief**

**March 15, 2021**

**ANISHINAABE AND DAKOTA TERRITORY, MB** — The Southern Chiefs' Organization (SCO) is concerned by the proposed legislation, Bill 64, released today by the province. The proposed changes to Manitoba's education system could have a disproportionately negative impact for low-income and rural communities, which would further impact First Nation students within the provincial system. Bill 64 also does not address systemic issues that First Nation students face every day, including child poverty, high racialized suspension rates, and a graduation rate that is just over 50 per cent.

It is estimated by the Centre for the Study of Living Standards that Canada could add more than \$71 billion to the economy if Indigenous people have the opportunity to attain the same educational levels as all other Canadians. Manitoba with a disproportionately high First Nation population would see its own economy grow by closing the education gaps for First Nations.

"There's nothing more important than our children and youth, and whenever there's anything announced that will affect them, it's a top concern for the southern Chiefs," explained Grand Chief Jerry Daniels. "Already, First Nation students face more barriers than other students due to entrenched poverty and systemic racism. With the proposed changes to reduce the number of school divisions and to replace democratically elected school boards with a politicised advisory council, we are concerned about less local control and accountability making a poor education system even worse."

Today, the province announced plans to bring 37 English-language school divisions under one Provincial Education Authority, which will be separated into 15 regions. Some regions bring together communities that are located many hours away, meaning an increased risk of disconnection and a lack of accountability. The province also plans to replace 300 elected school board trustees with community school councils and a province-wide advisory board, promoted as a cost saving measure.

**Head Office**

Swan Lake First Nation 200-200 Alpine Way, Headingley, Manitoba R4H 0B7

---

**Winnipeg Sub-Office**

1572 Dublin Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3E 0L4

Phone: 204.946.1869 Fax: 204.946.1871 Toll Free: 1.866.876.9701

[www.scoinc.mb.ca](http://www.scoinc.mb.ca) Facebook: @SCOIncMB

Specific school divisions and neighbourhoods often have specialized needs, which may be overlooked by the move to focus a province-wide advisory board. This move could decrease adequate representation, limit access for parents, and also further centralize and politicize the decision-making process within the education system. When asked about First Nation representation, Minister Cullen indicated that he would need to “look at the skillset required at that level in terms of authority”, seeming to indicate that First Nation educators do not have the requisite knowledge.

First Nation students already face a lack of representation when it comes to teaching staff, who are mostly non-First Nation in Manitoba’s education system. A Council of Ministers of Education Report found having Indigenous teachers in the classroom reduces teacher bias in assessment and student’s perceptions of bias. Despite this being an issue of top concern for First Nation parents, it has been overlooked by the province repeatedly.

“The minister repeatedly mentioned how broad the public consultation was for this proposed legislation, yet where was the outreach to our communities, our people, our education experts? We know what is needed to help improve education outcomes, including increasing cultural safety and transitioning to a holistic approach that focuses on the whole student. None of this is reflected in their proposed legislation,” stated Grand Chief Daniels.

Education is critical for improving an individual’s opportunities in life, especially for employment options but also to improve health and quality of life. Education is also important for whole communities, helping create lasting, positive change. The provincial average rate of graduation for non-Indigenous students is nearly 90 per cent - yet it is barely more than 50 per cent for Indigenous students in Manitoba.

“None of the pressing issues that First Nation students face every day, from increased experiences of poverty, to higher chances of being suspended or dropping out compared to non-First Nation students, to almost no representation in the classroom, were properly addressed by the province’s response to the educational review,” concluded Grand Chief Daniels. “They’ve had more than two years to work on this report and legislation, yet little has been offered beyond non-specific promises of Indigenous Inclusion strategies and other superficial changes that we have heard for years.”

-30-

*The Southern Chiefs’ Organization represents 34 First Nations and more than 80,000 citizens in what is now called southern Manitoba. SCO is an independent political organization that protects, preserves, promotes, and enhances First Nations peoples’ inherent rights, languages, customs, and traditions through the application and implementation of the spirit and intent of the Treaty-making process.*

**Head Office**

Swan Lake First Nation 200-200 Alpine Way, Headingley, Manitoba R4H 0B7

---

**Winnipeg Sub-Office**

1572 Dublin Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba R3E 0L4

Phone: 204.946.1869 Fax: 204.946.1871 Toll Free: 1.866.876.9701

[www.scoinc.mb.ca](http://www.scoinc.mb.ca) Facebook: @SCOIncMB

**For Media Inquiries:**

**Caitlin Reid**, Manager of Communications, Southern Chiefs' Organization

(204) 557-2399 | Email: [Media@scoinc.mb.ca](mailto:Media@scoinc.mb.ca)

[www.scoinc.mb.ca](http://www.scoinc.mb.ca)