

Rupertsland Institute

**Métis Education in
Alberta**

K-12 Policy Discussion Paper

2015

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Research, Policy and Strategic Partnerships

Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Background	3
Recommendations	8
Recommendation 1: Métis Education Council	9
a. Métis Education Council: Mandate	10
b. Constituting the Métis Education Council	11
Recommendation 2: Métis Academy (K-12)	12
a. Charter school application process: Major tasks and considerations	12
b. University partnerships	13
c. Métis Academy: In conclusion	14
Recommendation 3: Métis Scholar Enrichment Program	16
Recommendation 4: Métis wiki space	19
Implementation	20
a. Government of Alberta	20
b. University of Alberta and University of Calgary	21
c. Edmonton Public School Board	21
Conclusion	22
References	23
Appendix 1: Alberta Charter School Application Procedure	31
a) Preliminary Application	31
b) Preliminary Application: Feasibility Study	31
c) Preliminary Application: Community Consultations	32
d) Preliminary Application: Correspondence with Local School Board	33
e) Application Procedure: Final Application	33
f) Application Procedure: Commencement of the Charter School	35

Introduction

Rupertsland Institute (RLI) was granted a full mandate on Métis Education in 2012 by the Métis Nation of Alberta (MNA). As an arms-length institute affiliated with the MNA, Rupertsland is ideally positioned to effect widespread positive change for Métis students in Alberta. In the realm of post-secondary education, RLI has made significant progress, notably the establishment of the Rupertsland Centre for Métis Research (RCMR), a world-class Métis-specific academic research centre at the University of Alberta, and the administration of the post-secondary endowment program for Métis students studying in Alberta. The endowment program is housed under the Métis Education Foundation (MEF) of the MNA and is largely funded through the federal ASETS (Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy) program.

Progress in the realm of K-12 education has not been as encouraging.

In 2012, RLI's Associate Director of Métis Education and Advancement began developing Alberta's first comprehensive policy on Métis education in the kindergarten to grade 12 (K-12) realm. A series of 13 community meetings were held across Alberta during 2012-2013 to begin a dialogue on the needs of the Métis community within the realm of education. However, provincial government funding of \$75,000 dedicated to this segment of the education program was cut 100% in June of 2013, leaving RLI without an established education policy, no personnel, and effectively no capacity to contribute to the K-12 education of Métis students in Alberta. While articulating a comprehensive, long-term policy for Métis education is a complex challenge requiring a full complement of educated and skilled staff, RLI has a responsibility to move forward on the Métis Education agenda without any dedicated resources.

The present document articulates four specific initiatives to be undertaken concurrently (or consecutively if the availability of human resources necessitates), each requiring a different implementation timeline:

- a Métis Education Council of Alberta (MEC)
- a Métis Academy (public charter school) in Edmonton
- alternative educational programming for Métis learners
- a wiki space for information sharing on Métis education and other Métis subjects

We propose that the present document serve as a five-year strategic plan on Métis K-12 Education in Alberta, providing the foundation for RLI's Education policy. We further suggest that the plan be implemented, in part, via the: 1) Government of Alberta-Métis Nation of Alberta (Alberta-MNA) Framework Agreement's Annual Operating Plan, 2) RLI's Annual Operating Plan, and, 3) through an RLI-GOA (Government of Alberta) Memorandum of Understanding that, among other items, includes the prioritization of the following education initiatives:

- the establishment and continued funding of the proposed MEC;
- a commitment to work with RLI on the establishment of a Métis Academy; and
- an agreement to work with RLI to establish alternative educational programming, such as an after school initiative designed to support Métis students.

We also propose that RLI enters into specific agreements with the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta to support the Métis Academy initiative. The support of higher learning institutions is a necessary component of the charter school application. In addition, these partnerships would provide assurance for ongoing development of the Academy's programming and would be beneficial to the future development of RCMR academic projects.

Background

The Government of Alberta, Ministry of Education prides itself on inclusion; success for “all students” is a phrase consistently found in their official documents.¹ Métis students in Alberta, however, continue to face many chronic challenges that contribute to underachievement in learning outcomes. Few of these challenges are being systematically addressed and the persistent, arguably self-perpetuating, “achievement gap” is well documented in official sources as well as in independent scholarship (*Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, 1996; Métis National Council, 2004; Gunn & Pomahac, 2009; Alberta School Boards Association, 2011; Statistics Canada, 2011b; Alberta Education 2011b, 2012c, 2014; Pelletier, Cottrell, & Hardie, 2013; Anaya, 2014; Howe, 2014). It is clear that public education in Alberta is not meeting the needs of individual Métis students despite a seeming wealth of resources. It bears repeating that the imperative in protecting and supporting the national identity, in addition to the socioeconomic and psychophysical well-being, of Métis people through public education is a constitutional responsibility (*Constitution Act*, 1982, s. 35; United Nations, 2007; *Canada v. Daniels*, 2013).

Government officials, from municipal through to federal levels, tend to attribute the persistent education gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learners to socioeconomic factors and the intergenerational impact of residential schooling (Anaya, 2014).² Research from within the Métis community that addresses educational achievement for Métis students, albeit limited in quantity, suggests the lack of Métis perspective on levels of curriculum, pedagogy, and staffing as a major contributing factor (Kathy Hodgson-Smith Infinity Research Inc., 2005; Anuik & Bellehumeur-Kearns, 2012; Athena McKenzie Consulting, 2013; see also Cherubini & Hodson, 2008). Current practices are not consistent with the epistemological perspectives of Métis children and youth, and many Métis students have difficulty identifying with the mainstream perspectives that are expressed as normative in their classrooms. Together these factors can lead to an alienating

¹ The Preamble to the *Education Act* states “education is a shared responsibility and requires collaboration, engagement and empowerment of all partners in the education system to ensure that all students achieve their potential” (Alberta, Statutes, 2012, p. 10). The Ministerial Order on Student Learning opens “the fundamental goal of education in Alberta is to inspire all students to achieve success and fulfillment, and reach their full potential” (Alberta Education, 2013c). Furthermore, the second itemized goal of the Government of Alberta’s current business plan, “Success for every student,” explicitly forefronts FNMI interests, indicating that “the outcomes for Goal Two are that students achieve Alberta’s student learning outcomes and demonstrate citizenship, entrepreneurship and proficiency in literacy and numeracy and that the gap between First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) students and all other students is eliminated” (Alberta Education, 2014, p. 25).

² In a recent meeting on FNMI education, the Calgary Board of Education similarly intimated that underlying poverty issues may be preclusive to Aboriginal student success, handing out pamphlets on poverty reduction and social policy (Briggs & Lee, 2012; Alberta Human Services, 2013). On the history and impact of Métis residential school participation, see Chartrand, Logan, and Daniels, 2006.

learning environment, as was clearly demonstrated in the crisis that affected the Northland School Division.³

Adequate and authentic representation in mandated curricula and systemic educational practice is the responsibility of the Government of Alberta and, when achieved, will be to *the benefit of all Albertans*. These disparities do not affect only Aboriginal students; the integrity of the entire citizenship is implicated in the systemic denial of Aboriginal perspectives. Learning *from* Aboriginal, including Métis, philosophies and practices, in addition to learning *about* the history of colonialism and the historical encounters between various Aboriginal groups with non-Aboriginal governments will benefit all citizens.⁴

The educational challenges outlined above have implications in most, if not all, of the provincial and territorial jurisdictions across Canada. Notably Canada as a country has come under increased international scrutiny in recent years for its retrogressive positions regarding the rights of Indigenous peoples. Witness the United Nations Special Rapporteur Anaya's recent evaluation that "it is difficult to reconcile Canada's well-developed legal framework and general prosperity with the human rights problems faced by Indigenous peoples in Canada that have reached crisis proportions" (Anaya, 2014). This observation speaks directly to significant human development indicator gaps in the education sector, among others. But even within Canada, it appears that Alberta is behind other provinces in terms of Métis-specific educational policy and programming (Poitras Pratt, Andersen, Contreras, & Dokis-Jansen, 2013). One is left wondering how much has really changed since the damning "Ghitter report"—whose Section V: Native Education opens emphatically with the statement "the general state of Native education in Alberta is deplorable"—illuminated the complexities of racism and intolerance in Alberta public schools (*Committee on Tolerance and Understanding*, 1984). In his keynote address at an Alberta Teachers' Association symposium in 2001, Ron Ghitter asserts that things have only worsened: "when I ask whether or not 16 years later the situation in Alberta is better or worse in the area of tolerance and understanding, I sadly respond, unquestionably worse" (Ghitter, 2001).

