

Ontario First Nations schools last in Fraser rankings

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Writers

Ten of the 11 schools finishing last in this year's Fraser Institutes ranking of over 3,000 Ontario schools are First Nations schools from remote northern communities.

But the rankings do not take into consideration communities with no school buildings, funding cuts, history of taking the tests and in one case even have the wrong name for one school.

And one First Nation School Mnjikaning Kendaaswin, located on the Chippewas of Rama First Nation, who house the popular Casino Rama, beat out over 2000 off reserve schools in the ranking. It ranked 172 out of over 3,000 schools.

The Fraser Institute is a right-wing "think tank", which released its annual school ranking report last week, and based the rankings of 3,023 schools on the 2014 Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) grade three and six test scores in reading, writing and math.

Of the last 11 schools on the list, 10 are on First Nations territories. The 11th school on the bottom of the list is Graham Bell-Victoria in Brantford.

What isn't reflected in the statistics are conditions in First Nations communities.

Attawapiskat First Nation just opened its new school last year. J.R. Nakogee (named in the study was closed 14 years ago after a pipeline rupture spill in 1979 spilled 95,000 litres of diesel fuel contaminating the soil underneath J.R. Nakogee. Attawapiskat's only elementary school.) Attawapiskat's new school, Kattawapiskak Elementary School opened last year, 35 years after the closure.

According to a 2011 survey by the Assembly of First Nations, almost half of First Nations reserves need new schools -- and half of those have been waiting more than 10 years.

In the ranking, 11 First Nations are ranked 0.0 out of 10 and all tie for last

spot. The schools are: Baibombeh Anishinabe in Pawitik, Biidaaban Kinoomagegamik in Massey, Chapleau Elementary in Chapleau, Deer Lake School in Deer Lake, Eenchokay Birchstick in Pikangikum, J.R. Nakogee in Attawapiskat, John C. Yesno in Eabametoong (Fort Hope), Martin McKay Memorial in Sachigo Lake, Simon Jacob Memorial in Webequie, Standing Stone in Southwold and Titotay Memorial in Cat Lake.

Most of the lowest-ranking First Nation schools just started taking the EQAO tests last year or within the last two years.

Titotay Memorial School, on Cat Lake First Nation, just took the test for the first time in 2014.

New Credit's Lloyd S. King just started taking the tests in 2013 and 60 per cent of students scored below the provincial average in reading, writing and math.

Six Nations schools have been taking the tests since the mid-2000s.

Some First Nations schools weren't quite so far down on the list.

Lakeview Elementary on M'Chigeeng First Nation territory came in at 2716.

Quinte Mohawk School on Tyendinaga Territory came in at 2801.

Akwesasne Mohawk school in Cornwall, at 2995, is the highest-scoring First Nation school in the bottom 50.

Next is Ministik, in Moose Factory, at 3003.

At Six Nations, the picture is a bit rosier.

Six Nations schools ranked higher than most other First Nations schools in Ontario but they were still near the bottom of the list. Four Six Nations elementary schools and one New Credit elementary school, Lloyd S. King, all fell in the bottom 20 in the Grand Erie District School Board (GEDSB) scoring.

The top school on Six Nations is OMSK, which ranked 2,735 in the province and 68th in the GEDSB beating out a number of GEDSB schools. There are 90 elementary school rankings in the

GEDSB. The overall score for GEDSB schools was 7 out of 10.

Lloyd S. King scored 1.5 out of 10.

Emily C. General scored 2.0.

Jamieson scored 3.2.

I.L. Thomas scored 3.4.

Oliver M. Smith scored 3.7.

The average overall ranking for Six Nations and New Credit is 3.0.

The worst school in the GEDSB - Graham Bell Victoria in Brantford - scored 0.0, and is also among the 11 worst-ranked schools in the province.

The Fraser Institute says a rating of 6 is the provincial average.

OMSK Vice-Principal Terrylyn Brant said the scoring, for first nations school is fairly new.

"There is no real history for First Nation schools like there is for off reserve schools and these tests use

she said.

She said "with a 3.2 average we are not that far out of Brantford's top scorers who are getting 7 out of 10."

She said Brantford schools "receive more funding than we do, funding to prepare



Attawapiskat just got a new school last year after waiting for 14 years

for the tests, they have a history of taking the tests and they even have consultants that we don't have."

I.L. Thomas came in second on Six Nations, 2,801 in the province, 71st in the GEDSB.

Jamieson came third on Six

are not held.

Lloyd S. King placed 2,985 in Ontario and 86th in the GEDSB.

The top school in the GEDSB is Holy Family Catholic School in Paris. It ranked 204 in the province. Caledonia's

Oneida Central and St. Patrick's in Caledonia ranked 2nd and 4th respectively in the GEDSB, with Resurrection in Brantford rounding out the top five.

