

Let's talk school!



Sheshatshiu community forum

January 20, 2014



A plan to help our kids succeed in school

The Mamu Tshishkutamashutau Innu Education School Board held a **Let's Talk School** community workshop in Sheshatshiu on January 20th.

This forum was held to build on information gathered during a community consultation about education held in 2013. Elders, parents, school staff, Band and Innu Nation workers, school board staff and trustees came together to review and discuss the results, to identify what was missing, and to vote on the most important issues and the best strategies to tackle these. About 70 people participated in the workshop. The information from the consultation report and this forum will be used by the school to develop a school success plan to help all Innu children in Sheshatshiu get the education they need. There were no students or dropouts at this workshop and their voices need to be heard.



School trustee Bart Jack

Our Vision

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

Keeping the vision real

We have to be practical and realistic. We need to teach the children to be practical. They will not all become lawyers, doctors, engineers and professionals. They need to be directed into the trades, to get the training to take over or get jobs in the community. Many are dropping out now and go back to learn a trade. We need more skills and training in trades.

Peter Penashue



Language and culture

Speaking the language: During the workshop 37 Innu participants said they speak Innu-aimun all or most of the time at home, yet only 21 said that their children knew how to say everyday words like uishauau, nitushkan, amishk^u, uapimin and tipaikan. Participants said children are learning about Innu culture mainly at home and in nutshimit, as well as from elders, school, books and the internet.

Learning the culture: When asked about what should happen to help children learn more Innu-aimun and culture, people thought the most important strategies were 1) take the children on the land, 2) more training of Innu and non-Innu staff, 3) change the school calendar to allow for families to go to nutshimit, and 4) set up a curriculum centre.

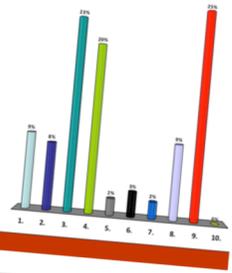
Culture in school: In small group discussions people talked about how the school could help kids learn their culture in the following ways: more Innu-aimun, culture, crafts and Innu-eitun classes/activities; parents and grandparents helping in the school as volunteers to teach culture and Innu-eitun; teachers and CAs co-teaching; CAs in all classrooms; hire elders on staff or more elder visits; more trained Innu teachers; teach non-Innu teachers about language and culture; Innu games: prepare Innu foods and learn nutrition in home-economics; learn practical hands-on Innu skills; study Innu land use with elders, nutshimit and technology; video presentations in Innu-aimun; use Innu-aimun dictionary app on the ipad; religion classes; reading buddies; morning prayer; Innu school uniforms; more pictures, books and posters; Innu yearbook and calendar, make it fascinating and interesting, visit elders, more Innu time interaction and curriculum; and Innu homework. One group said the Innu language and culture should be the base of all learning in the school.

“The school needs to have outings to spend in the tent where the kids can hunt and cook traditional foods, put up the tents, learn about the names of trees, rivers, etc. and traditional medicine and stories.”



Kids in my family mostly learn about Innu culture from:

1. an elder
2. school
3. home
4. nutshimit
5. books and films
6. internet
7. none of the above
8. all of the above
9. does not apply to me
10. other



School and nutshimit

People at the workshop talked about how the children need to learn the Innu culture in nutshimit. How can this happen with the school? People talked about changing the school calendar; whole families going to nutshimit; taking students and teachers with elders to nutshimit; organizing gatherings as school trips; make the elders' gathering part of the school curriculum; and learning about nutshimit food.

Strengths and challenges

What will help us strengthen our culture and language? People are still strongly connected to the Innu culture. We still have our own language. People still go in the country and practice their culture. **What challenges do we face in keeping the language and culture strong?** People talked about technology like tv, computers, facebook, xbox; a lack of funding, Innu materials and human resources; and the lack of interest in kids to learn the culture, especially those suffering from addictions.





Families and culture

People at the workshop talked about how families have to take more responsibility for teaching Innu-aimn and language. Parents have to show their kids that culture is important and make sure they speak in Innu-aimun all the time. They should encourage their kids to spend more time with elders and show them respect. Whole families need to participate in the outpost program, and organize family gatherings.

