Office of the Commissioner of
INDIGENOUS
LANGUAGES

Fluency and Immersion Teacher Education Roadmap

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Acknowledgements

> “The cradle of our spirit is in our languages”
>
> *– Commissioner Ronald E. Ignace*

The Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages would like to acknowledge all the language champions who shared their stories, teachings, and lived experience, often drawn from a lifetime of learning and who continue to bring language revitalization to the forefront. We admire their tireless efforts, even in moments when they felt unheard, under-resourced, or asked to do more than systems were willing to support.

Much of the work that has sustained Indigenous languages up to this point has been carried forward without recognition, stable funding, or long-term institutional backing. It has happened in homes and classrooms, on the land and on the water, in community gatherings, and in everyday conversations. Language champions have taken on many roles: teaching and mentoring, translating, developing curriculum, conducting community-led research on what works, and writing proposals just to keep programs going. Many language champions also work to drive transformative change, navigating institutions that were designed in a time when Indigenous languages were not envisioned to exist. They have carried these responsibilities while balancing family, other work, and heavy expectations, and some have even set aside their own learning to support others. Despite these challenges, they continued.

The Commission would also like to acknowledge the kindness, guidance, and strength of Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and helpers who carry and support language revitalization throughout their journeys. They remind us to care for one another while doing this heart work, because it can be demanding and at times, heavy. They remind us that the way forward is relational, rooted in spirit, responsibility, and the teachings that come through story, song, and land-based practice. Their guidance helps ensure that language revitalization is carried with respect and in a good way.

Finally, the Commission acknowledges the many unrecognized leaders, grassroots organizations, community-based programs, and Indigenous-led organizations who have been doing this work for generations and who continue to do it today. This Roadmap has been developed based on the research led by the Commission, as well as meetings and language gatherings hosted by the Commission, all of which identified the need for fluent and proficient speakers, more effective immersion approaches, and the need for more teachers. It is offered with humility, as one step alongside a much larger movement. It exists because language champions have never stopped carrying the spirit of their languages forward, and because so many have made space for others to follow.

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Executive Summary - The North Star

> "Fluency and immersion teacher training is the Achilles heel that will prompt transformative change"
>
> *– Commissioner Ronald E. Ignace*

Across the country, Indigenous Peoples are standing up their languages in their rightful places on their homelands. Each word spoken in classrooms, in homes, and on the land reconnects a generation to their ancestors and to the future. Language carries relationships, governance, and distinct worldviews. It connects people to places, each other, and their responsibilities.

The Commission has heard from Indigenous Peoples across Canada that the North Star is clear: to centre the creation of accredited and certified immersion teachers as the foundation for producing as many fluent and proficient Indigenous language speakers as possible, across all ages and generations.

Fluency and proficiency are the heartbeat of language revitalization. Without fluent and proficient speakers, there can be no teachers; without teachers, there can be no new fluent and proficient speakers. This Roadmap answers an urgent call to increase both and to rebuild the circle of learning that colonial systems worked to break.

For more than a century, education in Canada was used as a tool of erasure. Indigenous languages were silenced in schools, forbidden in classrooms, and Indigenous children were punished for speaking them. Those policies failed in destroying our languages but left deep gaps in the systems that shape how education works today.

Now, as Indigenous Peoples reclaim their languages, they face a paradox: **Indigenous languages are still not meaningfully implemented as teachable subjects within provincial and territorial education systems**. Although Indigenous languages can be taught as subjects in some places, they are implemented unevenly and inconsistently. Furthermore, the goal is for Indigenous languages to be taught through fully immersive methodologies. In order for them to be meaningfully teachable subjects, Indigenous languages must be on equal footing with other subjects and Indigenous language educators must be equal to all other teachers. This is a critical step in moving towards teaching all subjects in Indigenous languages through immersion approaches.

While there are over 100 accredited Indigenous language programs offered through recognized post-secondary institutions across Canada, there is a gap in terms of Indigenous language immersion teacher training programs, particularly degree programs that qualify graduates for teacher certification. This context provides an overview of current barriers, which have limited Indigenous languages from becoming meaningfully teachable subjects in Canada.

The result is a generation of learners eager to speak their languages, with too few immersion teachers available to support them. This leads to Indigenous Peoples who are unable to exercise their right to access education in their own languages.

And yet, across the country, momentum is building. In Manitoba, Nunavut, British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, and beyond, communities are building immersion programs, training teachers, and redefining what "accreditation" means. They are *Walking on Two Legs*, grounded in Indigenous Knowledges, while adapting Western systems to better serve Indigenous-led priorities. Language champions across the country are demonstrating how fluency and proficiency can be achieved when learners are taught ***in*** the language, not just ***about*** the language. We are seeing that **immersion is the condition that creates speakers, and building these pathways requires a coordinated whole-of-Canada approach**.

Building of the Roadmap

In 2024, the Commission completed two reports titled *Existing Pathways to Indigenous Language Immersion Teacher Training - A Backgrounder* and *Laying the Groundwork for the Fluency and Immersion Teacher Education Roadmap - An Environmental and Literature Review* to gain a better understanding of fluency, proficiency, and immersion teacher education initiatives in Canada. These reports align with what the Commission heard through its language gatherings across the country. The message was clear: immersion is the most effective method for language teaching and learning, but there are no clear, accredited pathways for Indigenous language immersion teachers. The Commission also heard from Indigenous Peoples across Canada that without fluent, proficient teachers, we cannot create fluent and proficient speakers.

In 2025, the Commission invited language champions across Canada to help lay the foundation for this Roadmap. Between June and December, the engagement process included four gatherings, held both in person and virtually, alongside one-on-one conversations with the language champions. This work supported shared learning and clarified the conditions needed to strengthen fluency, proficiency, and Indigenous language immersion teacher education pathways across Canada.

The *Fluency and Immersion Teacher Education Roadmap* focuses on Indigenous language immersion as the most effective and proven approach to creating fluent and proficient speakers. Research and analysis completed on behalf of the Commission by Dr. Heather Bliss, titled *Towards a Roadmap for Indigenous Language Immersion Teacher Training*, together with the lived experiences of language champions across the country, consistently point to the same conclusion: immersion builds the depth, confidence, and the cultural grounding speakers need to carry language forward. Non-immersive settings, isolated vocabulary instruction, or limited exposure do not produce the fluency nor proficiency required to sustain vital languages across generations. Transformative change must take place now in the current education systems to create and sustain a base of fluent and proficient immersion teachers. Too many Indigenous languages are in a fragile state, at risk of disappearing within a generation or two. This is not a distant concern or problem; it is urgent.

The Roadmap is scoped around this pressing national challenge: the shortage of Indigenous language immersion teachers. Across the country, Indigenous Peoples are ready and learners are eager, yet the systems needed to support and recognize people to teach immersion remain limited and uneven.

The Commission's role in this initiative is threefold:

- **Convener:** Bringing together language champions, educators, Elders, youth, partners, governments, and institutions so we can align efforts, learn from one another, and build strong pathways for immersion teacher education.
- **Bridge Builder:** Navigating between Indigenous-led visions and provincial, territorial, and federal systems, helping institutions adapt to support rather than direct language revitalization.
- **Champion:** Working to advance legislative, systems, and pedagogical changes, so Indigenous languages are fully recognized, valued, and resourced as languages of instruction.

This Roadmap builds upon years of listening, dialogues, and collaboration across the country. It reflects what Indigenous Peoples have already built and envisioned and what policy makers, governments, and institutions must now make possible. It offers a shared vision for how immersion teacher education can become the backbone of language revitalization in Canada: grounded in Indigenous Knowledges, sustained by policy, and guided by the shared goal of creating new speakers and accredited, certified teachers.

At a Glance: Recommendations

ACTION 1.1

Enable immersion through legislation

Amend provincial and territorial education and school acts to formally recognize Indigenous languages as languages of instruction and enable immersion language education.

ACTION 1.2

Stabilize long-term, core funding

Establish long-term, sustainable, and adequate funding for immersion programs to prevent disruptions that threaten language continuity. This includes support for infrastructure, Indigenous-led community organizations, land-based learning, and emergency measures for languages most at risk.

ACTION 1.3

Increased access to educational data from public schools

Identify areas of need in Indigenous language instruction, support communities in advancing those needs, and monitor progress.

ACTION 2.1

Recognize Indigenous-led institutions as certifying bodies

Formally recognize Indigenous-led institutes and organizations as certifying authorities and establish co-leadership models with universities and colleges to deliver immersion teacher education and accreditation systems grounded in Indigenous worldviews and pedagogies.

ACTION 2.2

Streamline and ladder credential pathways

Develop laddered and stackable credential models, including micro-credentials, certificates, diplomas, and degrees, to enable flexible, accelerated routes to certification that reflect immersion learning trajectories and recognize prior learning and fluency.

