

First Nations education conference in Hamilton

by Marie-Lauren Gregoire

HAMILTON—Mississaugas of the New Credit hosted the 4th annual Partners in Success education conference at the Sheraton Hotel on February 6 to 9, 2001. The Mississaugas of the New Credit partnered with Indian and Northern Affairs for the 4th consecutive year to bring the conference to teachers, administrators and educators. The theme of this year's conference was 'seeing the potential in every child.'

The conference presented speakers and seminars that deal with critical issues in education. Bryan LaForme, co-founder and committee chair, spoke with Teka about the conference. "I started it because I felt that First Nations weren't really kept up to date on a lot of the changes that take place within the province and the federal government when it comes to education, especially with the young people," said LaForme. The conference focuses on the young people, "We try to focus all our interests on how we can benefit our youth, because, after all, they're going to be our next leaders."

The First Nations education conference covered topics like school violence and curriculum development, as well as spirituality, parent-teacher relations, futures and post secondary education, celebrating success, dealing with adversity and the power of positive thinking. Conference speakers are professionals in their field presenting relevant topics and conference attendees enjoyed them, "Our participants are very satisfied in the calibre of the speakers that we have," said LaForme. The response of the participants about the seminars was overwhelmingly positive.

The teachers, administrators and directors that attend the conference come from all over, "We have students that come from Niagara College, from Mohawk College. We have students that are doing their thesis from Ohio, we've had delegations from Fiji, educators come from Alaska," said LaForme. The New Credit First Nation Education Department ensures all its teachers attend this exceptional conference by providing professional development days to the schools and the day care.

As many as 200 participants attended the conference this year. Conference organizers expect that number to grow. The conference is built upon the recommendations of past attendees and the issues of the day. Thérèse Oden, Luxmar Marketing Inc., explained the topic selection, "We work from information from last year's conference, we do evaluation sheets and people submit their ideas of what they want to hear about."

This year's theme included a seminar about school violence as it is becoming more predominant. John Van Allen, detective sergeant of the Ontario Provincial Police, presented a seminar on school violence, awareness, assessment and prevention. Van Allen discussed the role of the teacher in safety at school, "I think they should see where their role is in dealing with parents, encouraging children to come forward and discussing safety issues with children and dealing with setting some bounds of control in the classroom."

Van Allen's presentation covered the spectrum of violence in schools from school shootings and bomb threats to school

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yard bullying. He focuses on educating teachers and students to recognize the indicators of violence and be aware of their place in the solution. Van Allen advised that a police presence in schools is beneficial, "I think its positive for the police service and the school itself." Van Allen presents school safety seminars at local area schools and visited Six Nations' elementary school last summer.

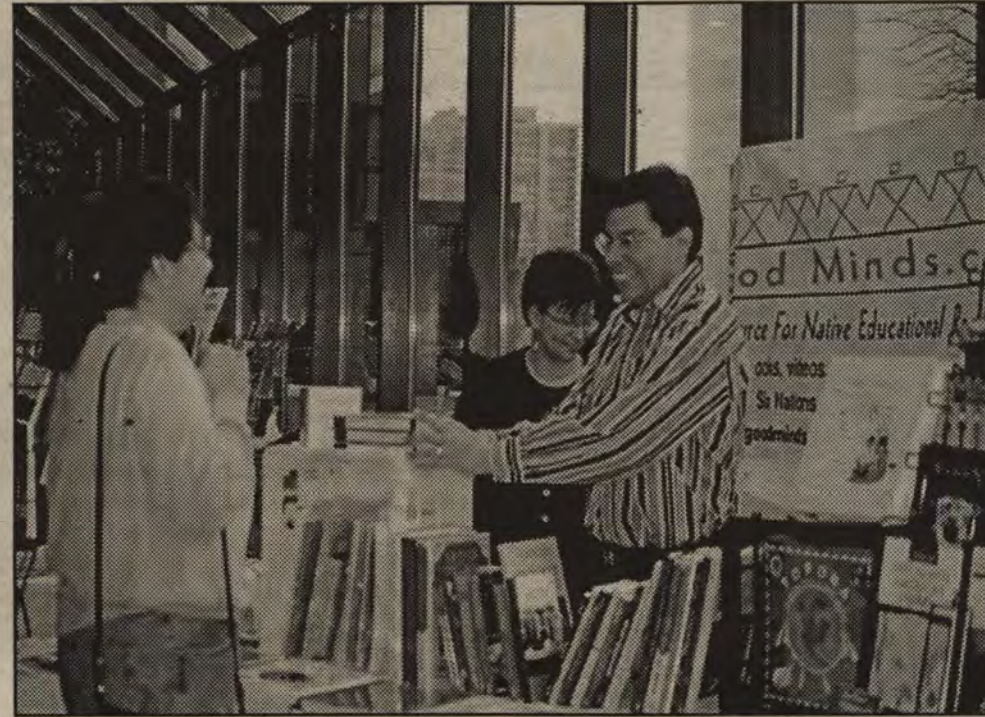
Teachers and students who attended this seminar found the information relevant and current. Shirley Joshua, aboriginal counsellor at Niagara College, enjoyed the presentation and agreed that police presence is important in schools, "We have lots of police presence in our school. They let the students know they're there and they're not going to get away with anything." Joshua believes it is important because students feel safe knowing that police are enforcing the law, "I want my daughter to feel safe when she's at school. I want her to feel like it's not acceptable for someone who is doing illegal activities to be able to get away with it, that the police are going to come and search their locker and take them out of the school."

Jennifer Micallef, student at Niagara College, found the seminar on school violence relevant, "Schools need to be safe and secure in order to provide education." Micallef and Joshua learned from this

seminar and were challenged to think how school violence affects their community and what their role and the parent's role is in school safety. The goal of the conference is to probe the minds of the attendees, to challenge them to learn from this experience and share it with their colleagues, "We want to challenge them to go back into their communities, network with their co-workers and say 'well, this is what we got out of this conference, let's see what we can do.'"

The seminar on curriculum development was important to teachers and administrators. Jim Hollander, curriculum coordinator at the Ojibway and Cree Cultural Centre, presented a seminar on making curriculum culturally relevant. Hollander encouraged group work and discussion and provided a practical approach to teaching culturally relevant curriculum in First Nations communities. Hollander encouraged what he called "culturally relevant teaching."

Teachers and students at this seminar were impressed by the seminar and encouraged to develop their own thoughts on curricula, "[the seminar] allowed us to do some thinking on our own views of curriculum development," said Allan Mountford, teacher at Durham School Board. Arlene John, student of English from Oneida, believes "We need to do our own curriculum development. We need to



he First Nations Education conference included seminars, speakers and publishers displays as well as native craft vendors. Goodminds.com from Six Nations presented a booth at the conference. Daphne Johnston, from Cape Croker, gets information on curriculum materials from Jeff Burnham, president of Goodminds.com, Arlene Hill looks on.

start from scratch." These seminars probed teachers, students and administrators to develop themselves in making schools safe and curriculum culturally relevant.

The 4th First Nations Education Conference encouraged teachers, students

and administrators to find the potential in every child. The organizers want to benefit the youth and LaForme believes, "if there is any way we can influence a child to becoming a better person that's what we want to do." a