

**First Nations Education Initiative  
Premier Gordon Campbell:  
July 5, 2006**

*Check Against Delivery*

Thank you all for being here today.

I want to start with a thank you to the Elders and the Chiefs who have kept the light and the torch of aboriginal culture and history in stories, burning across our province's history.

Today as we think of what we're accomplishing, I think it's a time for us to look back, as well as to look forward.

I want to say thank you once again to the Squamish First Nation for welcoming us to their lands, for welcoming us to their school, for the leadership that they have shown across the province, and for working together in the community to build a stronger future for all of us.

Today as we sit here in this incredible place, we are guarded over by two mountains above us, Two Sisters, who look down across this great expanse of ocean and valley and said that they wanted to remind us all to live in harmony and peace. I think that education and understanding is the beginning of harmony and peace.

Today we celebrate because of the leadership of the National Indian Brotherhood back in 1972, and equally because of a generation of people who have worked together and strived to bring this day to fruition. I want to say thank you to Nathan Matthews of the Simpcw First Nation. I want to say thank you to Edward John of the Tl'azt'en Nation, and to all of the people who worked so hard to bring this day to its conclusion.

This is a conclusion of the past. It is the opening of the future.

I want to pay a special tribute to the federal Minister of Indian and Northern Development, Jim Prentice. I first met Minister Prentice just a few weeks ago when he took on his responsibilities. He said to me that his primary goal in the short term was to open educational opportunities for first nations across British Columbia. He understood that to do that, we'd have to recognize first nations' culture, we'd have to celebrate first nations' language, we'd have to share first nations' stories with young first nations students, and we'd have to allow first nations to lead us forward in educational development — to use Chief John's words: "in educational excellence" — because in the past we've failed young first nations students.

The first thing we have to do is look at building an even brighter and stronger, more positive, more constructive future. Minister Prentice recognized that; he set to work on that. Because of his work and his leadership, we are here today watching a new initiative

of educational opportunity to young first nations and aboriginal people across our province and, eventually, across our country.

I'm pleased to be here today with my colleagues Shirley Bond and Tom Christensen, especially pleased because this is not the first effort we have made in expanding educational opportunities. Just last month on National Aboriginal Day we signed two enhancement agreements to provide programs in aboriginal culture and heritage. To date, we have 28 agreements designed to help aboriginal students reach the highest rank of academic achievement.

But equally importantly, together and hopefully as a province with our first nations leadership, we will build a sense of aboriginal history, aboriginal culture, and the aboriginal experience in this province that we all celebrate as a defining feature of our province.

I stand here today, speaking to you before Chief Gibby Jacob of the Squamish First Nation. Chief Jacob is a great ambassador for the Squamish people. He shares their stories, he shares their strength, he shares their history, and he shares their vision of the future.

Today we look to the future. We look to young first nations kids like Connor who is a brilliant young lad, I understand. We look to the opportunities in the future that Benjamin will be deciding for himself. He'll decide that on a foundation of understanding, of strength, of confidence of his first nation, of who he is, where he's come from, why he is here, and of what he would like to do.

This agreement is meant to open the doors of dreams for young first nations people across our province. It says one thing that is critically important: we will be guided by first nations. The curricula that will be developed will be the work of and for first nations. We will teach first nations' language; we will revitalize them because they are an important part of what our province is and what our province can be in the future.

So today is a day of celebration and a day of thanks. To the Elders and the Chiefs who came before, thank you.

To the people who have worked for the last generation bringing us to this moment so that we can sign these agreements, thank you.

To all of those who are here today to witness these agreements, who pick-up the torch, who say "we will pass the torch of excellence in educational opportunity to every aboriginal student across this province, one by one by one", thank you.

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