The Métis voice is not adequately represented at the provincial level in Alberta today—a simple fact that is equally true of Education as of the other Ministries. The unique needs of this

³ The Northland School Division (NSD) is a particularly poignant case. The NSD student body is over 95% Métis and First Nations. In 2010, the provincial minister of education was forced to dismiss the trustees and order an inquiry as the school dropout rate had reached catastrophic proportions. According to the NSD Inquiry Team Report, "in 2009 there were only 34.6 per cent [of NSD students] who achieved an acceptable standard. . . For the same year, three-year high school completion rates for NSD were only 19.4 per cent (in 2004, they were 24.3 per cent), while for the province as a whole they were 70.7 per cent" (Alberta Education, 2010d, pp. 26-27).

⁴ In 2008, John Ralston Saul compellingly and compassionately argued that a reconciliation of these worldviews—perennially conceived as "disparate"—is fundamental to the integrity of Canadian identity. Saul understands Canada as a "métis civilization," insisting that for Canadians to continue to deny the (small "m") métis nature of our national identity "is to embrace existential illiteracy" (Saul, 2008, p. xv).

“voiceless” and vulnerable population are not being considered or addressed through Government of Alberta education policy. Those promising initiatives that do exist for Alberta’s Aboriginal students are almost exclusively First Nations-centered.⁵ As Poitras Pratt, Andersen, Contreras, and Dokis-Jansen (2013) conclude in their nationally-funded Knowledge Synthesis report, “it is a First Nations policy world” (see also *RCAP* 1996; Kathy Hodgson-Smith Infinity Research Inc., 2005; Alberta Education, 2010b). In terms of K-12 education, the 2002 First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework (Alberta Education) itemizes a number of estimable “First Nations, Métis and Inuit” goals and strategies that are inclusive of students of diverse Aboriginal communities but without specifying the unique needs or circumstances of any. Athena McKenzie reports, in a 2013 overview of the 2002 Framework and its implementation, that outcome data is “severely lacking” in terms of Métis education (p. 49) and that the aggregation of virtually all available data into a single pan-Aboriginal category is a barrier to understanding and meeting the needs of Métis students.⁶

In 2010, a tripartite Memorandum of Understanding for First Nations education in Alberta between treaty, provincial, and federal governments was signed (Alberta Education, 2010b).⁷ No such document exists for Métis Education in Alberta. The First Nations MOU proposes an Indigenous Knowledge and Wisdom Centre (IKWC) “that is focused on improving the educational outcomes of First Nation students in a culturally appropriate and responsive education environment” (p. 4). As it stands, it appears that this IKWC will not address Métis knowledge or learning needs. Compared to the Canadian Council on Learning’s efforts around Aboriginal education that deliberately concentrated on First Nations, Métis, and Inuit learning needs, this is a highly exclusive approach (Canadian Council on Learning, 2009). Finally, the Alberta *Education Act* that was passed in 2012 includes a controversial provision that allows for the appointment of First Nations school board trustees in select communities (Alberta, Statutes,

⁵ A recent progress report addressing the labour force and economic development sectors indeed reveals such a First Nations centrality. *Connecting the dots: Progress highlights* (Alberta Jobs, Skills, Training and Labour, 2013) addresses nine identified strategic priorities and features twenty-three examples identified as “snapshots of change highlighting how things are being done differently” since 2011 (p. 2). Eight out of twenty-three initiatives are exclusively First Nations and one is specific to the Métis Settlements (which represent approximately 6% of the total Métis population in Alberta; Statistics Canada, 2011a). The MNA is nominally mentioned in a number of the more inclusive initiatives, but it is remarkable that there is only specific mention of two off-settlement Métis in the twenty-four page document.

⁶ The Aboriginal Learner Data Collection Initiative, an Alberta Education policy through FNMI services, indicates that “results shall only be reported on an aggregate basis.” See: <https://education.alberta.ca/admin/fnmi/fnmireports/datacollection/faq.aspx>. On the need for disaggregated data for FNMI learners, see Canada, Council of Ministers of Education, 2011.

⁷ It should be noted how critical multilateral relationships and widespread collaboration are in realizing such a province-wide vision. The Alberta Education website indicates that “over 100 representatives participated on eight all-party sub-tables that were created in 2011-2012 to identify options and make recommendations to the MOU working group to inform the development of the MOU Long Term Strategic Action Plan” (see “Background and Key Contacts,” <http://education.alberta.ca/admin/fnmi/partnering/mou.aspx>).

2012), once again suggesting a hierarchical and restricted approach to Aboriginal rights in a province that holds one of the highest populations of Métis across the nation.

Even a cursory search of Alberta Education literature reveals an accumulation of documents that address the education needs of Alberta's FNMI students. These documents support the many affirmations that FNMI education is a priority for the Ministry, and many thoughtful considerations are outlined. Alberta Education clearly recognizes the need to consult with Aboriginal communities, to improve learner success for FNMI students, to increase parental involvement, to strengthen relationships among key stakeholders, and to foster a greater understanding of FNMI culture and wisdom, among other identified goals (see, for example, Alberta Education, 2002). Several promising initiatives have taken place since the Framework was released in 2002. These include a mandate to incorporate Aboriginal perspectives in the 2005 Social Studies Programs of Studies, the development of Aboriginal Studies 10-20-30 program, and the *Walking Together* teacher resource. However, significant challenges in implementation persist and a lack of data addressing achievement outcomes, and any disaggregated data on Métis students in particular, makes it very difficult to determine the degree to which the benefits of the Framework are reaching the students. A number of academic studies clearly indicate that teachers continue to require education, resources, and support in order to properly meet the unique needs of FNMI students and, in particular, to appropriately incorporate "Aboriginal perspectives" as required by the curriculum (Peden, 2011, 2013; Phillips, 2011; Scott, 2013). It should be noted that none of the province-wide initiatives directly address Métis-specific interests.⁸ It is here that Alberta would be well advised to look at best practice models for targeted teacher recruitment programming such as those of SUNTEP within the province of Saskatchewan. This program attracts and trains Métis individuals to become future teachers and holds a strong record of success in "training our own" (Poitras Pratt, Andersen, Contreras, & Dokis-Jansen, 2013).

We have heard multiple times since the famous Ghitter report of 1984, that "it is time for action, not for yet another study" (*Committee on Tolerance and Understanding*, 1984, p. 116). We agree, action is well overdue. But effective, sustainable, and meaningful change *will* also require more research—studies clearly focused on the implementation of new, impactful, positive practices. The fact of the matter is that Métis-specific studies addressing promising practices and challenges in Alberta's education system do not exist. Neither do outcomes that are satisfactorily measured or reported. The most effective channels through which teachers could better support the unique needs of Métis learners' also requires further investigation.

⁸ Alberta's Aboriginal Studies program (Aboriginal Studies 10-20-30) does differentiate Métis from other Aboriginal cultures, and provides praiseworthy curricula and resources for students who are engaged in these high school courses. The major concerns with this program is that very few schools actually offer it (Athena McKenzie Consulting, 2013).

