

# Our Aboriginal Education Project

## RECENT PAST

In 2005, a commitment was made by political and Aboriginal leaders from across Canada to take action to close the quality of life gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Improving educational achievement for First Nation, Métis and Inuit students from Kindergarten to Grade 12 was one of the ways identified to make meaningful change.

As a result, in 2007, the Ministry of Education launched the Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework, with the goal to improve the learning environment and educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. The Ministry of Education committed to providing funds and support to school boards across the province so they can promote awareness and appreciation for First Nation, Métis and Inuit history, culture, language and perspectives. The benefits of the Ministry's commitment will extend to our Board's school communities.

## OUR RESPONSE

In April 2008, the Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board began the process by hiring an Aboriginal Education Specialist to work with one of our Superintendents. Together, they established an Internal Working Group as well as an Elders' Advisory Council to guide and advise the project. We were also pleased to begin meeting with the Aboriginal Education Advisory Circle. All parties have a distinct role and bring unique perspectives and we are already seeing the benefits from working together on this project.

Our Aboriginal education project is called *Making Good Tracks* – which we feel reflects the importance of working together for the benefit of present and future generations. A major focus of this project is to establish a Voluntary Aboriginal Self-Identification Policy. The goal of this policy is to collect accurate data in order to track student progress and help us evaluate the effectiveness our new student success initiatives.

## LOOKING AHEAD

We look forward to the many opportunities that this project will offer our school communities. Studies show that the most effective schools are ones that recognize Aboriginal cultures, identity, values and needs, while challenging students to acquire the skills necessary to succeed in life. As we plan for the future, we invite you to attend one of the community consultation events that we have planned, or call to arrange a group presentation or one-on-one interview. Your input is important as we work together *Making Good Tracks*.