ACTION 3.1

Advance pay equity and teacher mobility

Develop interprovincial and territorial partnerships and channels for Indigenous immersion teacher certification to support teacher mobility across regions and ensure equitable compensation and recognition for immersion teachers.

ACTION 3.2

Build and sustain teacher cohorts

Establish and support immersion teacher cohorts that strengthen professional development, fluency, mentorship, and retention through sustained connection to community, colleagues, and Elders.

Commission Overview

The Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages was established in 2021 to **promote and champion Indigenous languages and to support Indigenous Peoples across Canada in reclaiming, revitalizing, maintaining, and strengthening their languages.**

Indigenous Peoples are at the centre of the Commission's work, helping to make visible the systemic barriers that continue to limit the revitalization of Indigenous languages, and advancing the conditions needed for them to thrive. Grounded in the *Indigenous Languages Act* (the Act), the Commission is guided by the understanding that language revitalization is inseparable from self-determination, education, and well-being. This Roadmap is an illustration of what it means to implement the Act meaningfully. Turning recognition into practice through community-led models, flexible support, and sustained collaboration across jurisdictions are clear examples of how the Act can be purposeful.

The Commission's mandate aligns with *Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action* on Indigenous languages rights, including the appointment of an Indigenous Languages Commissioner,[1] as well as global commitments to Indigenous languages rights. This fundamentally includes the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP),[2] which affirms Indigenous Peoples' rights to revitalize, use, develop, and transmit their languages to future generations, and to establish and control educational systems that teach in Indigenous languages. The United Nations' International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022–2032) further calls on States to move beyond recognition and toward sustained, systemic action.[3]

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1 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. 2015. *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action.*

2 Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. 2007. *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.*

3 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. 2021. *Global Action Plan of the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (2022-2032).*

Laying the Foundation

Structural Imbalance in Teacher Immersion Education Pathways

There is an imperative need for a comprehensive educational approach that prioritizes the instruction in Indigenous languages, spanning from early childhood through adulthood.[4] This approach must accommodate diverse educational environments such as public schools, community schools, independent schools, and community learning programs. In contrast to English or French, Indigenous languages in Canada are not funded or recognized nationally as official languages despite being unique to this land and not being taught elsewhere globally.

As Indigenous Peoples reclaim their languages, they face a challenge: **Indigenous languages are still not meaningfully implemented as teachable subjects** within provincial and territorial education systems across the country. This is a fundamental gap; having Indigenous languages evenly implemented as teachable subjects is an important step towards being able to teach all subjects in Indigenous languages through immersion methods. In order for them to be meaningfully teachable subjects, Indigenous languages must be on equal footing with other subjects and Indigenous language educators must be equal to all other teachers.

Public schools have an important role in language acquisition. They are connected to larger efforts of language revitalization and can lead in taking ownership, of improving the status, and the use of languages in communities.

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4 Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages. 2024. *Indigenous Languages: Teacher Education and Accreditation.*

Defining Immersion Education

Immersion is a method of instruction in which a curriculum is delivered through the medium of a language that is not the first language of the students.[5] It is fundamentally different from language education, in which a language is taught as a subject within a larger curriculum.[6] Immersion education has long been recognized as an effective strategy for Indigenous language maintenance or revitalization, with differing formal definitions for what constitutes Indigenous language immersion in education. Immersion education is also distinct from bilingual education, in which some of the curriculum is delivered in one language and some in another (e.g. switching between English and French).

Meaningful Teachable Subjects in Practice

For most subjects, systems provide:

- Recognized teacher education programs
- Credentialing bodies and standards
- Stable employment and compensation
- Professional learning and mentorship
- Producing fluent and proficient speakers

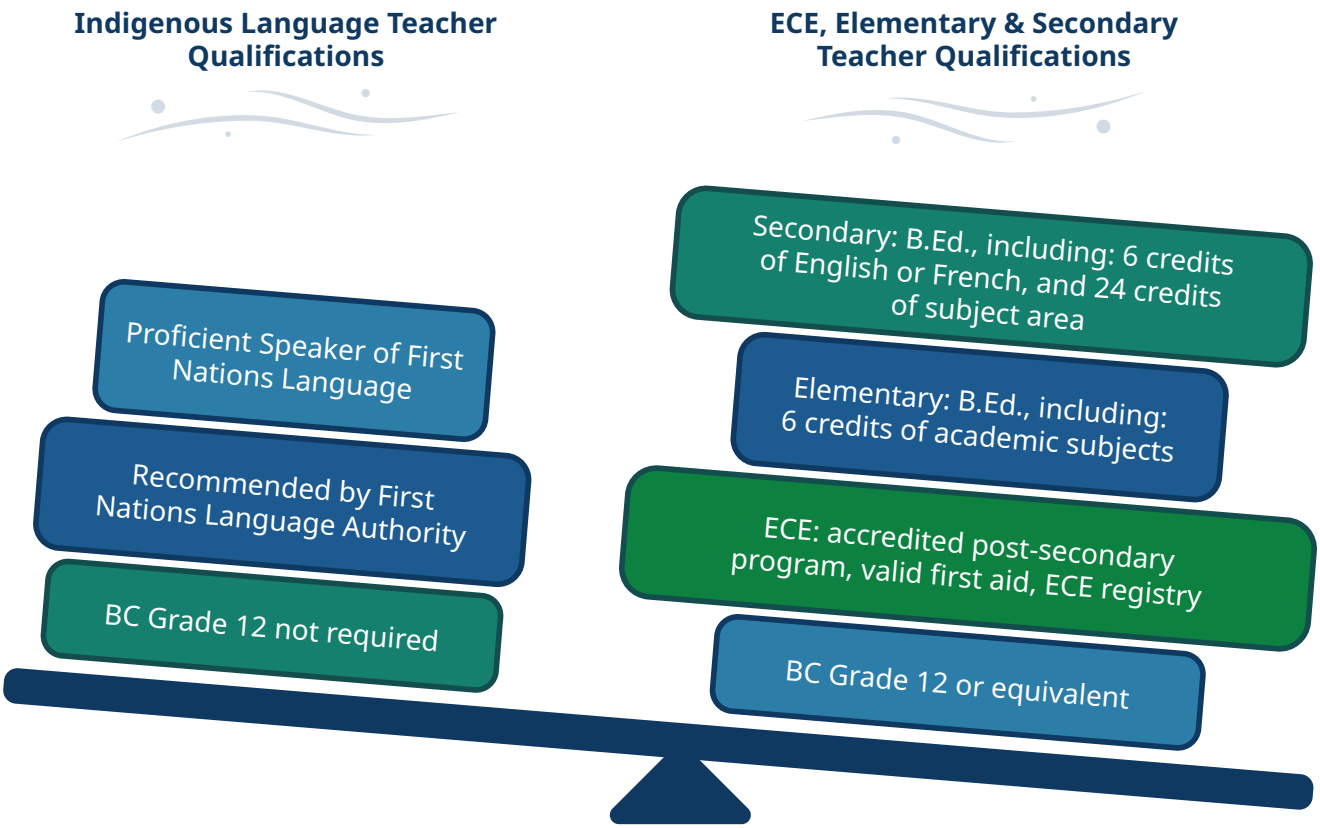
For Indigenous language immersion teachers, these elements are often missing or fragmented, placing the burden on individuals rather than systems.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

This image illustrates a structural imbalance, not a lack of expertise. Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary teachers benefit from established training and credential pathways, while Indigenous language immersion teacher education has limited formal options. Systemic change is needed to create equitable pathways that reflect the value and complexity of Indigenous language teaching.

Figure 1. Qualifications for Indigenous Language Teachers[7]



This illustration is based on examples from a single province and is intended to be illustrative. Conditions, pathways, and recognition vary across jurisdictions.

Teacher certification standards, curriculum frameworks, and funding formulas continue to centre English and French, leaving Indigenous languages to rely on short-term grants, volunteer instructors, or ad hoc community programs to survive.

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7 Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages. 2023. *Reshaping The Landscape of Indigenous Language Teacher Programs.*

Roadmap Objectives

This Roadmap is the first step towards illustrating this inequity and collectively enabling transformative changes across all systems and jurisdictions. It is an introductory framework to inspire hope that with collective efforts, fluency and proficiency pathways can be achieved.