Other provinces across the Métis homeland have had similar challenges and our neighbours offer a number of exemplary initiatives that could effectively help Alberta achieve equity and excellence. The Gabriel Dumont Institute of Native Studies and Applied Research (GDI; founded 1980), for instance, is the official education arm of the Métis Nation of Saskatchewan and is widely regarded as a best practice for the multi-level programming it offers to Métis learners in Saskatchewan.⁹ The Louis Riel Institute, a legislated affiliate of the Manitoba Métis Federation, must also be recognized for its comprehensive agenda and ongoing commitment to Métis education in Manitoba. In terms of breadth and depth of province-wide programming, the Government of Ontario can well be cited as a best practice in Métis education. Several years of concerted action on FNMI policy framework and consistent movement towards province-wide initiatives including communication channels for effective and ongoing knowledge exchange can now be reviewed. The Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) produced its Métis Education Action Plan in 2008, which outlines the goals and objectives of its comprehensive education agenda. In 2009 an MOU on Métis education was signed between the Métis Nation of Ontario and the provincial government. In 2010, the University of Ottawa made history by appointing Dr. Brenda Macdougall as the first ever Chair in Métis Research. The MNO has contracted a number of independent studies on Métis K-12 education in Ontario (MNO, 2011; Anuik & Bellehumeur-Kearns, 2012; Dion, 2012). Among which, Dr. Anuik and Bellehumeur-Kearns's (2012) comprehensive study on the state of Métis education in Ontario is the first environmental scan of provincial strategies addressing Métis K-12 learners. In the article, numerous school board-level advisory councils in Ontario actively addressing Métis interests are reported.¹⁰ As further evidence of provincial support of Métis students, the team supporting Métis learners in K-12 currently receives \$300,000 in provincial funding per year from the Government of Ontario.¹¹ With the exception of RLI, which as noted above has had all provincial funding revoked for its education program, no concordances exist in Alberta for any of these initiatives.

Alberta must improve. The official documents claim a commitment to self-actualization for *all* students and indicate specifically that Alberta strives to be “a provincial leader in Aboriginal education” (Alberta Education, 2002, p. 9). It is time for this vision, an inclusive vision, to be realized. In a province that is home to the highest Métis population across the nation (Statistics Canada, 2011a), there is an opportunity to take a leadership role in Métis education and truly achieve its laudable goal of excellence for all Alberta students. We must no longer settle for

⁹ GDI delivers a range of successful and impactful programs and services, including the SUNTEP program (Saskatchewan Urban Native Teacher Education Program) and the GDI Publishing Department dedicated to Métis-specific resources, and has sustained an effective partnership with the Saskatchewan government for over thirty years. See also Préfontaine, 2014.

¹⁰ Anuik and Bellehumeur-Kearns also indicate that the Rainy River District School Board has distributed copies of *Seven Sacred Teachings* by Métis author David Bouchard to all students, to be used for character education throughout the school board (2012).

¹¹ This figure was disclosed by MNO senior officials, who report another \$300,000 in targeted provincial funding for Métis post-secondary in Ontario.

patchwork attempts to meet perceived fundamental “deficiencies” but insist on excellence and sustainable equity.

Recommendations

We are recommending a multi-tiered plan that endeavours to build ethical alliances, to provide holistic and sustainable solutions to chronic challenges facing Métis K-12 students, and to strengthen community identity and well-being. Networks of cooperative relationships are foundational to each stage of the plan. The recommendations are to be implemented by means of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Alberta Ministry of Education and the MNA:

- 1) a Métis Education Council of Alberta to advise RLI on the best process for identifying Métis education needs through systematic and academic research undertaken through a collaborative community approach in tandem with information dissemination on Métis K-12 education and initiatives throughout the province;
- 2) a Métis Academy in Edmonton, to provide culturally appropriate delivery of Alberta curriculum as per the Alberta Charter Schools Regulation (Alberta, Regulations, 2012);
- 3) alternative educational programming for Métis students, including after school initiatives and academic upgrading; implementation of a pilot project with a framework for extension to targeted provincial locations; and
- 4) the development and moderation of a Métis wiki space that is collaboratively edited, widely accessible, and freely available for the sharing of information about all subjects related to Métis education, culture, and history.

The recommendations put forward in this paper have all been conceived to be inclusive of adult learners engaged in upgrading or General Educational Development.

Recommendation 1: Métis Education Council

Foundational to any educational initiative must be a consultative body that accurately and consistently provides a voice for community needs and that will uphold the confidence and the best interests of the targeted learners and their communities. The Métis Education Council of Alberta will advise RLI on educational matters relevant to the Alberta Métis community, including, but not limited to the following: the identification of a best process for identifying Métis education needs through systematic and academic research undertaken through a collaborative community approach; dissemination of information relevant to Métis K-12 education and initiatives throughout the province; along with other education matters as identified by Métis community members across Alberta. It is thus our position that educational supports for K-12 Métis learners, including those programs outlined below, can be successful only to the degree in which the integrity of a province-wide Métis Education Council (MEC) is sustained. It will in collaboration with this MEC that actions will be taken to address the extensive, and as yet poorly understood, barriers facing Métis learners in K-12 in Alberta.

The Crown, in Right of the Province of Alberta as represented by the Minister of Education, has a fiduciary duty to consult with Métis people, as one of the three Aboriginal peoples of Canada recognized by the *1982 Constitution Act* (s. 35), on matters of K-12 Education. Métis representation at policy discussions is currently very limited, and almost invariably takes the form of a single individual or unofficial consultations, as opposed to an authorized and consistent institutional input. This lack of representation is reflected in the routine conflation of Métis-specific interests into the umbrella category of “self-identified First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) students” in virtually all Alberta Education official policy and grey literature. Also of note is the absence of Métis representation in community engagement initiatives as evidenced in the annual “Speak Out—the Alberta Student Engagement Initiative” reports (Alberta Education 2009b, 2010c, 2011c, 2012a, & 2013d).¹² Indeed, without an authoritative advisory council in place to provide accurate and ongoing voice to Métis learner needs, the Ministry of Education will at best be reliant on a dissociated picture amassed through random correspondences between individual community stakeholders and Government of Alberta representatives. Advisory correspondence must occur through legitimate Métis governance and on a regular basis.

We feel it is imperative that Rupertsland Institute take immediate action to oversee the implementation of a provincial MEC.¹³ The expedition of this process could be argued in view of

¹² With one exception, Métis needs are in fact not addressed at all in the numerous documents that can be retrieved from www.speakout.alberta.ca. In April 2012 a conference session for teachers provided a “tour” of the then recently-launched Alberta Education digital resource *Walking together: First Nations, Métis and Inuit perspectives in curriculum* (2012c). It appears that the session did not examine the barriers facing contemporary Métis learners, but rather promoted the teaching resource aimed to help educators overcome a deficit model approach to FNMI students and to develop a greater understanding of “Aboriginal world-views.”

¹³ The call for a centralizing body is not new. In a seminal policy paper, the National Indian Brotherhood/Assembly of First Nations (1972) repeatedly calls for a Band Education Authority to be in dialogue with the provincial

the Premier's recent announcement of the creation of a new Assistant Deputy Minister of Aboriginal Learning (Alberta Aboriginal Relations, 2014, March 27). The benefits of having the MEC securely in place upon appointment of the new Assistant Deputy Minister would be significant.