There are roughly 100 First Nation elementary schools in the province; 21 schools made it onto the Fraser list. The schools that didn't make it onto the list did not take the EQAO tests.

The institute notes that private schools and federally funded schools operated by First Nations are not required to administer EQAO tests. Since the results of these tests form the basis for the report card, only those schools that administer the EQAO tests could be included.

The EQAO tests are otherwise mandatory, standardized tests conducted annually by the province assessing grade three and six students' abilities in math, reading and writing. The tests are carried out in both public schools and Catholic schools.

Karen Sandy, Six Nations' native trustee with the GEDSB, says she doesn't think EQAO tests are an effective measure of a school's performance. "I just don't think the EQAO test are effective, anyway," she says. "They put a lot of pressure on the students and teachers."

Sandy also takes issue with the tests because there is no cultural component for First Nations children who take it.

"It only tests against the dominant society who created the tests," she says.

"Large-scale tests don't give a true picture of a child's progress."

The Fraser Institute says the ranking "Report Card" helps parents choose better schools for their children. "Where parents can choose among several schools for their children, the Report Card provides a valuable tool for making a decision. Because it makes comparisons easy, it alerts parents to those nearby schools that appear to have more effective academic programs. Parents can also determine whether schools of interest are improving over time.

Helen Miller, a Six Nations Band Councillor with a focus on education, says the dismal results for Six Nations schools boils down to not enough funding from the federal Aboriginal Affairs ministry.

"Six Nations schools are federal schools. The province allocates a lot of money to provincial schools to prepare students for the testing. The grades 3 and 6 prepare and practise all year.

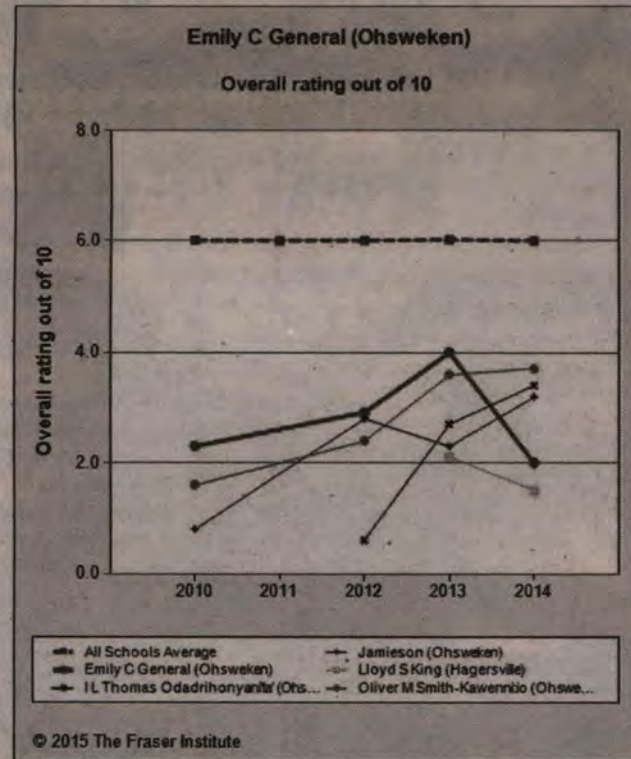
"To my knowledge, (AANDC) doesn't provide any money for our students to practise and prepare," says Miller.

She says "Provincial schools have a lot of resources, community and [otherwise], to help. Six Nations schools have limited resources, if any."

Miller also says the test are culturally inappropriate. "There is no First Nation-specific EQAO test," she said. "Our students must take the generic EQAO test that all of Ontario takes. A lot of the questions on the generic tests are not relevant to a [First Nation] community or culturally appropriate.

"So how can they use the EQAO to measure our students' intelligence/performance and our schools' performance when the testing is not culturally appropriate? Students/parents can refuse to take those tests. They can't be forced to take them."

Peter Jones, AANDC regional director Toronto, did not return calls or emails seeking comment.



The trend on the chart shows Six Nations schools have improved considerably in their rankings over the last few years. I.L. Thomas just started getting ranked in 2012 and jumped almost two whole points in the last two years alone.

that scoring history for placement."

Even with that disadvantage she said she was pleased to see that in the GEDSB, OMSK did well.

"Even in Brantford the english language schools didn't fair that well. The top schools in Brantford are french immersion schools,"

Nations, 2,841 in the province, and 74th in the GEDSB.

Emily C. General came in last on Six Nations, 2,961 in the province, and 83rd in the GEDSB.

J.C. Hill was not ranked because it is a junior high school and EQAO tests in grades six, seven and eight