With the objective of enhancing fluency and immersion teacher education initiatives across Canada, this Roadmap calls for us to:

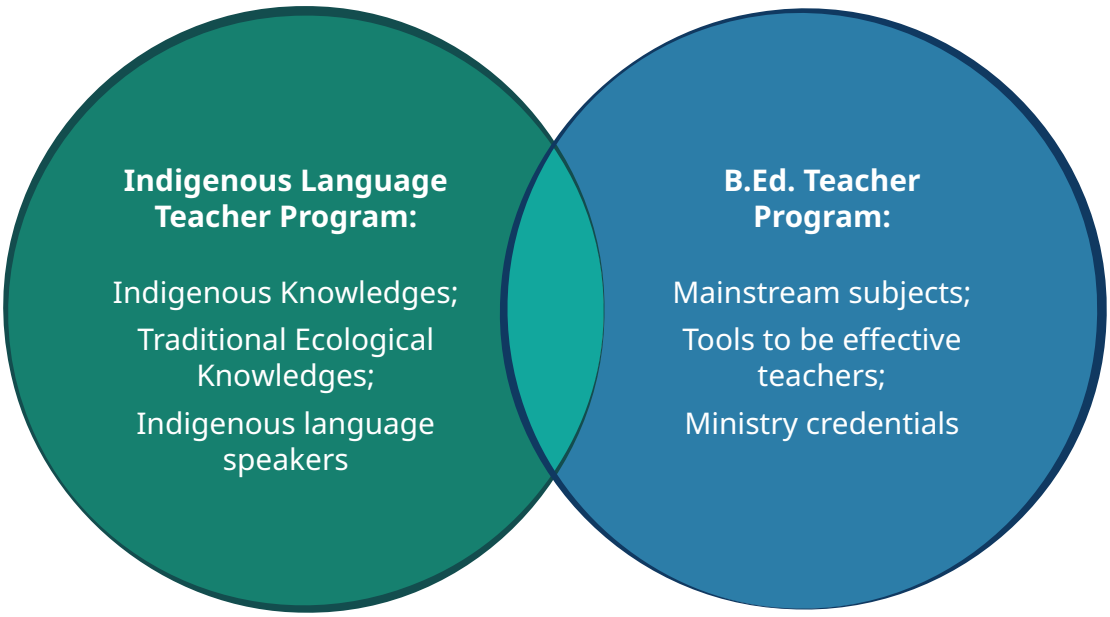
1. **Open the Pathway** into immersion teacher education through coordinated action in building legislative, policy, and funding mechanisms that will enable equal footing for Indigenous languages to thrive. To do so, we must:

    - Amend provincial and territorial education and school acts to formally recognize Indigenous languages as languages of instruction and enable immersion language education.
    - Establish long-term, sustainable, and adequate funding for immersion programs to prevent disruptions that threaten language continuity. This includes support for infrastructure, Indigenous-led community organizations, land-based learning, and emergency measures for languages most at risk.

2. **Build Recognition and Certification** to ensure immersion teacher education pathways lead to meaningful recognition and long-term sustainability. To do so we must:

    - Formally recognize Indigenous-led institutes and organizations as certifying authorities; and establish co-leadership models with universities and colleges to deliver immersion teacher education and accreditation systems grounded in Indigenous worldviews and pedagogies.
    - Develop laddered and stackable credential models, including micro-credentials, certificates, diplomas, and degrees, to enable flexible, accelerated routes to certification that reflect immersion learning trajectories and recognize prior learning and fluency.

Figure 2. Merging Indigenous Language Teacher & B. Ed Programs[8]

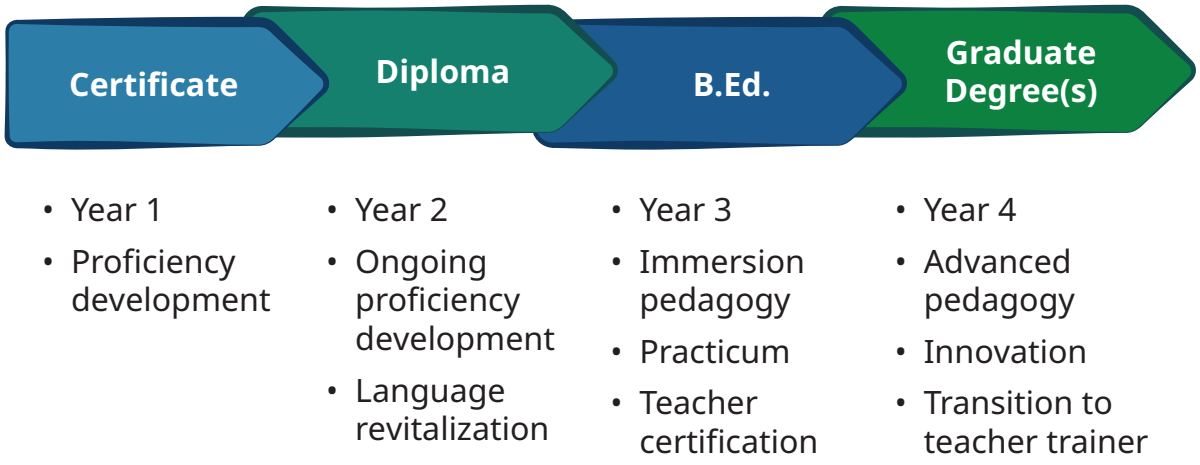


8 Ibid.

3. **Support Thriving Immersion Teacher Careers** to retain immersion teachers

   - Develop interprovincial and territorial partnerships and channels to support teacher mobility across regions and ensure equitable compensation and recognition for immersion teachers.
   - Establish and support immersion teacher cohorts that strengthen professional development, fluency, mentorship, and retention through sustained connection to culture, community, colleagues, and Elders.

Figure 3. Program laddering structure for Indigenous language immersion teacher training[9]



This Roadmap brings forward collective wisdom. It reflects the voices of Elders, teachers, and learners who remind us: **revitalizing language is not only about identity and belonging, but also a critical public policy priority, a determinant of health and economic well-being, and a pathway toward reconciliation.** Where Indigenous Knowledges and languages were once denied and denigrated, a shift towards recognition and respect is taking hold, led by Indigenous Peoples. This Roadmap is offered with humility, knowing the work is ongoing, and the path will continue to be shaped by those who have never stopped speaking, teaching, and advocating.

This journey requires direction, cooperation, and courage. We are moving towards a future where Indigenous languages are celebrated, lived, taught, spoken, and heard every day in schools, homes, and across the country.

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9 Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages. 2025. *Laying the Groundwork for the Fluency and Immersion Teacher Education Roadmap - An Environmental and Literature Review.*

Guiding Values and Shared Principles

Walking on Two Legs Framework

The foundation of this work rests on the principle of *Walking on Two Legs*, an action-oriented framework that describes the need to balance Indigenous Knowledge systems with the practical structures of Western education. It affirms Indigenous Knowledges as complete, living systems, while positioning Western systems as tools that can support Indigenous priorities. At its core, it is an ethic of stewardship: relational, land-based, and guided by responsibilities to past, present, and future generations. *Walking on Two Legs* calls institutions to move with humility, centering respect, reciprocity, and responsibility as the conditions for meaningful decisions and action.

Lifelong Learning, Humility, and Collective Effort

Language learning is a lifelong journey, shaped by many entry points, and many ways of carrying language forward. This Roadmap is offered as a starting point; it recognizes and honours the ongoing leadership of grassroots organizations, community-based programs, Indigenous-led organizations, educators, Elders, Knowledge Keepers, youth and language champions who have been sustaining and advancing Indigenous languages long before this initiative. This Roadmap is intended to support language teachers and learners at any stage of life and will continue to grow and adapt as new voices, knowledge, and teachings guide its direction.

Rooting Indigenous Knowledges

Language is inseparable from culture, ceremony, and land. In every conversation and gathering, Elders and teachers spoke about the need to root this work in Indigenous Knowledges, where teaching and learning are one act. Learning happens through observation, listening, repetition, and story; through land-based practice; and through everyday use in homes, classrooms, and gathering places. Our Elders remind us that the land is the first classroom and remains the most enduring teacher. Rooting language learning in Indigenous Knowledges keeps fluency and proficiency alive, ensuring programs grow from Indigenous worldviews.

Honouring the Knowledge Keepers

This Roadmap acknowledges the many Elders, Knowledge Keepers, language champions, and experts whose vision and persistence have carried this movement forward. They have laid the groundwork, built the teaching camps, and passed their knowledge forward so others might follow. Their guidance remains a living compass, reminding all who take up this heart work that language revitalization is both spiritual and practical, rooted in enduring teachings and alive in today's realities. Without their generosity and teaching, this Roadmap could not exist.

Investing in Youth and Emerging Speakers

Across all gatherings, champions emphasized the importance of investing in youth as the next generation of speakers, teachers, and knowledge carriers. Young people are growing up in a moment of revitalization, where identity, culture, and language are strengthening together. Creating pathways that support their fluency and proficiency from early childhood through adulthood and across generations ensures rebuilding the full circle of language transmission and that emerging speakers have the opportunity not only to learn and live in their languages but also have viable careers in teaching them. Sustained investment in youth programs, mentorship opportunities, fast-tracked teacher education pathways, and immersion environments helps build the critical mass of speakers needed to carry languages into the future.

Revitalization as Well-being and Prosperity

Strengthening Indigenous languages is not only a foundation of self-determination, but also a determinant of health, socio-economic well-being, and a strategic advantage for Canada. Communities where languages are spoken experience stronger identity, higher self-esteem, and deeper intergenerational connection. Language revitalization supports mental health, while opening pathways to education and employment grounded in Indigenous values.