The proposed MEC will serve as an interlocutor for the RLI education mandate primarily for K-12 Métis education. The Council will serve as an arms-length entity that reports directly to RLI with the joint purpose of identifying and overseeing province-wide initiatives aimed to improve education for Métis K-12 students in Alberta, inclusive of adults engaged in General Educational Development.

a. Métis Education Council: Mandate

We propose the mandate for the MEC to include the following:

1. advise RLI on any matter relating to Métis K-12 education, including identifying policies and programs that should be put into place to enhance education outcomes and experiences and their implementation;
2. engage the Métis community, educational institutions (including school-level and board-level advisory councils as well as select post-secondary institutions), the Province of Alberta Education Ministry, as well as appropriate inter-provincial educational agencies, in order to better understand challenges and promising practices for Métis K-12 learners;
3. promote partnerships that enhance education outcomes for Métis people in Alberta, including positive family and community involvement in educational initiatives;
4. identify research gaps and commission independent research that will enable a better understanding of Métis educational needs and of promising supportive practices, which may ultimately lead to more equitable educational outcomes for Métis learners in Alberta;
5. independently monitor the implementation of the Education Ministry's FNMI Education Policy Framework and the Alberta *Education Act*;¹⁴ and,
6. report comprehensive findings to RLI on a bi-annual basis.

education Ministries. The MNA Association Final Report on the Native Education Policy Review (NEPR) states: "Alberta Learning should establish an Aboriginal Steering/Advisory Committee to advise Alberta Learning on policies, issues and initiatives that have a bearing on . . . Aboriginal student success in grades K-12" (2000, p. 12). Elsewhere, the report calls for a resource and research centre: "the Government of Alberta should support the concept of an Aboriginal curriculum resource centre to conduct research" (p. 21).

¹⁴ Equitable access to education and improved educational attainment for Métis learners are listed as primary goals of the binding Alberta-MNA Framework Agreement (2008). The Agreement also includes criteria for progress evaluation: no such evaluation of Métis K-12 Education has been published by either of the signatory Parties. In monitoring the progress of Métis-related education policy, the MEC would thus be a foundational presence regarding Aboriginal Education accountability in Alberta.

b. Constituting the Métis Education Council

We envision the Council to be comprised primarily of Métis individuals -with significant expertise in the field of education. Regional representation would be a secondary criterion once appropriate expertise has been identified. Candidates will be vetted by RLI and appointed by the RLI Board of Governors to specific terms. Appointments could be staggered for the sake of continuity-.

We anticipate that the Council will require the following supports: honoraria and expenses for all council-related services; one full-time support staff responsible for administration and marketing; venues for meetings including quarterly conventions; a budget for research contracts, resource development, and ongoing consultation with the Métis community.

Council members will be expected to develop and maintain partnerships and support council interests individually, and on an ongoing basis, as per the MEC mandate outlined above, in good faith and all the while serving the best interests of Métis learners. The council will be expected to convene as needed, no less than once per quarter, attend bi-annual meetings on education with RLI and MNA representatives, and submit a written annual report documenting activities and findings for each calendar year. Select council representatives will voice pedagogical, curricular, and staffing needs to authorities by way of an annual meeting with the provincial Education Minister.

The realization of the proposed MEC will depend on several critical factors, which we recommend be addressed immediately. A budget for interim MEC operations and the commission of preliminary research on the state of Métis education in Alberta—including challenges and promising practices regarding community engagement, curriculum, pedagogy, and staffing (akin to Anuik & Bellehumeur-Kearns, 2012)—must be approved, and activities initiated. This will be followed by a detailed budget to be presented for consideration by the MNA for its 2015-2016 Annual Operating Plan. This budget will include the council requirements itemized above, the drafting of contracts for council members, and funding for further research activities. The latter may include considerations concerning self-identification of Métis learners in Alberta schools, development of Métis-specific pedagogy and/or curriculum, the recruitment of Métis post-secondary students into teacher preparation programs, and the advancement of professional development and teaching resources aimed to increase the capacity of non-Métis teachers in supporting the self-actualization of Métis students.

Recommendation 2: Métis Academy (K-12)

At its strategic planning retreat in Sylvan Lake in 2013, RLI staff agreed to include a public Métis Academy initiative as a strategic goal in its 2014-2015 work plan. The idea of a K-12 public school centered on Métis culture and Métis-appropriate pedagogy is supported by the unique cultural and pedagogical needs of Métis students in addition to the apparent lack of Métis content offered by school boards in Alberta's urban centers.¹⁵

The City of Edmonton was identified as the ideal site for the proposed Academy for a number of reasons. We feel that a Métis population estimated at 30,000, a figure which far surpasses that of other Aboriginal groups in the city, creates the population *gravitas* required for a self-sustaining public school (Statistics Canada, 2011a). In addition, the Aboriginal programming currently offered by the Edmonton Public School Board (EPSB) is largely limited to First Nations culture and Cree language (Edmonton Public Schools, 2014, June 10). Further, Edmonton is experiencing a population explosion and the EPSB is having difficulties accommodating the influx of new students (Tumilty, 2013, December 16; n.a., 2014, January 7), and finally, senior EPSB representatives have unofficially expressed their support to senior MNA staff for a Métis charter school application.

The unique achievements of Government of Alberta charter schools are widely recognized (Ritchie, 2010), and the province continues to accept applications for new schools. A new vision for the next generation of Alberta public charter schools has emerged, which declares a priority shared by RLI: educational research. A 2009 charter school concept paper indicates that the alternative programs offered could lead the way in “the transition to a robust, knowledge-centered economy based in Alberta [serving as] provincial innovative education research centres” (Alberta Education, 2009a, p. 2). The discussion paper emphasizes the potential of future partnerships between charter schools and post-secondary research institutions, arguing that significant involvement in education action research for the charter would be fundamental to Alberta achieving the vision of “charter schools as catalysts for critical thinking about education” (Alberta Education, 2009a, p. 2).

a. Charter school application process: Major tasks and considerations

The Minister's application procedure for opening a new charter school is clearly detailed in the Alberta School Act—Charter Schools Regulation (Alberta, Regulations, 2012). It is lengthy and complex, and should be seen as a medium term goal at best. Submissions are to be made in three stages, and the fundamentals of each are outlined and annotated in the Appendix. Figure 1 illustrates the fundamentals of the application process.

The most extensive segment of the preliminary application is the required independent research supporting the charter. We propose that this requirement be adapted from the results of a feasibility study that we recommend be contracted immediately. This study will require working

¹⁵ Again, this initiative has been proposed before. The MNAA review of the NEPR also calls for “Aboriginal controlled schools” (MNAA, 2000, p. 4). See also National Indian Brotherhood/Assembly of First Nations, 1972.

relationships with post-secondary education departments and members of the Métis community, as collaboration and consultation with members of both of these groups will be necessary at each step of the Academy's gestation. It should be noted that the study itself and the prerequisite relationships with academic institutions and community members will be valuable in realizing RLI's vision for Métis education, even if the results of the study are not favourable to pursuing a charter school application.

One of the most substantial tasks required of the final application is the development of a Métis-specific curriculum. Specific outcomes will be required for each grade level (K-12). The curriculum will be fundamental to the school's charter, and will be offered as a supplement to the mandated provincial program of studies. Key to the Métis-specific program would be the inclusion of an "Elder-in-residence" program.¹⁶ The curriculum program could include components of Métis history and jurisprudence, as well as Michif language and other traditional knowledge practices, such as land-based pedagogy.