Community and culture

People talked about how the whole community needs to get involved in making sure the Innu culture lives on. They said leaders need to listen to people about what the needs of our future leaders are. More community workshops about education and culture need to be held. Some people said after-school classes on Innu-aimun and culture should be held for young parents. Another suggestion was to have an Innu-aimun instruction program on community radio.

Attendance

Almost everyone at the workshop agreed that attendance – getting kids to go to and stay in school – is one of the most important issues facing the school and the community. They said the top reasons that children did not go to school were:

1. Lack of support from home
2. Drugs, drinking, substance abuse
3. Bullying
4. Don't understand English

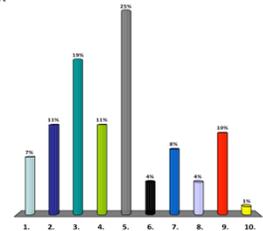
When asked what were the top 3 ways to get and keep kids in school, workshop participants said:

1. More support and help from parents and guardians
2. More Innu outings, and language and culture classes
3. Rewards like school trips and computers
4. More extra-curricular activities like sports and drama



Pick the 3 best ways to get and keep kids in school:

1. Rewards like itune cards, books, art supplies
2. Rewards like school trips and computers
3. More Innu outings and language and culture classes
4. More extra-curricular activities like sports and drama
5. More support/help from parents/guardians
6. Tutoring help
7. Outreach to talk to drop-outs
8. Career counseling
9. Role models speaking to students
10. Other



Talking about attendance

Ten parents at the workshop said their kids do not attend school. People made a number of comments about attendance during the workshop. They said:

- Children have too much stress and there is no one to help them.
- We have good teachers, but not enough students.
- Children are controlling the parents.
- Leaders and parents need to commit to education.
- We need more funding for education.
- Innu people don't support their children enough. We don't force or encourage our kids to go to school. We need to help them attend and graduate from school.
- Kids can't talk to their parents because they're drunk, gone to bingo, etc. The only person they can talk to is their teacher, their classmates.
- We should make more time for our kids, discuss and talk to our kids. We should be listening; we shouldn't argue or get mad.



School climate

School climate is about how people get along with each other. A good school climate is when students, staff, parents, grandparents, community members feel safe, supported, valued, connected and accepted. Workshop participants said the best ways to make the school more safe and welcoming were: 1) an anti-bullying program for children, 2) clear and consistent rules and discipline, reward good behaviour and work, and 4) teach the children right from wrong. Following close behind were the following strategies: healing relationships, more team-building among staff, and supporting staff to deal with burnout, depression and addictions.



Follow-up to this workshop

Workshop participants said they thought the workshop had done a good job covering the important issues. They said the keypads were useful for this kind of session. However, there was not enough time for group discussions. People wanted to speak and many did not get a chance. The community consultation helped to gather a lot of information to help the school and the community come together to plan for the future of Sheshatshiu children, but the dialogue needs to continue. More forums like this one are needed. The process for developing the school success plans should provide opportunities for both school and community voices to talk and plan together.

The provincial curriculum

Voting with their keypads, people said the biggest challenges to teaching and learning the provincial curriculum were: English is a second language; the Innu culture is not reflected in the programs; kids have poor language skills in English and Innu-aimun; and kids pass to the next grade even when they fail. When asked about the best ways to improve the quality of education, people voted for these strategies: more focus on language skills; more kids in early childhood programs; and better attendance. There was disagreement on whether to focus on Innu-aimun language skills first and then English.

The school is the first institution the Innu control, so we need to make it a success. We need to show we can do it. We need to fight to make our school better – to fight to make sure our kids attend and graduate. This school will work out if we all work together. The community and teachers need to work for the students. And children need to pursue their dreams, attend university or college if that is what they want. **Bart Jack**

Almost everyone agreed that the school will only get better when parents and the community are more involved. What are ways the school can involve community members? People voted for these strategies: contact parents as soon as problems happen and about the good things too; organize more events like family days and talent shows; set up a parent-teacher association; and invite Innu resource people to the school. What are ways the community can get more involved? Go to parent-teacher and school board meetings; talk to teachers and visit your kids' classrooms; volunteer to teach Innu, for the breakfast program, sports or drama; and help do fundraising for special events.

School and community working together!