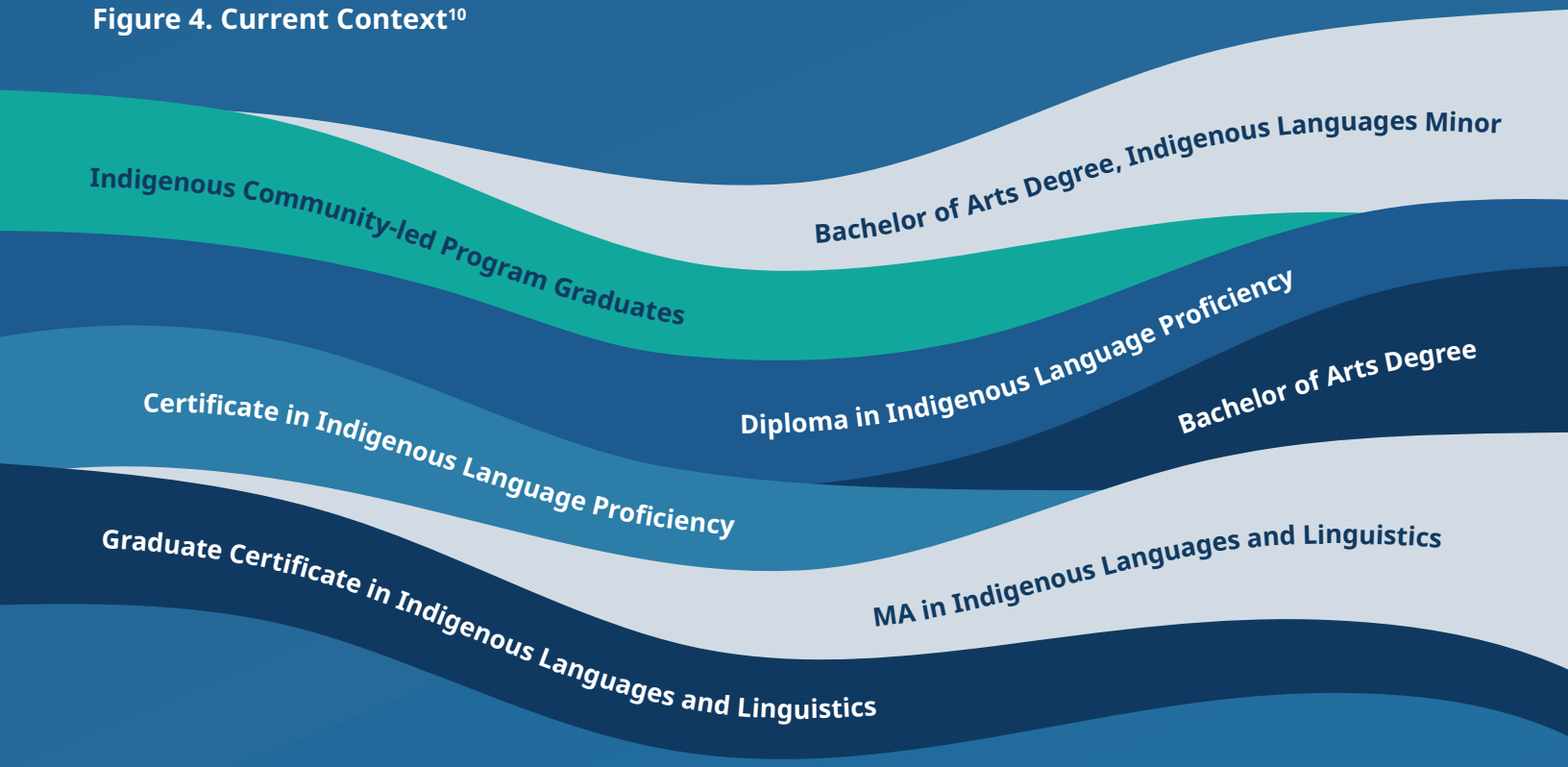
Current Landscape of Immersion Teacher Education

Less than a quarter of the Indigenous language programs offered in Canada are teacher training programs, and the majority do not lead to a degree or qualify graduates for teacher certification. Most teacher training programs are specific to teaching language-as-subject. Very few offer specialized training in immersion, however, most offer flexibility in terms of course delivery, with online, in-community, or hybrid options. It's important to note that over half of the programs don't need any base level of language proficiency for admission.

There are only 25 Indigenous language programs with a primary focus on teacher training across Canada. Of those, only eleven qualify graduates to apply for provincial or territorial teacher certification, and only four are designed for proficient speakers.

This is deeply concerning because new speakers are not being generated at a fast enough rate to address the rapidly declining number of speakers, which further endanger the state of many Indigenous languages. Furthermore, the lack of new speakers creates an over reliance on existing speakers, many of whom are Elders.

Figure 4. Current Context[10]



10 Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages. 2023. *Reshaping The Landscape of Indigenous Language Teacher Programs.*

ILLUSTRATIVE CASE STUDY

Common Expectations in Indigenous Language Teaching Positions

This case study is a composite example drawn from commonly advertised Indigenous language teaching positions across multiple jurisdictions. It is included to illustrate recurring structural challenges, not to single out any employer or program.

Role Overview

An Indigenous language teacher is hired to deliver language instruction across multiple schools and grade levels. They are also often not just teachers, but also language keepers, translators, curriculum developers, and the cultural anchors of language revitalization. As such, the well-being of teachers must be an explicit condition to prioritize retention.

Common Expectations

- Teach language classes in several schools or classrooms
- Travel between sites on a regular basis
- Develop or adapt curriculum and teaching materials
- Support classroom teachers with language activities
- Contribute to cultural events and school initiatives

What Is Often Missing

- Dedicated time for mentorship with fluent speakers or Elders
- Protected time for the teacher's own language learning or fluency development
- Access to professional learning specific to immersion or language teaching
- Clear pathways for progression, stability, or long-term recognition

Why This Matters

While these roles reflect strong interest and commitment to language revitalization, the scope of responsibility often exceeds what one person can sustain over time. Without adequate supports, compensation, and professional pathways, positions may remain unfilled or be repeatedly reposted, limiting continuity for learners and programs alike.

The programs mentioned in Figure 4 are listed in Table 1 (with an asterisk to indicate those designed for proficient speakers).[11]

Table 1. Indigenous language teacher training programs qualifying graduates for certification

Institution	Program
First Nations Technical Institute	*Teacher of an Indigenous Language Certificate
Lakehead University	*Indigenous Language Instructors Diploma
Memorial University of Newfoundland	*Bachelor of Education for Nunatsiavut
Nicola Valley Institute of Technology	Advanced Diploma in Indigenous Language Teaching
Nipissing University	*Teacher of Indigenous Language as a Second Language
St. Thomas University	Native Language Immersion
University College of the North	Kenanow Bachelor of Education
University of the Fraser Valley	Aboriginal Culture and Language Support Diploma
University of New Brunswick	Wabanaki Bachelor of Education
University of Regina / First Nations University	First Nations Languages Minor, Indigenous Teacher Education
University of Victoria	Bachelor of Education in Indigenous Language Revitalization

Table 1 lists the eleven Indigenous language teacher training programs that qualify graduates for teacher certification. Four additional programs provide professional development training for those who are already certified teachers, and the remaining ten programs provide training in Indigenous language education, but do not qualify graduates to be certified as teachers. Nearly half of the teacher training programs provide students with practicum opportunities.[12] Even though graduates of some of these programs go on to teach in education settings, very few focus primarily on immersion.[13]

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11 Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages. 2025. *Laying the Groundwork for the Fluency and Immersion Teacher Education Roadmap - An Environmental and Literature Review.*

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

The Way Forward

Across the country, Indigenous Peoples are designing and leading language programs that bring together proficiency, fluency, pedagogy, and cultural integrity, grounded in relationship to land, communities, and lineage. Each represents a distinct pathway shaped by local contexts, community priorities, and the vitality of the language itself. While diverse in form, these pathways share a commitment to immersion and fluency, and to preparing new teachers in ways that honour how language is lived, carried, and passed on.

However, the systems required to recognize, sustain, and scale these pathways have not kept pace. Without the meaningful recognition and implementation of Indigenous languages as teachable subjects on equal footing with other subjects, structural supports such as accreditation, pay equity, and long-term sustainability remain limited or uneven.

Immersion teacher education is not new in Canada. French-language education demonstrates how sustained policy, legislation, and public investment can support language transmission at scale through recognized certification pathways, dedicated funding, and institutional infrastructure.

Indigenous languages, however, continue to operate within a fragmented education landscape and immersion teacher education pathways are limited. Community-led programs, Indigenous institutes, and post-secondary partners are doing vital work to sustain immersion, often without stable policy frameworks, long-term funding, coordinated certification systems, or equitable compensation. As a result, many initiatives rely on a small number of fluent and proficient speakers as well as significant individual efforts to continue.