We suggest that curriculum developers also consider incorporating a "cultural studies" focus into the secondary school curriculum (grades 7-12). As such, a cultural studies emphasis could include enrichment around topics such as nationalism, colonialism, urbanization, historiography, epistemology, language revitalization, sociolinguistics, identity politics, cultural hybridity, as well as the unique implications of diasporic identity. All of these fields offer significant implications for Métis history and culture. Moreover, a lack of understanding of these implications by mainstream Albertans is at the core of damaging colonial and racist attitudes that persist towards Aboriginal peoples. A curriculum of this type could be significant in strengthening Métis identity in Alberta, and also in preparing students enrolled in the Academy for the critical thinking required in post-secondary studies. Clearly, the development of a specialized curriculum will, again, require collaboration with academic researchers and pre-service teacher training programs.

b. University partnerships

The timing to set up a partnership with academic institutions is ideal. The Association of Canadian Deans of Education (ACDE) remains committed to the vision outlined in the *Accord*

¹⁶ Elder involvement of this sort was also recommended in the MNAA final report on the NEPR (2000, p. 7). Edmonton Catholic School District has a successful "Council of Native Elders" program in place that allows a strong and formalized link to the community (<https://www.ecsd.net/Programs/Overview/AboriginalLearning/Pages/Council-of-Elders.aspx>). Furthermore, Gunn and Pomahac note an instance in a small Alberta community where "results [of such an elder mentorship program] demonstrated that th[e] impact on the students and their homes, the community, and the school at large was significant. While graduation rates improved over two years, the greatest impact was on the psychological and emotional aspects of the stakeholders. The Aboriginal students and their families reported a sense of belonging and care. In turn, it was this feeling that cultivated a commitment to educational attainment, and a greater understanding of its value" (2009, pp. 12-13).

on *Indigenous Education* which was signed in 2010: “Indigenous identities, cultures, languages, values, ways of knowing, and knowledge systems will flourish in all Canadian learning settings” (ACDE, 2010, p. 4).¹⁷ The Rupertsland Centre for Métis Research (RCMR) at the University of Alberta has an established relationship with RLI as well as a complementary mandate. RCMR can assist RLI in setting up partnership negotiations with the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta. In the south, the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary announced its intention to focus on Indigenous education, strengthening links between Aboriginal communities and the learned community over the last two years. In support of this promise, the Werklund School of Education hired five new Indigenous faculty members, three of whom are Métis, in 2013 to join a senior scholar in Indigenous education. Plans are underway to increase this group of six to at least eight Indigenous faculty members by 2015-2016.

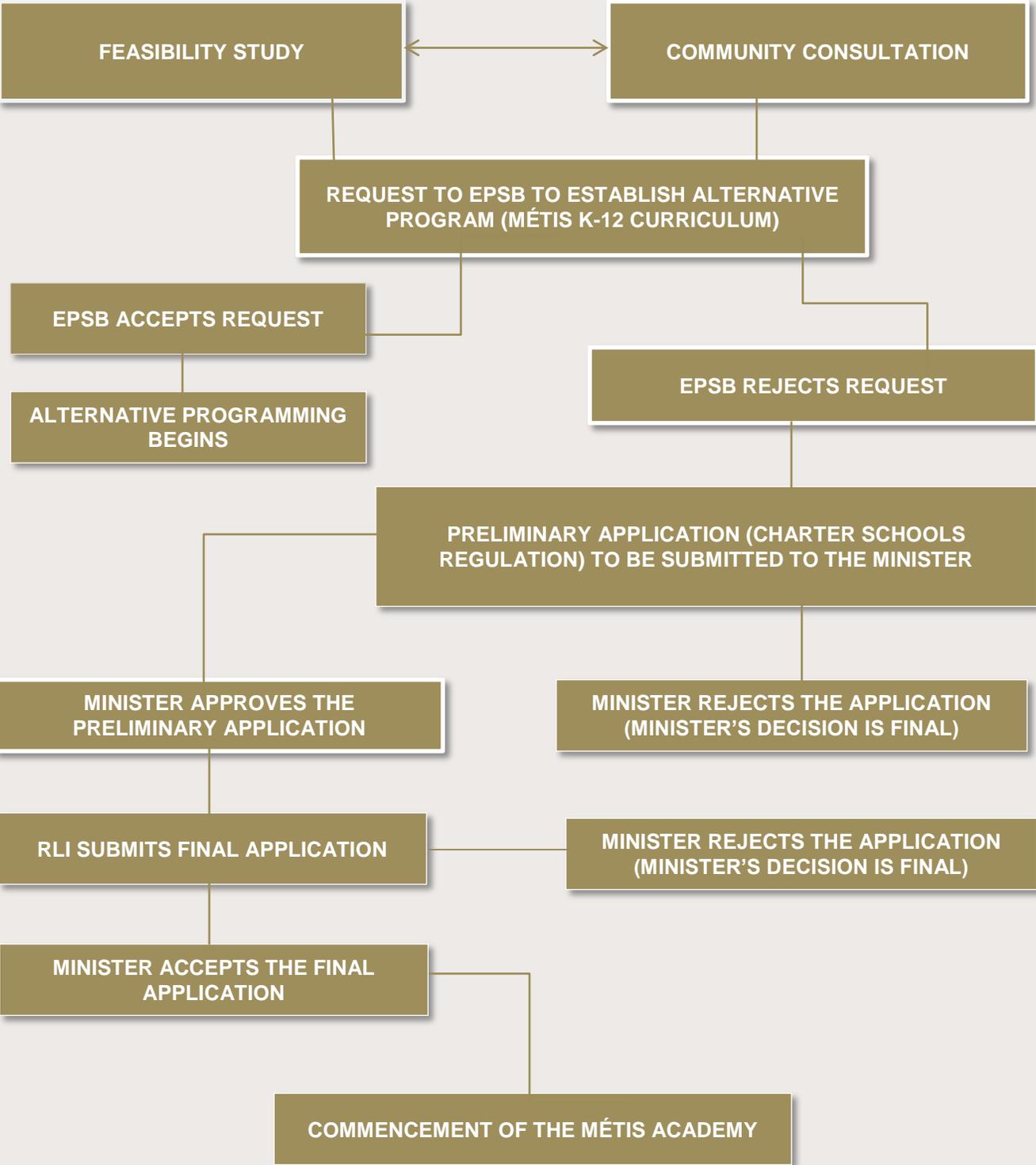
c. Métis Academy: In conclusion

A Métis Academy would have clear and measurable benefits in terms of student educational outcomes, and would also be singularly beneficial in the historically important goal of reclaiming Métis identity and culture in Alberta. It would be designed to fulfill strategic long-term goals of the MNA and RLI and would also accomplish research goals specified under the Alberta-MNA Framework Agreement. Given the scope and importance of the Academy application, we recommend that it be developed under the Alberta-MNA Framework Agreement and possibly also the Tripartite Process Agreement (Canada/Alberta/Métis Nation of Alberta Association, 1992). This would enable a powerful collaboration amongst key Métis stakeholders as well as the resources necessary to create a portfolio of superior quality. In addition, the diplomacy and shared goodwill that would be enacted in a collaboration between the Métis Nation and the Alberta Government may facilitate negotiations with the Education Minister, when the time comes for the ministry to adjudicate the application.

Developing an application for the Minister’s consideration is a complicated matter that will involve extensive human resources, multilateral partnerships, and negotiations at the political and technical levels. As with any large project, the task may appear overwhelming at first glance. However, the Métis Nation of Alberta and Rupertsland Institute have proven that, broken down into small components, even the largest task becomes achievable. The RLI administration recommends commissioning a feasibility study as a first step in the development of a Métis Academy.

¹⁷ In November 2013, ACDE president Blye Frank wrote to the Minister Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada expressing the ACDE’s objection to the proposed First Nation Education legislation (C-33; <http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?Language=E&Mode=1&DocId=6532106&File=29#1>) and demonstrating renewed commitment to “the rights and needs of Indigenous people and communities” (<http://www.fnesc.ca/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/November-20-2013-ACDE-letter-to-Minister-Valcourt.pdf>).

