

# Letter of concern re the draft Alberta social studies curriculum, Fall 2024

## Introduction

Sharon MacFadyen, a retired school teacher and a member of the Being Good Relations Network living in Treaty Six, offers us this personal letter about her professional and right relations concerns with the proposed Alberta Social Studies curriculum. You are invited to use whatever facts or wording you wish in your own, personal or group letter to the Alberta government. **Please name your own concerns in your own words, too.**

### **The key advocacy point directed to government should be:**

that the government listen to the many concerns raised by Indigenous and non-Indigenous experts and organizations; pause the current draft of the curriculum; and re-draft in a way that takes expressed concerns, expert advice, and Truth and Reconciliation commitments fully into consideration.

## Key additional resources

[Web resources, including a sample letter, and more context.](#)

[Proposal on the curriculum passed in 2021](#) by Northern Spirit Regional Council at the request of the Being Good Relations Network.

## Sharon's letter

"As an Albertan and White settler, I write to share my concerns and profound dissatisfaction regarding the development and implementation of the new Alberta K-6 Social Studies curriculum. In particular, I am disturbed by the token gestures in the draft curriculum towards First Nations, Métis, and Inuit history, worldviews and perspectives. This curriculum fails to address the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, contributing to what has been described as its recent stalling out.

While the proposed curriculum contains a perfunctory acknowledgement of Canada's Indigenous Peoples and their historic relationship with the land, compared to the previous curriculum, it has even less information in it on the history of the Indigenous people, residential schools and treaties from an Indigenous perspective. In fact, there is no mention of residential schools in the K-6 draft that is currently being piloted, and only token acknowledgement of Treaty. These glaring omissions negate a joint commitment to action made by previous Alberta governments to fulfill the TRC Call to Action #62, which clearly states:

*Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students.*

The irony of breaking this 'educational treaty' cannot escape one, especially since the current curriculum groundwork for teaching about treaties in Grades 1-3 is nominal at best. Now, it seems, we are to take many steps back, despite input from Indigenous and non-Indigenous experts.

The draft has age-inappropriate "Skills and Procedures", and directions to teachers that include "Hypothesize different reasons treaties were negotiated and signed by First Nations and the government of Canada". Also included are generalized statements that diminish and dismiss the grave injustices that resulted from the White Settler interpretation of the Treaties.

For teachers just starting out, without the benefit of having taught the old curriculum, there is no clear direction to address the inherent concepts of friendship, mutual respect, and promises that treaty rests on, instead reducing it to a land business deal.

This curriculum has minimal Indigenous perspective and voice, despite recommendations from a variety of expert consultants whose inputs were largely ignored. For example, where works of Indigenous writers telling stories of Indigenous Peoples could have been used in Grade 6 to explore the Haudenosaunee Confederacy as a model of democracy, instead students are directed to "connect the fundamental principles of democracy (equality under law and representation) to practices of Haudenosaunee". This imposes a Eurocentric cultural overlay, instead of building student capacity for intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.

I concur with educators that this curriculum limits student opportunities to purposefully engage with diverse worldviews, beliefs, and perspectives, and fails to recognize the diverse cultures, histories, contributions, and perspectives that exist in both historical and contemporary Alberta, including those of First Nations, Metis and Francophones.

It is long past time to get serious about addressing the Calls to Action for Education laid out by Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission. If we want a just Alberta, we need to take this curriculum back to the drawing board and listen to the professional advice of educational experts. Only then will we have a curriculum that respects our commitments to the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action."

- *Sharon McFadyen, October 2024*