Language champions across the country have shown what supports are required for fluency, proficiency, and immersion teaching: community authority, immersion-first pedagogy, and pathways that grow speakers and teachers together. The next step is strengthening the conditions that allow these efforts to be recognized, supported, and sustained over time.

Progress depends on coordinated actions across the country. Governments, Indigenous-led organizations, post-secondary institutions, and education systems each hold responsibility for opening access, strengthening recognition and certification, and supporting long-term immersion teaching careers. To move from aspiration to implementation, this Roadmap focuses on three interconnected areas: **opening pathways into immersion teacher education, strengthening recognition and certification, and supporting thriving immersion teacher careers.**

1. Open the Pathway

Indigenous languages must be uplifted and recognized meaningfully as teachable subjects within Canada's education systems. Opening the pathway to fluency, proficiency, and immersion teacher education requires coordinated institutional supports and meaningful legislative changes that recognize, respect, and enable Indigenous-led approaches.

Opening the pathway means creating access for people at different starting points, including:

- Fluent and proficient speakers without formal education credentials, including first language and highly proficient speakers who carry the language through community learning, mentorship, or lived experiences.
- Community-based immersion learners, building fluency and proficiency through land-based, intergenerational, and culturally grounded programs.
- Partnership-based learners, engaging with post-secondary institutions, and Indigenous-led institutes that adapt accreditation, timelines, and pedagogy in response to community leadership.
- Educators with teaching credentials, but limited fluency and proficiency, including those holding Bachelor of Education degrees, who are seeking immersive pathways to develop language proficiency and immersion pedagogy as an adult.

Together, these entry points reflect the diversity of journeys into immersion teaching and frame the scope of this Roadmap as a shared effort to strengthen the conditions that allow those pathways to take root and grow.

Calls to Action

To open pathways into immersion teacher education, coordinated action is required at all levels to build legislative, policy, and funding mechanisms that position Indigenous languages on equal footing.

1.1 Enable immersion through legislation and create more immersion teacher education programs

Amend provincial and territorial education and school acts to formally recognize Indigenous languages as languages of instruction and enable immersion language education.

1.2 Stabilize long-term, core funding

Establish long-term, sustainable, and adequate funding for immersion programs to prevent disruptions that threaten language continuity. This includes support for infrastructure, Indigenous-led community organizations, and land-based learning, so that all Indigenous languages in Canada are safe, vibrant, and thriving.

1.3 Increased access to educational data from public schools

To help identify areas of need in Indigenous language instruction, support communities in advancing those needs, and monitor progress.

Who can take action:

- Indigenous Peoples, governments, governing bodies, and organizations
- Premiers and Ministers of Education
- Provincial and Territorial governments
- Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC)
- Deans of Education and post-secondary leadership

Where we can all make a difference:

- Vote, advocate, and raise awareness to support legislative changes.

SPOTLIGHT

Midwest Indigenous Immersion Network

Midwest Indigenous Immersion Network (MIIN) supports Ojibwe language revitalization by coordinating strategic initiatives, developing curriculum and materials, collecting educational data, and facilitating professional development.

Formed in 2020 and recognized in 2021, the network works with immersion schools, community groups, and two university partners. One program is in Wisconsin offering immersion-based upper-year programs and one in Minnesota focused on preparing Ojibwe language teachers to address a major shortage of licensed, fluent educators. With fewer than 1% of Ojibwe students in immersion, MIIN aims to strengthen both immersion pathways and broader language learning opportunities.

In February 2026, MIIN conducted its second bi-annual survey of K-12 public schools and Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) schools in Minnesota for the 2024- 2025 school year.[14] The purpose of this survey was to learn more about American Indian language teachers, curriculum, and instruction in Minnesota schools. The ultimate goal of the survey is to increase the quantity and quality of American Indian language instruction available to Minnesota's American Indian students and beyond.

Their long-term vision emphasizes stronger partnerships, political alignment across jurisdictions, legislative protections, and sustainable funding, inspired by successful models like Māori and Hawaiian language revitalization.

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14 Midwest Indigenous Immersion Network. February 2026. *American Indian Language Instruction Report.*

SPOTLIGHT

Onkwawenna Kentyohkwa

Onkwawenna Kentyohkwa is a community-based organization that teaches Kanyen'keha (the Mohawk language) to adults on the Six Nations Grand River Territory. The program is built around the philosophy of creating high-level speakers through comprehensive, root-word–based language instruction. The program focuses on adult learners, particularly English-dominant adults, to rebuild speaker populations in communities where fluent Elders have passed, and intergenerational transmission has been broken.

Over the span of a few decades, Kanyen'keha has been revitalized and strengthened substantially; the program has produced dozens of fluent speakers throughout the duration of its two-year program. The program emphasizes that immersion must mean complete use of the language at all times, and that effective revitalization requires clear, measurable proficiency goals, long-term program structures, and assessment systems such as ACTFL to track student progress and program effectiveness.

An ideal revitalization scenario is grounded in well-defined goals, Indigenous-led curriculum and assessment systems, adequate funding for both teachers and adult learners, and community authority over certification, dialect decisions, and teaching requirements. Even communities unable to implement full immersion can benefit from adopting goal-oriented programming, grammatically scaffolded curricula, and performance-based assessments.

SPOTLIGHT

Sníchim Foundation and the Yellow House

Charlene George (S7atsáliya) and Swu7wu Billy (Cheǹáx̱wtn), Language Directors at the Sníchim Foundation, highlighted the adult immersion program that runs at the Yellow House (Tsleil-Waututh Nation partnership), in collaboration with Simon Fraser University's Indigenous Languages Program.

The program incorporates the "Where Are Your Keys" method of immersion, such as cooking-based language practice, conversational immersion sprints, and narrative sequencing exercises. This method builds fluency through meaningful, everyday interactions and is an effective strategy for creating speakers quickly.

Their model intentionally trains learners as future teachers from day one, through peer-teaching activities, lesson swaps, and real-time problem-solving, while simultaneously strengthening their own fluency and proficiency. Sníchim Foundation has also developed its own Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) tool to assess learners, track progress, and inform instruction.

SPOTLIGHT

Government of Manitoba

In Manitoba, the pathway from language learning to teaching is being intentionally opened at the post-secondary level. The Government of Manitoba has made significant commitments to the revitalization and protection of Indigenous languages through targeted post-secondary investments and legislative reform. With more than $4.5 million in provincial investment, new Indigenous language immersion degree programs have launched at the University of Winnipeg and University College of the North.[15]

These programs focus on full immersion in Anishinaabemowin (Ojibwe) and Ininimowin (Swampy Cree), supporting second-language learners to become fluent and proficient speakers while creating a direct pathway into teacher certification, strengthening the long-term capacity of Indigenous language instruction in Manitoba.

Legislatively, Manitoba has amended *The Public Schools Act* through The Public Schools Amendment Act (Indigenous Languages of Instruction). This amendment enables Indigenous languages to be used as languages of instruction within Manitoba's K–12 public school system, creating the legal framework necessary to support Indigenous language immersion and instruction in public schools. By aligning immersion pedagogy, degree credentials, and provincial policy, Manitoba is demonstrating how governments and institutions can work together to build sustained, scalable routes into Indigenous language teaching rooted in fluency and proficiency.

Beyond education, Manitoba has taken steps to increase the visibility and use of Indigenous languages within government. In March 2025, the province launched a pilot initiative to translate Hansard, the official record of legislative debates and proceedings, into Indigenous languages, beginning with Anishinaabemowin, with the intent to expand to additional Indigenous languages used in Manitoba. This initiative supports language revitalization, creates new Indigenous language resources, and affirms the role of Indigenous languages in public life and governance.

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15 Province of Manitoba. October 20, 2025. *Manitoba Protects Indigenous Languages with New Teaching Degree Programs.*

2. Build Recognition and Certification

Opening pathways into immersion teacher education is only the first step. For these pathways to be viable and sustainable, immersion teachers and programs must be formally recognized and certified in ways that reflect Indigenous worldviews, self-determination, and lived fluency and proficiency. Recognition and certification systems shape who is allowed to teach, how teachers are compensated, and whether immersion programs are treated as legitimate and enduring parts of education systems.

Across Canada, many immersion teachers are already doing the work of teaching and sustaining languages, often without credentials that are recognized by provincial and territorial systems. In some cases, certification frameworks privilege Western pedagogical models or academic timelines that do not align with immersion learning or community-based language transmission. As a result, fluent and proficient speakers as well as emerging teachers may be excluded, under-recognized, or required to navigate lengthy and misaligned pathways to gain recognition for work they are already doing.

Language champions and institutions working in partnership have demonstrated that recognition and certification can be adapted to serve language revitalization rather than constraining it. Where Indigenous-led institutions are recognized as certifying authorities, and where universities and colleges work in co-leadership roles, certification pathways become more accessible, culturally grounded, and responsive to priorities of Indigenous Peoples. These approaches make it possible to recognize fluency and proficiency, immersion pedagogy, and teaching capacity without sacrificing Indigenous control or integrity.