Figure 1: Flow Chart for the Establishment of a Charter School



Recommendation 3: Métis Scholar Enrichment Program

Another initiative fundamental to RLI's comprehensive K-12 plan will be an enrichment program that includes academic tutoring and adult upgrading. It is reported that many Aboriginal students begin to fall behind academically while still in elementary school, that the high school graduation rate for Aboriginal students is far below the national average for non-Aboriginal students, and that family support is often lacking for Aboriginal learners (Trypuc & Heller, 2008; Gunn & Pomahac, 2009; Richards & Scott, 2009; Alberta School Boards Association, 2011). This lack of family engagement can be attributed in large part to a lack of positive educational experience for Aboriginal guardians or other community members; the end result being that many Aboriginals lack basic skills in literacy, math, and science. The enrichment program that we envision would begin to redress each of these. Taking a holistic and community-centered approach, the centre would offer educational programming for Métis learners of all ages and levels that supports and supplements the provincial curriculum taught in schools through a Métis-appropriate pedagogy. These programs would be offered free of charge to interested learners.

Early intervention is imperative in remediating deficits in academic engagement and achievement (Fuchs, Hale, & Kearns, 2011). RLI recommends an academic enrichment program that is firmly grounded in strengths-based pedagogy and also uses a formative assessment approach based on the response-to-intervention model, widely recognized as an effective teaching strategy (Crowell, Lesiak, McCarthy, Polanski, & Ramey, 2011; Kearney & Graczyk, 2014; Diamond, Justice, Siegler, & Snyder, 2013). The process will assess learning of Métis students and provide customized academic support that will address areas of difficulty before these become engrained and very difficult, or even impossible, to remediate. The program will begin at the kindergarten level—which is three years earlier than most school-initiated interventions begin.¹⁸ We feel that this could provide the support needed for at-risk students to more easily meet academic outcomes, remain intellectually engaged in their regular classrooms, and ultimately *prevent* learning delays or cognitive processing weaknesses from developing, or their dropping out of education altogether.

Proficiency in essential skills will be assessed three times a year: upon enrollment in the enrichment program, in early January, and again at the end of the school year. We recommend that school evaluations, including report cards, also form part of the student's file at the centre, if

¹⁸ Many schools continue to require a minimum of Grade 3 for learning disability evaluations to be conducted. This is because the measurable discrepancy between ability (as determined by intelligence testing) and achievement is not sufficient for differentiation in the earlier grades. This "wait to fail" model has been severely criticized by the educational psychology community. A 2010 white paper authored by more than fifty experts argues against ability-achievement discrepancy analysis, and indicates that an empirically-validated response-to-intervention (RTI) model could be used to prevent learning problems in all learners. It must be noted that RTI-informed teaching is distinct from the specific learning disability identification and assessment, which requires individual comprehensive evaluation by psychologists (Hale et al., 2010).

possible. An education plan will be designed by a certified teacher for each student, based in part on the results of these tests.¹⁹

The adult program should include essential skills programming and also a General Educational Development (high-school equivalency) plan. If the budget permits, we recommend that the adult education component be offered four days a week during regular business hours. One certified teacher would be employed to work with the adult students, circulating freely and/or instructing group lessons as required.²⁰ If demand for the program is sufficient, then RLI may need to augment the program to employ a second teacher. The two teachers should have complementary specializations: one with expertise in math and sciences, the other experienced with the language arts and social studies. On the remaining weekday, the teacher(s) would be available to work with programming and the individual files of the children in the K-12 program. We recommend including a low-cost child care option if possible.

A recent publication by Jim Silver (2013) analyzes the impact of a variety of innovative Aboriginal adult education initiatives in Winnipeg. The text underlines the transformative potential of effective programming, on both the individual and the community level. Best practices such as these should be studied closely in designing the adult education program. Partnering with institutions such as the Werklund School of Education (University of Calgary), who are prioritizing Indigenous education and actively seeking community partnerships in innovative education initiatives, should also be considered.²¹ Aboriginal adult education is another area in which Alberta can begin to catch up by learning from initiatives undertaken in other provinces. Moreover, with the untapped resources available at Werklund, RCMR, and elsewhere in Alberta, the potential is clearly there for our province to take a leadership role in this sector. It would be difficult to overestimate the benefits in revitalizing Aboriginal communities in Alberta if this potential could be truly realized.

The enrichment program, thus conceived, would require a budget of some substance but could be realized on a relatively short timeline. Resources would be required for the development of a

¹⁹ Regarding operations, it is recommended that suitable venues be identified by the MEC and made available for the delivery of the enrichment program as a pilot program in Edmonton. RLI would initiate agreements with Métis parents and the appropriate school administration, and could arrange for student transportation, if required. These arrangements would be made in accordance with the respective school boards' current operational guidelines. A healthy snack would be provided and students will work in small groups, following an individualized program, with their respective teachers or tutors for one to two hours.

²⁰ The service delivery of the Discovery Choices program offered by Calgary Board of Education (<http://schools.cbe.ab.ca/b868/>) and/or the Learning Store Outreach Program offered by Edmonton Public (<http://outreach.epsb.ca/aboutus/schoolprofile/>) are recommended as possible models for the adult education program.

²¹ The Adult Learning study area at Werklund has approached a number of the new Indigenous faculty members about the possibility of setting up a "Humanities 101" course for Aboriginal learners. This initiative seeks to link disadvantaged learners with an introductory post-secondary experience that is informal and community centered and that may prompt higher learning outcomes.

business plan, program venue(s), salaries for one full-time teacher and one part-time administrative staff per site, wages for tutors, student transportation and snacks, and program advertisement. The business plan would include curriculum development for the program and also a plan for expanding the program to other locations in Alberta.

Recommendation 4: Métis wiki space

A fourth and final recommendation is for a public wiki, accessible through the RLI and/or MNA website. In contrast to the other initiatives proposed, this information-sharing database would be low cost, low risk, low maintenance, and could be implemented almost immediately following approval. We feel that quality information, to be freely shared among Métis people and allies, is a necessary tool in reclaiming and preserving Métis culture and identity.

The wiki would be a freely available, collaboratively edited, hyperlinked web application—akin to Wikipedia—for sharing information on Métis culture, history, and education. Entries in the wiki may address anything related to the lives of contemporary and historical Métis people, from, for instance, “Métis Nation,” to “Michif,” “Métis cultural artefacts,” “Scrip Commission,” “Métis governance,” “Malcolm Norris,” and “Indigenous pedagogy.” Wikis of this sort have proven hugely successful in information sharing and also in community building (O’Sullivan, 2009). There is currently no such resource on the web.

It will be required that annotations be written in widely accessible language, and supportive documentation will be requested of all verifiable facts. Contributions would be open to the public, one might even envision populating such a space with student contributions that have been vetted through appropriate channels. To manage risk, a required password would offer some measure of security and contributions would require approval from the wiki’s editorial team.

Numerous basic wiki packages are available for free download on the internet, including the very popular MediaWiki (www.mediawiki.org). The package would come with a licensing agreement that defines ownership of content²². RLI would contract a web designer to customize the site. This commitment would require less than twenty hours for an experienced web designer, once organizational details and the editor-administrator structure are determined by RLI. A call for contributions, advertising the site would go out at this stage. The primary risk associated with such an initiative would be quality maintenance. It is recommended that the site be publicized only after fifty core entries have been completed and approved, likely to be written by a contractor. All ongoing contributions will be automatically emailed to the editorial group to be edited for accuracy, completeness, and cultural bias before being made publicly available.

This project would require a budget for the initial design contract and hourly wages for editors/moderators. It is possible that these ongoing duties and responsibilities could be assumed by staff currently responsible for the maintenance of the RLI website or by the MEC support person, as proposed above, keeping in mind that human resources are scarce and limited at non-

²² While Wiki spaces appear to be exempt of copyright infringement as long as articles and sources are properly documented, RLI should have legal advice to understand the limitations of the tool.

profit organizations such as RLI. An organizational plan for the site and a contract for initial annotations will also be required at the outset.