Calls to Action

To ensure immersion teacher education pathways lead to meaningful recognition and long-term sustainability, coordinated action is required to adapt certification systems and credentialing models. **To do so, we must:**

2.1 Recognize Indigenous-led institutions as certifying bodies

Formally recognize Indigenous-led institutes and organizations as certifying authorities and establish co-leadership models with universities and colleges to deliver immersion teacher education and accreditation systems grounded in Indigenous worldviews and pedagogies.

2.2 Streamline and ladder credential pathways

Develop laddered and stackable credential models, including micro-credentials, certificates, diplomas, and degrees, to enable flexible, accelerated routes to certification that reflect immersion learning trajectories and recognize prior learning and fluency.

This includes the need for institutional flexibility in admissions and laddering, as well as the need for dedicated Indigenous immersion streams within existing programs.

Who can take action:

- Provincial and territorial governments
- Ministries and Departments of Education
- Teacher certification bodies and regulatory authorities
- Universities, colleges, and Indigenous-led institutes
- Deans of Education and academic senates

Where we can all make a difference:

- Advocate for certification systems that recognize Indigenous-led education, self-determination, and immersion-based fluency.

SPOTLIGHT

Simon Fraser University

Dr. Marianne Ignace, Director of the Indigenous Languages Program and First Nations Language Centre at Simon Fraser University (SFU), outlines a community-based model for Indigenous language revitalization built through partnerships with 12–15 First Nations across British Columbia and the Yukon, where all language programming is delivered locally rather than on campus.

Since 2016, many partner communities have increasingly used SFU's certificate and diploma programs to build cohorts of new speakers capable of running their own full-time, immersion-based programs. SFU currently offers a certificate, diploma, Bachelor's pathway, and Master's degree in Indigenous languages, but is not accredited to certify teachers; shifting into teacher education requires partnership with SFU's Faculty of Education to combine fluency development with a teacher-training degree pathway.

Dr. Ignace emphasized the critical role of oral proficiency assessment, describing how ACTFL's Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI) was adapted for Indigenous languages in partnership with community partners, implemented it in her programs, and later formalized training and certification with ACTFL to establish culturally grounded benchmarks. She noted, however, that assessment must be paired with healing from the harmful legacies of residential and day schools, which shape community attitudes toward evaluation.

SPOTLIGHT

First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI)

At the First Nations Technical Institute (FNTI), Indigenous-led accreditation is already creating credible pathways into regulated professions. Through the National Indigenous Accreditation Board (NIAB), Indigenous institutions have established mutual recognition with the Canadian Association for Social Work Education, enabling Indigenous-designed and accredited degrees to carry full professional legitimacy.

Building on this foundation, FNTI is advancing a Teacher of Indigenous Language professional program to support fluent and proficient speakers to become teachers and address long-standing pay equity gaps, alongside a Bachelor of Indigenous Education and flexible language learning pathways.[16] This model demonstrates that Indigenous-led certification can inform regulatory standards while preserving Indigenous authority. It also offers a viable blueprint for recognizing and credentialing immersion language teachers across Canada.

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16 First Nations Technical Institute.2026. *Teacher of an Indigenous Language.*

3. Support Thriving Immersion Teacher Careers

Opening pathways and strengthening recognition are not enough on their own. To sustain immersion education over time, teachers need support that helps them stay in the role, grow professionally, and be financially secure, regardless of where they live. Immersion teachers are often asked to carry heavy responsibilities, including teaching, curriculum development, translation, mentorship, and cultural leadership, often without equitable compensation, professional support, or long-term stability.

Supporting thriving immersion teacher careers means addressing the conditions affecting retention, well-being, and mobility. When teachers are fairly compensated, connected to peers and Elders, and able to relocate or work across regions, immersion programs are more sustainable, and language learning is easily carried across generations and places.

Calls to Action

To retain immersion teachers and strengthen long-term program stability, coordinated action is required to address pay equity, professional support, and workforce mobility. **To do so, we must:**

3.1 Advance pay equity and teacher mobility

Develop interprovincial and territorial partnerships and channels for Indigenous immersion teacher certification to enable teacher mobility across regions. This will also ensure equitable compensation and recognition for proficient and fluent immersion teachers.

3.2 Build and sustain teacher cohorts

Establish and support immersion teacher cohorts that strengthen professional development, fluency, proficiency, mentorship, and retention through sustained connection to communities, colleagues, and Elders.

3.3 Fast-track programming

Post-secondary institutions can provide fast tracked programming for adults who enter education programs and are already fluent and proficient speakers. Their training and development must be supported by post-secondary institutions, organizations, and communities through personal leave and financial incentives.

Who can take action:

- Indigenous Peoples, governments, governing bodies and organizations
- Provincial and territorial governments
- Ministries and Departments of Education
- Teacher unions and professional associations
- School boards and Indigenous education authorities
- Post-secondary institutions and Indigenous-led institutes

Where we can all make a difference:

- Support pay equity, mobility agreements, and long-term investment in immersion teachers by advocating for fair compensation and stable teaching careers in Indigenous language education.

SPOTLIGHT

Lakehead District School Board

Anika Guthrie (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Education Coordinator) and her team at the Lakehead District School Board are working with unions, regulatory bodies, and community partners in Ontario to address pay equity, accreditation, and recognition of language expertise.

The central challenge faced in this work is finding fluent speakers who are also certified teachers, so there is a need to develop alternate certification pathways for fluent speakers who lack formal degrees to build capacity for immersion programs.

To support immersion, they are building classroom-level language spaces, organizing family immersion days, and planning long-term program structures. Their vision for an ideal system includes accessible immersion spaces, clear language learning pathways from early years to university, stronger knowledge-sharing networks, and cross-border collaboration that reflects how Indigenous languages extend beyond jurisdictional boundaries.

Language reclamation, Indigenous pedagogies, and community-driven approaches are key to the continued success of this work.

SPOTLIGHT

University of Alberta

The University of Alberta's Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (ATEP) is grounded in Cree values and relational pedagogy rather than direct immersion. ATEP integrates 14 Cree-based guiding principles that encourage students, many of whom study online and come from diverse Nations, to think about and reconnect with their own languages, cultures, and worldviews.

While not an immersion program, ATEP supports future teachers through a Bachelor of Education stream infused with Indigenous pedagogies, cultural grounding, and opportunities for prior learning recognition, including advanced standing for those with language experience or work as educational support staff.

Dr. Evelyn Steinhauer, Director of ATEP, emphasized that language revitalization is "more than words," stressing the emotional, cultural, and spiritual depth beneath language, which the program reinforces through community-engaged research, Elder involvement, and a forthcoming podcast exploring ATEP's guiding values.

She stressed the need for dedicated Indigenous spaces, land-based learning opportunities, and greater institutional flexibility to support Indigenous ways of teaching and being. ATEP's focus is on nurturing compassionate, grounded teachers who understand their responsibilities to students, language, and community.

A Gap That Must Be Addressed

Promising practices are emerging for entry and recognition, but far fewer examples exist where immersion teachers are consistently supported and compensated equitably over the long term.

This is the gap we must close: immersion teaching must be recognized as a viable, respected, and sustainable career. Doing so is essential to retaining teachers, strengthening immersion programs, and ensuring that language revitalization can continue for generations.

We will know we are successful when community immersion programs are stable, thriving, and Indigenous language teachers are formally recognized and compensated equitably across jurisdictions.

We will know we are successful when immersion teacher education is offered fully in Indigenous languages; when strong curriculum and teaching resources are available; and when fluent and proficient educators are supported to teach wherever they live and work.

Conditions Needed for Immersion Teacher Education to Thrive

The pathways set out in this Roadmap are grounded in a set of shared conditions that emerged consistently across engagement sessions, research, and national forums led by the Commission. These conditions reflect lived practices, collective experiences, and describe what must be in place across communities, institutions, and systems for immersion teacher education to take root, grow, and be sustained over time.

Immersion-first pedagogy

Fluency and proficiency develop when learners are taught in the language, not about the language. Immersion is the condition that creates speakers and prepares teachers to guide others toward fluency and proficiency. Effective immersion teaching requires time, continuity, and environments where the language is lived and used throughout the day.

Self-determination and leadership

Indigenous Peoples hold the authority to define their languages, fluency and proficiency expectations, and teaching practices. Pathways into immersion teaching must be shaped by community priorities, governance structures, and cultural contexts, with institutions and systems playing a supporting role.

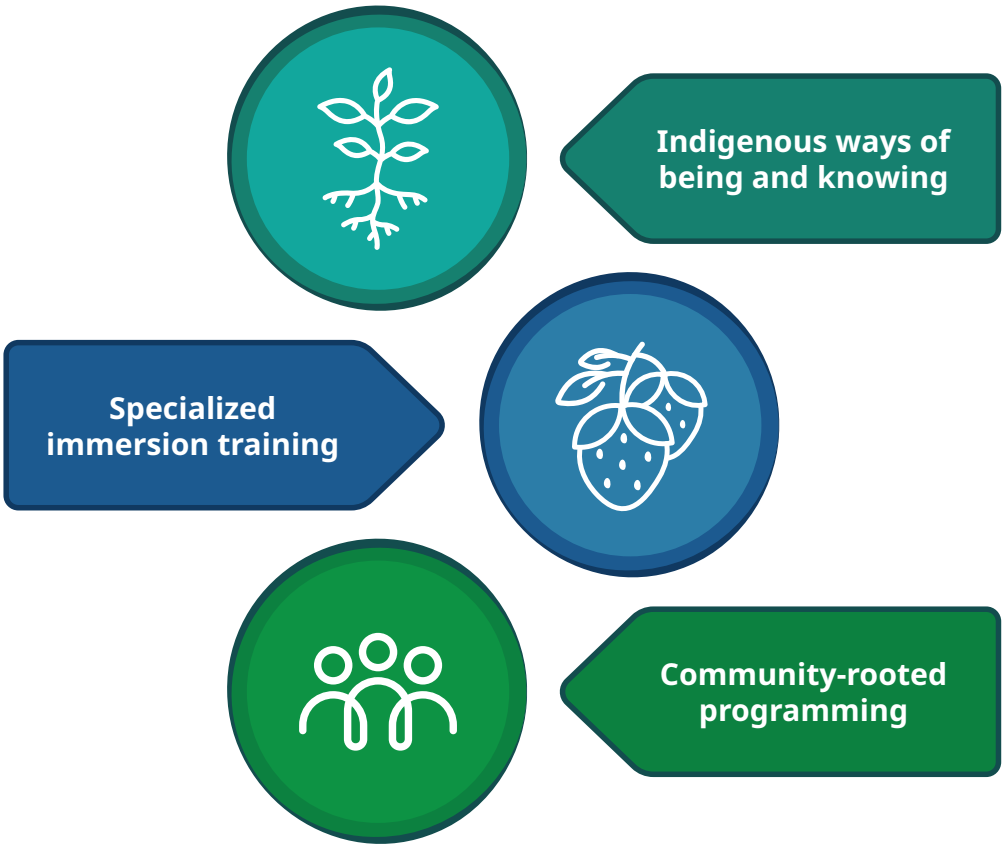
Fluency and proficiency as the outcomes

The success of immersion teacher education is measured by the growth of fluent and proficient speakers as well as language educators. Credentials, programs, and assessments are meaningful when they support this outcome and strengthen language use across generations.

Multiple pathways, multiple paces

There is no single journey into immersion teaching. Pathways must accommodate different starting points, including community-based learners, post-secondary partnerships, as well as fluent and proficient speakers seeking pedagogical support. Flexibility allows people to enter, pause, return, and advance as their language and teaching practices deepen.

Figure 5. Key Ingredients of Immersion Teacher Education[17]



Teaching the language and teaching how to teach

Immersion teachers need support in language proficiency, fluency, and immersion pedagogy. Effective pathways prepare teachers to model the language, create immersive learning environments, and guide learners in ways reflecting Indigenous approaches to teaching and learning.

17 Office of the Commissioner of Indigenous Languages. 2025. *Existing Pathways to Indigenous Language Immersion Teacher Training - A Backgrounder.*

Holistic learning rooted in land, ceremony, and well-being

Immersion teacher education must support holistic learning that engages the whole person: body, mind, heart, and spirit. Land-based learning, ceremony, and attention to well-being shape how Indigenous languages are lived, understood, and passed on. These practices help learners and teachers build fluency and proficiency through daily experiences, strengthening resilience, cultural grounding, and long-term commitment to carrying the languages forward.

Measuring fluency and proficiency

Partners with expertise in documentation, assessment, measuring fluency and proficiency, and knowledge-sharing can support this work under Indigenous leadership by contributing tools, platforms, and technical capacity. This includes organizations such as the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) and others.

Over time, shared infrastructure can help connect communities, practitioners, and institutions, making it easier to access resources, exchange learning, and build on promising practices while maintaining Indigenous governance and control.

Recognition that sustains the work

For immersion teaching to thrive, teachers need recognition that supports fair compensation, professional respect, and long-term stability. Certification, accreditation, and assessment systems are most effective when they align with community-defined standards and sustain those carrying the work forward.

Immediate Next Steps: Coordinated Action and Shared Stewardship

The next phase of this work will focus on coordinated actions that will build on existing community-led efforts and strengthen alignment across regions, languages, and systems. This work will centre on consolidating learning, sharing knowledge responsibly, and supporting communities to adapt and build from proven practices.

Building a coordinated knowledge base

A shared priority emerging from the Commission's engagements is the need to collect, research, share, and build on promising practices without centralizing control or extracting knowledge from communities. This work must be distributed across partners, with Indigenous governance at the centre.

Immediate next steps include:

- **Mapping and monitoring the landscape:** Map and continue to monitor the Indigenous language immersion landscape. This includes Indigenous-led and governed language organizations, community-based initiatives, and immersion programs in diverse educational environments to assess progress towards shared goals and identify gaps as well as opportunities.
- **Developing adaptable frameworks:** Develop and publicly share adaptable "skeleton" curriculum frameworks, pedagogies, and assessment models based on promising practices. These resources should be designed for communities to tailor to their own languages, cultures, and learning contexts.
- **Documenting and supporting aligned research:** Document and support research on educational frameworks, pedagogies, and curricula that align with Indigenous worldviews. This includes work that supports communities to understand their languages from non-linguistic perspectives, as well as the documentation of immersion and teaching methodologies. This work must support a wide range of learners, including those with different sensory, cognitive, or communication needs.
- **Ensuring Indigenous governance and control:** Knowledge-sharing, research, data sovereignty, documentation, and repositories of best practices must remain under Indigenous-led governance and control, with clear consent protocols to guide use, adaptation, attribution, and protection of Indigenous Peoples' knowledges.

Accountability and Measuring Progress

The Calls to Action outlined in this Roadmap carry shared responsibility and require clear accountability mechanisms to ensure that commitments translate into sustained, systems-level change. Accountability must be measurable, transparent, and grounded in principles of Indigenous governance, recognizing that language revitalization is both a collective right and a shared obligation.

Indicators of Progress (3-5 Year Horizon)

Progress toward implementation will be assessed through a combination of legislative, institutional, workforce, and community-based indicators. Over the next three to five years, meaningful progress will be demonstrated through:

Legislative and policy change

- An amendment to all provincial and territorial legislation and education policies to formally recognize Indigenous languages as languages of instruction.
- Policies enacted that enable immersion education and Indigenous-led certification pathways.

Program growth and access

- An increase in the number of Indigenous immersion teacher education programs, including those delivered through Indigenous-led institutes and community-based partnerships, across urban, rural and remote contexts.
- Expanded and equitable access points for fluent and proficient speakers, immersion learners, and credentialed educators entering immersion pathways, regardless of geography, language population, or jurisdiction.

Recognition and certification outcomes

- Formal recognition of Indigenous-led institutions as certifying authorities.
- Implementation of laddered and stackable credential models that recognize prior learning, lived fluency and proficiency, and immersion pedagogy.
- Reduced time-to-certification for fluent and proficient speakers already teaching or preparing to teach.

Workforce stability and retention

- Increased number of Indigenous immersion teachers as well as retention strategies.
- Improved pay equity and compensation parity across regions.
- Operational interprovincial and territorial mobility agreements enabling teachers to work across jurisdictions.

Funding stability

- Establishment of long-term, core funding models that support immersion programs, infrastructure, land-based learning, and community-led delivery without interruption.

Data availability and use

- Strengthening the ability to access the number of fluent and proficient speakers.
- Improved access to Indigenous language education data from public school systems to support community planning, advocacy, and monitoring of progress.

Monitoring Legislative Change and Funding Stabilization

Accountability for legislative changes and funding stabilization must be shared and transparent. Monitoring will occur through:

Indigenous-led oversight

- Indigenous governing bodies, organizations, and education authorities can play a central role in tracking whether legislative and funding commitments align with community priorities and lived realities.
- Indigenous-led institutions recognized as certifying authorities can provide regular reporting on program outcomes, barriers, and system responsiveness.

Government responsibility

- Provincial, territorial, and federal governments are responsible for monitoring and publicly reporting on legislative amendments, policy implementation, and funding commitments related to Indigenous immersion education.
- Ministries and Departments of Education are accountable for implementing changes within education systems and ensuring that commitments result in accessible, operational programs.

Public reporting and transparency

- Progress can be tracked through public reporting mechanisms, including annual reports, joint statements, and data releases that document advances in language vitality, workforce development, and funding adequacy.
- Education data, where collected, should be accessible to Indigenous communities to support self-determined planning and accountability.