Implementation

Implementing the recommendations in this document will require a strong commitment from both the provincial government and the Métis people of Alberta. Multiple parties will need to commit to moving this agenda forward including the provincial government, Métis leadership, the public school boards in Edmonton and elsewhere, the Universities of Calgary and Alberta, as well as the wider Métis community across the province. The GOA will play a key role as the government with jurisdiction in the realm of education. A stable and ongoing commitment to fund Métis education will be required, as well as help in navigating the various challenges that may surface throughout the Métis Academy application process.

With the provincial government's support, we believe this document represents an excellent basis for a five (5) year K-12 Strategic Plan for Métis Education in Alberta. The implementation of this plan would not only allow RLI to fulfill its mandate to the Métis people of Alberta but would also allow the provincial government to be seen as a leader in serving the growing needs of a large Aboriginal demographic who have articulated a clear vision for Métis education. This vision however rests upon mutual trust and a shared vision to realize a better educational future for all Albertans.

a. Government of Alberta

We recommend that RLI work to develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the provincial government. The MOU should include:

- a specification for the establishment and continued support of the proposed MEC;
- a commitment to work with RLI on the establishment of a Métis Academy;
- an agreement to work with RLI to establish a Métis enrichment program (through alternative education programming); and
- an agreement for regular meetings between RLI senior staff and the pertinent Government of Alberta Deputy Minister.

Funding should be realized through two distinct channels:

- ongoing and stable line-item department funding under the Alberta-MNA Framework Agreement; and,
- direct annual funding to RLI concomitant with specified tasks.

We suggest that implementation of activities and deliverables for the RLI K-12 strategic plan should be included in an annual work plan under the Alberta-MNA Framework Agreement. This process would allow the Métis Nation of Alberta to maintain the government-to-government relationship implicit in the Alberta-MNA Framework Agreement and keep in place the accountability framework that will ensure adherence to the goals set out in this document, based on a strict protocol of deliverables and outcome measurement.

b. University of Alberta and University of Calgary

Applications to the Minister under the Alberta Charter Schools Regulation require collaboration between the proposed charter school and the academic community. We propose that RLI calls preliminary meetings with the Universities of Alberta and Calgary under the Joint Task Panel clause in the Endowment agreement that MEF holds with the two universities to discuss formalizing a partnership. A joint agreement with the respective Education Faculties may include the following goals:

- support for the Métis Education Council;
- a commitment to Métis-specific education research and to the development of a Métis-centred K-12 curriculum;
- ongoing support for the development of a Métis Academy in Edmonton; and
- an agreement to a knowledge transfer process from the university to the Métis community by means of practicum student placements at the Academy and ongoing field research in Aboriginal pedagogy.

c. Edmonton Public School Board

Support from the EPSB for the Métis Academy is fundamental to the Métis Academy application process. We recommend initiating an informal pre-application dialogue with the EPSB to gauge the Board's support for the Academy initiative. Following this unofficial contact, all communication with the EPSB must be carried out according to GOA guidelines, and all correspondence must be disclosed in the preliminary application submission.

Conclusion

Albertans have many reasons to be proud of their education system. The values underlying the recent *Inspiring Education* document, where students will become “engaged thinkers and ethical citizens with an entrepreneurial spirit” is one more reason to stand tall as Albertans (Alberta Education, 2010a). However, it can be argued that the integrity and strength of the education system can only truly be assessed in full consideration of its most vulnerable learners. Effectively addressing the needs of a historically marginalized and perennially underrepresented Aboriginal population will allow Alberta Education to truly realize its vision for the future.

It must also be noted that investing in Métis education is not only a moral and constitutional imperative: it is also an economic necessity. As the province moves further into a “learned economy,” continued economic success will rely increasingly on education and labour market integration. From a purely economic perspective, Eric Howe (2014) has demonstrated unequivocally how costly it will be for the Province of Alberta to not take effective and sustainable action on the educational inequities experienced by its Indigenous population, the Métis in particular.

All of our recommendations are designed to support the development of capacity within the Métis community. To do otherwise would propagate the colonial process that dispossessed Métis people in the first place. By placing education at the forefront of the Métis agenda, the community will be making a commitment to redress inter-generational consequences of colonial policies. This healing will be integral to the authentic reclamation and revitalization of Métis history, identity, and culture and the repair of historical alliances between its citizens.

It is our position that the authentic inclusion of Métis voice in policy and programming and that autonomy for the Métis community in defining its own educational parameters are necessary for equity in education to be achieved. We suggest that by prioritizing a comprehensive and uncompromising Métis Education agenda, MNA and RLI will establish a historical precedent and lay the ground for future relations with the Government of Alberta.

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Appendix 1: Alberta Charter School Application Procedure

The application procedure for opening a new charter school is lengthy and complex (Alberta, Regulations, 2012). Submissions are to be made in three stages (preliminary application, final application, and commencement requirements), and the fundamentals of each will be outlined in turn.

a. Preliminary application

A number of conditions must be met for a preliminary charter school proposal to succeed. In addition to basic information such as name, grade distribution, opening date, and projected building requirements of the proposed school, a preliminary application must contain philosophy, vision, and purpose statements for the proposed charter school; a justification for the charter's program including how it will be distinguished from existing district school board programs; a copy of the board's refusal to adopt a similar program (all correspondence between the board and the applicant concerning the alternative program must be included in the application); a declaration signed by parents indicating the intention to enroll their children in the charter school; and independent research supporting the proposed program.²³

The most substantial of the required preliminary activities are the supporting research, the community consultations prerequisite to parental declaration of intent, and the negotiations with the district school board. The scope and implications of these three activities will now be considered.

b. Preliminary application: Feasibility study

Independent research is a pre-condition for any application to the Minister. In the case of a Métis charter school, it is conceivable that this research take the form of a feasibility study. This would provide a deeper understanding of cost-benefit factors implicated in the proposed charter, the pedagogical and cultural value of a Métis-specific program, as well as the interest level of Métis parents and community members.

²³ A complete list of preliminary application requirements is itemized in the Alberta School Act—Charter Schools Regulation, Section 3, namely, “3 The preliminary application must be in writing and contain the following information: (a) the name, address, telephone number and, if available, fax number and e-mail address of the applicant; (b) the proposed name of the charter school; (c) the information described in section 35(a) and (b) of the Act; (d) a statement explaining how the program to be offered by the charter school is significantly different from the programs offered by the board; (e) independent research supporting the proposed charter school program; (f) the proposed opening date for the charter school; (g) a parent declaration, in the form prescribed by the Minister, signed by parents indicating their intention to enroll their children in the charter school; (h) the projected student enrollment, grade distribution and school building requirements on the proposed opening date of the charter school; (i) all correspondence between the board and the applicant concerning the alternative program, including a copy of the board's decision to refuse to establish the alternative program,” (2012, pp. 2-3).

The government prescribes that the study demonstrates, above all, the benefits of the proposed educational plan (Alberta Education, 2011b). The study should indicate how the proposed program will be innovative and how it will expand choice in the local jurisdiction; how the program will potentially improve educational outcomes for students; and how the improved student achievement will be measured against that of students in other local schools not belonging to the same charter.

RLI would also require that the study address the following questions: To what degree do Education faculties at the Universities of Alberta and Calgary support the development of a Métis Academy? Could an enduring partnership be established that would support the development and *in situ* evaluation of Métis-specific pedagogy? Would the university Education departments be willing to assign practicum placements at the Métis charter school to interested pre-service teachers? In regards to community interest, the study should attempt to evaluate the breadth and depth of family support for the Métis Academy: declared intention to enroll children is a requirement of the application, and community involvement with the school activities will be essential to the success of the Academy once it is launched.