Centering Indigenous Governance in Implementation

Indigenous governance must remain central at every stage of implementation. Accountability is not only about measurement, but about who holds decision-making authority.

Indigenous leadership and co-leadership

- Indigenous Peoples, governments, and organizations must lead or co-lead the design, delivery, certification, and evaluation of immersion teacher education pathways.
- Co-leadership models with post-secondary institutions must be grounded in Indigenous worldviews, pedagogies, and language transmission practices.

Community-defined success

- Indicators of success should reflect community definitions of fluency, proficiency, teaching readiness, and language continuity, not solely Western academic benchmarks.
- Communities must retain control over how their languages are taught, assessed, and carried forward.

Sustained relationships, not one-time commitments

- Accountability requires long-term relationships, stable funding, and institutional trust, not project-based or short-term approaches.
- Teacher unions, professional associations, school boards, and education authorities must work in ongoing partnership with Indigenous leadership to remove systemic barriers and sustain immersion careers.

A Shared Responsibility

Accountability for this Roadmap does not rest with a single institution. Progress depends on coordinated action by Indigenous Peoples and organizations, governments, education systems, post-secondary institutions, and professional bodies. Each has a responsibility to act, to measure progress, and to adjust course where commitments are not being met.

Ultimately, accountability means ensuring that Indigenous languages are no longer treated as marginal, fragile, or temporary within education systems, but are supported as living, instructive, and enduring languages, carried forward through strong immersion teachers and Indigenous-led governance.

Conclusion

> "The Indigenous Languages Act alone will not bring back our languages. It's what Indigenous leaders and peoples and Canada do with the Act that will provide transformative change, through our languages, which will give voice to our values, traditions, and laws on the land."
>
> *– Commissioner Ronald E. Ignace*

The health of an Indigenous language is partially reflected in how many children are learning it and speaking it. For that reason, increasing adult fluency through Indigenous language immersion teacher education is crucial for language vitality. By mobilizing adult learners to become immersion teachers, we strengthen Indigenous self-determination through *Walking on Two Legs*, advancing language restoration and revitalization, while adapting Western systems as tools that can support Indigenous priorities. This is also part of resuming care for our homelands and communities, by restoring languages to the places they come from and the responsibilities they carry. Indigenous immersion teacher education also creates space to reclaim traditional roles and practices and affirms immersion teachers as leaders in language revitalization.

If we are to attain reconciliation, reshaping the landscape of Indigenous language teacher education is essential to transforming systemic colonial racist policies and laws.

The Fluency and Immersion Teacher Education Roadmap upholds the principles of the 1991 the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP)*[18] and the 2005 *Task Force Report on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures*[19], and reflects what Indigenous Peoples, language champions, and educators across the country have long affirmed: immersion teacher education is central to the future of Indigenous languages. The work ahead is both practical and profound. It calls for systems to change in ways that honour Indigenous authority, support fluency and proficiency, and sustain those who carry languages forward through teaching.

By opening pathways, strengthening recognition and certification, and supporting thriving immersion teacher careers, Canada can move from pockets of promises to lasting, nationwide impact, ensuring that Indigenous languages are lived, taught, and heard for generations to come.

18 Government of Canada. 1991. *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples.*

19 Government of Canada. 2005. *Task Force Report on Aboriginal Languages and Cultures.*

Promising Practices: Fluency and Immersion Teacher Education

In development of this Roadmap, the Commission hosted one-on-one conversations with language champions advancing fluency, proficiency, and immersion teacher education in their respective areas. Their insights and contributions are the foundation of this Roadmap and clarified the conditions needed to strengthen fluency, proficiency, and Indigenous language immersion teacher education pathways across Canada. This section provides an overview of their important work.

Keewatinase, Department of Indigenous Education (Lakehead University)

Keewatinase, Department of Indigenous Education at Lakehead University is a program intentionally as a community-rooted teacher education initiative that aligns university processes with Indigenous knowledge systems and local language learning goals.

Rather than teaching language directly, the program focuses on preparing teachers through K–6, 7–12, and Indigenous Language streams, emphasizing land-based learning, community-led instruction, cultural camps, privileging Indigenous knowledge.

Accreditation, while enabling teacher certification, is complex and often perceived as colonial. This is being addressed by Keewatinase through working with the Ontario College of Teachers, which is focused on relationship-building and strong partnerships. Ultimately, this work is centered on change management requiring patience, readiness, strategic alignment with community priorities, and priorities focused on eliminating systemic violence, while scaling grassroots' immersion success.

Ontario Ministry of Education

As the demand for Indigenous languages classes continues to grow, school boards are facing increasing difficulty in ensuring there are enough proficient Indigenous languages speakers certified to teach in provincially funded schools. There are too few certified teachers to support students who may wish to study Indigenous languages.

To address this gap, the Ontario Ministry of Education is working with Ontario College of Teachers and First Nations, Métis and Inuit partners to co-develop a new specialized certification pathway for Indigenous languages speakers to be certified to teach in provincially funded schools. This includes the identification and certification of proficient language speakers with the knowledge and skills to support language learning through an Elder / Community Endorsement Model. The new certification pathway will increase the availability of language learning opportunities for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students and complement the work already being done in teacher education programs and Indigenous Institutes leading to certification.

Pirurvik Centre

Pirurvik Centre runs a comprehensive, community-rooted Inuktitut language training model designed to rebuild speaker fluency and develop qualified immersion instructors across Nunavut. Pirurvik delivers three key pathways:

- Qimattuvik for strengthening advanced Inuktitut among first-language speakers;
- Aurniarvik, an intensive 8-month full-day immersion program for Inuit adults who grew up without the language; and
- Aqqusiurvik, a two-session diploma program that uniquely prepares learners to teach both first and second language speakers.

All programs integrate land-based learning as foundational to both linguistic and cultural revitalization. Pirurvik's pedagogical approach is grounded in Inuit knowledge systems, emphasizing life-cycle learning and assessment focuses on demonstrated practical knowledge.

University nuhelot'ine thaiyots'inistameyimâkanak Blue Quills

Blue Quills University is an Indigenous-led institution that relies on tailored, locally informed approached for immersion and language-teacher development. It has made efforts to support Indigenous language revitalization through programs that blend language learning with elements of teacher preparation, though their primary focus remains on creating new language speakers. Blue Quills offers a three-year program intended to build second-language proficiency, with some students later laddering into education degrees. For their important work to continue, Blue Quills University requires consistent funding, which increases their access to fluent ceremonial speakers, appropriate classroom spaces, culturally rooted curriculum, and writings that document program models for wider use.

University of Hawai‘i at Hilo

The Kahuawaiola Indigenous Teacher Education Program in Hawai‘i is a fully immersive, legislated, graduate-level program that prepares teachers in Hawaiian and has become a model for other Indigenous language groups, though it still faces constraints such as small cohorts. There is still a need for fair and adequate funding, institutional support, proper recognition of Indigenous language teacher expertise, and compensation that reflects the ongoing labour language teachers perform to maintain and grow their fluency.

Experiential approaches, such as micro-teaching, language-learning simulations, hula-based immersion activities, and materials development courses, help students understand Indigenous language learning from both learner and teacher perspectives.

The ideal vision for this work includes institutions that no longer require justification for Indigenous language programming, funding models tailored to the needs of under-resourced languages, incentives to support teachers, intentional language-use domains in daily community life, and flexible programs.

W̱SÁNEĆ School Board

The W̱SÁNEĆ School Board works in partnership with the University of Victoria's Indigenous Education program to integrate immersion-based language learning into a four-year teacher-education pathway that also offers certificate, diploma, and degree exit points. Early years of the program include substantial English support, but by the third and fourth years, students complete entire courses in the language, participate in immersion "coffee house" conversation sessions, and attend immersion camps.

This program has produced many fluent and proficient speakers, yet there remains a gap between language learning and teacher certification. To address this, a new Post-Degree Professional Program (PDPP) will launch in 2027 to provide a formal route for language-proficient graduates to become certified teachers.

Their ideal vision includes more community control over certification, stable pathways for language-rich teacher training, increased capacity to balance learners and instructors, and expanded mentorship structures that support learning "in the spaces in between," drawing on master-apprentice models and community-based teaching. In recognizing not all learners want to become teachers, expanding BA-level pathways that braid language into multiple disciplines increases the number of speakers and builds broader community capacity.

Yukon Native Language Centre

The Yukon Native Language Centre (YNLC) focuses on developing immersion-based language learning grounded in culturally rich, land-based experiences, and supported by strong curriculum, resources, and assessment tools. Immersion can only succeed when there are enough fully fluent and proficient teachers, making fluency and proficiency development their immediate priority.

YNLC envisions creating teacher training and certification pathways within the next five to seven years and is in early discussions with universities. They stressed that Indigenous Peoples must lead program design, set their own standards for cultural and language proficiency, define teaching certification, and control assessment systems grounded in Indigenous worldviews.

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