Prior to commissioning this feasibility study, RLI must create a “partnership environment” with the appropriate provincial higher learning institutions. We propose that RLI initiate a formal partnership arrangement with either one or both of the largest universities in Alberta—the University of Alberta (Edmonton) and the University of Calgary. This partnership must consider various areas of cooperation, including, but not limited to, the creation of a permanent working group on Métis education; the support for curriculum development; a commitment from Education departments to student teacher practicum placements at the Academy; and support for a formal agreement between RLI and the Government of Alberta under the FNMI process. Once this partnership arrangement is formalized, we recommend that the Métis Academy feasibility study be commissioned immediately.

c. Preliminary application: Community consultations

The successful implementation of a Métis Academy in Edmonton will require extensive involvement of the Métis community at every step. Indeed, the Minister’s application requires specific actions be taken with the community in order to ensure the viability of a new school, culminating in a signed declaration of intent to enroll. However, community participation in the consultation process must go significantly beyond this preliminary application requirement. Consultation with parents and guardians should extend to their vision of the curriculum:

- What aspects of Métis culture, history, and language do they see as being most important?
- What areas of study (literacy, mathematics, science, etc.) require the most support or emphasis?

- What should be the role of Métis Elders within the school?

The role of parents, guardians, and community stakeholders will be crucial in the governance of the Métis Academy, beyond what is required by law. Family and community engagement as part of a School Council as well as the school's administrative board will be fundamental to the success of the Academy. This group should also be actively involved in fundraising and voluntary supervision for extra-curricular activities, in order to provide a full range of supplementary cultural and social programming for students of the Academy. Consequently, the initial community consultations should include a survey component that gauges community interest in actively supporting school administration and school culture.

d. Preliminary application: Correspondence with the local school board

The local district school board also plays a critical role in the application process. RLI must demonstrate that the proposed program is *not* currently being offered by the local school board, and that the local board is *not* willing to expand its programming to include the alternative program in question. This is to be demonstrated through disclosure of the complete correspondence between RLI and the local school board. Specifically, RLI must first request in writing that the local school board expand the offered Aboriginal curriculum and include a Métis-specific component, as well as any other objectives fundamental to the proposed charter. A written refusal by the local board to establish the proposed program, as well as acknowledgement that the proposed program is not currently being offered, is required for a charter application to proceed.

It appears likely that RLI will easily obtain this required refusal. While it is true that the Edmonton Public School Board (EPSB) has a number of Aboriginal programs, none of them focus specifically on Métis interests. In addition, an argument can easily be made that the EPSB is struggling to keep up with current demands and is not in a position to pioneer an initiative on Métis Education, a virtual *terra incognita* for public education in Alberta. This being said, the requirement for full disclosure recommends that RLI be prudent in approaching the school board. It may be advised to consider a low-level, informal meeting to gauge how the board will respond before initiating the formal, and reportable, request process.

e. Application procedure: Final application

Given that the results of the feasibility study are positive and the Minister approves the preliminary application, RLI may opt to move forward with the final application. As per Section 3(7) of the Charter Schools Regulation, "if the Minister approves the preliminary application under subsection (4)(b), the applicant must submit a final application to the Minister no later than November 1 of the year preceding the year in which the charter school is to open" (Alberta,

Regulations, 2012, p. 3). The final application requires significantly more information than the preliminary application, as can be seen in Figure 2.²⁴

Figure 2: Charter School Final Application—Required Information

Source: *School Act: Charter Schools Regulation*, Section 3(8) (Alberta, Regulations, 2012, p. 3-4)

The final application must be in writing and contain the following information:

- (a) proof that the applicant is a society incorporated under the Societies Act or a company registered under Part 9 of the Companies Act;
- (b) the proposed charter for the school;
- (c) the measures to be used to determine the outcomes referred to in sections 32(b) and 35(a) and (b) of the [School] Act;¹
- (d) indications of significant community support for the charter school;
- (e) the selection criteria to be used if applications by students for enrollment exceed the maximum student capacity of the school;
- (f) a policy development plan;
- (g) a charter school budget report in the form prescribed by the Minister;
- (h) any additional information relating to the operation of the charter school as required by the Minister.

The School Charter document, item 3(8)b, is a detailed and comprehensive vision for the school and will be extensive in its development.²⁵ The document must include the teaching philosophy and vision of the school, detailed curriculum to be offered, proposed student learning outcomes, grade distribution, as well as a number of details concerning of student body, governance, regulations, and communications. This work will require the extensive collaboration of experts in Métis culture and history, teachers, and curriculum developers. This alone necessitates a partnership with at least one major university located in Alberta.

²⁴ Alberta Education has provided a manual to clarify the application process, see Alberta Education, 2011b.

²⁵ The contents of the charter are specified in Section 4. “In addition to the requirements set out in section 35 of the Act, a charter must include the following: (a) any curriculum to be offered by the charter school that is in addition to the Alberta Programs of Study; (b) a description of the process by which successful charter school innovations are communicated to the education community; (c) the roles and responsibilities of the charter board and the parents; (d) the bylaws or articles of association of the charter board; (e) the projected student enrollment, grade distribution and school building requirements at the end of the initial term of the charter; (f) a description of the process by which the charter may be amended; (g) a description of the process by which the charter school may be dissolved, including (i) the form of notice of dissolution to be given by the charter board to parents and other interested persons or groups, (ii) the transfer of students to other schools, and (iii) the disposition of real and personal property and financial, school and student records” (Alberta, Regulations, 2012, p. 5). Section 35 of the School Act specifies, “A charter must include the following: (a) the particular teaching philosophy, vision and purpose of the school with the goals of the school written as measurable outcomes; (b) a description of the improved student learning outcomes to be attained by the students; (c) the period during which the school is to operate; (d) the name of the society or company that is to operate the school; (e) a description of the students for whom the school is intended; (f) the grades to be offered at the school; (g) any other matter required by the regulations or the Minister” (Alberta, Statutes, revised, 2010, pp. 34-35).

The development of the Academy’s curriculum will be a substantial and crucially important undertaking. As a charter school, the Métis Academy will be required to teach the mandated provincial program of studies. But it will be in a position to also incorporate a Métis-specific supplemental curriculum. As indicated above, this curriculum must be detailed in the final application. It will likely include components of Michif language, Métis history and culture, and Métis jurisprudence, as well as Métis cultural activities (fiddling, jigging, and preparing pemmican or bannock). It is also suggested that a “cultural studies” focus be incorporated into the secondary school curriculum, as outlined under “Recommendation 2a. Charter school application process: Major tasks and considerations.” A curriculum of this type could be significant in strengthening Métis identity in Alberta, and also in preparing students of the Academy for the critical thinking required in post-secondary studies.

f. Application procedure: Commencement of a Charter School

Following the Minister’s approval of the application, a number of commencement requirements must be fulfilled before operation begins.²⁶ These requirements, again, highlight the importance of working collaboratively with experts in diverse fields, with Métis stakeholders, and with the provincial government.

²⁶ Section 6 of the Charter Schools Regulation reads, “Before a charter school begins to operate, (a) the school must have at least 100 students enrolled in it or the number of students that, in the opinion of the Minister, is required to ensure that the program offered by the charter school is educationally and financially viable, and (b) the charter board shall (i) appoint a superintendent in accordance with section 113 of the Act, (ii) appoint a secretary-treasurer in accordance with section 116 of the Act, (iii) ensure that parents of students enrolled or seeking enrollment in the charter school are made aware of transportation plans where applicable, and (iv) provide the following information in writing to the Minister: (A) the names and certificate numbers of the individuals who will be teachers at the charter school, including the principal; (B) the location of the school building; (C) if the school building is leased from the private sector, proof of compliance with municipal zoning bylaws and all applicable municipal and provincial public health, fire, safety and building standards requirements; (D) an updated school budget report in the form prescribed by the Minister; (E) details of any contractual arrangements to be made between the charter board and (I) the Minister, (II) a board, or (III) any other person” (Alberta, Regulations, 2012, pp. 5-6).