

Day 1

8:00 am	Registration and Breakfast	
9:00 am	Opening Prayer	Elder Lucy Elder Sam
9:15 am	Welcoming Comments Overview of Today	DGC Anna Betty Achneepineskum Sherry Britton Janine Desmoulin (Emcee)
9:45 am	Creating a School Budget from Side-By-Side Letters	Chris Mercer
10:45 am	Break	
11:00 am	Education Priorities Discussion	Randi Ray
12:00 pm	Lunch	
1:00 pm	White Rabbit EDU – Empowering Education Through AI: Opportunities, Tools, and the Road Ahead	Keith Atwood Alex Short
2:00 pm	Break	
2:15 pm	White Rabbit EDU – Empowering Education Through AI: Opportunities, Tools, and the Road Ahead cont'd	Keith Atwood Alex Short
3:15 pm	Break	
3:30 pm	Project Based Learning is Indigenous Education VIRTUAL	Michelle Arnaud
4:30 pm	Closing Comments Prayers	Elder Lucy Elder Sam

Day 2

Special note: therapy dogs will be available until lunch

8:00 am	Registration and Breakfast	
9:00 am	Opening Prayer	Elder Lucy Elder Sam
9:15 am	Welcoming Comments Overview of Today Review of Yesterday	DGC Anna Betty Achneepineskum Sherry Britton Janine Desmoulin (Emcee)
9:30 am	Mental Wellness and Cyberbullying Presentation	Ashley Jellema
10:30 am	Break	
10:45 am	NAPS Cyberbullying Presentation	Cst. Miles Orakwelu
11:45 am	Early Years Update	Kristy Hankila and Polly Francis
12:15 pm	Lunch	
1:00 pm	Opioid Poisoning Awareness and Nasal Naloxone Response	Brian Edwards
2:00 pm	Break	
2:15 pm	Oshki-Wenjack: Developing Culturally Centred Programs for Classroom Assistant and Anishinaabemowin Language	Raven Linklater Samantha Servi Emily Drake
3:15 pm	Break	
3:30 pm	Spirit North	Taylor Bell Allison Curtaz
4:30 pm	Closing Comments	Sherry Britton
	Event Draws and 50-50	Elder Lucy
	Closing Prayers	Elder Sam



Chris Mercer, MBA

Managing Partner, Miikana Consulting

As a self-identified settler with significant experience working with and for First Nations, over 10 years of senior executive-level experience, and hundreds of successfully executed consulting projects, Chris brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise to the project. Chris has supported a wide range of organizations on a project basis, including dozens of organizational strategy, learning, and business development initiatives focusing on improving Indigenous relations. Some of the portfolios he had led throughout his (pre-consulting) career that continue to inform his perspective include; finance, strategic planning, government and community relations, Indigenous relations, client services, business development, and communications. Chris has his MBA from IMD, is fluently bilingual (E/F) and is the recipient of a Top 40 Under 40 award.



Randi Ray

Education Priorities Discussion

Randi Ray, PhD is a proud Anishinaabe Kwe from Flying Post First Nation and founder of Miikana Consulting and Noojimo Health (Canada's first Indigenous Virtual Mental Health Clinic). Randi is passionate and committed to working with people and organizations to bridge the social and economic gaps through innovative Indigenous-designed solutions. Randi has experience educationally and professionally in mining, education, economic development, health and financial sectors as an entrepreneur, provincial lead, professor, advocate, strategist, facilitator, researcher and lifelong learner. Randi's motivation is deeply rooted, and her passion is to improve overall minobimadziwin (the good life) for First Nation (and by doing so) all people across Turtle Island.

Using interactive tools and conversations, the purpose of this session is to learn from the Education Directors about their key education priorities for the next seven generations. Our goal is to collectively define key priorities, ensuring that future educational initiatives are community-driven and responsive to the specific needs of NAN students and their families.



White Rabbit Educational Technology

Empowering Education Through AI: Opportunities, Tools, and the Road Ahead

This engaging two-person seminar will explore how artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming education, with a focus on practical applications for First Nations schools and communities. Designed for education leaders, principals, and staff, the session provides a clear and grounded overview of how AI can support educators, enhance learning outcomes, and better prepare students for a rapidly evolving world shaped by automation and intelligent systems.

We will begin by demystifying what AI is and showing real-world examples of how it is already being used in education globally—from intelligent tutoring systems and curriculum planning tools to writing aids and assessment support. We will then shift focus to how AI can be used responsibly and effectively by teachers, administrators, and students in their schools.

This interactive and practical presentation is designed to support First Nations education leaders in making informed decisions about integrating AI into their schools. Throughout the session, participants will explore current trends and developments in artificial intelligence and their implications for education, discover hands-on tools and examples for teaching and administration, and examine how AI can enhance differentiated learning, student engagement, and individualized feedback. The session will also emphasize the importance of digital literacy and critical thinking in preparing students for the future job market, while addressing ethical concerns and cultural considerations specific to First Nations contexts.

Keith Atwood

Co-Owner, White Rabbit EDU

Keith brings over 20 years of experience delivering IT services and solutions across northern Ontario, with a deep understanding of the unique challenges faced by remote and First Nations communities. As co-owner of White Rabbit EDU, Keith specializes in IT infrastructure, networking, end-user support, security, and communications systems. His hands-on approach and long-standing commitment to supporting education in the north have made him a trusted partner for schools and organizations seeking reliable, culturally aware technology solutions. Keith's focus is on building sustainable, secure, and efficient systems that empower schools to thrive in today's digital landscape.





Alex Short

Co-Owner, White Rabbit EDU

Alex Short is a trained educator with direct teaching experience in First Nations schools, including his time at Cat Lake First Nation and work through Indigenous education support organizations like Kwayaciiwin. As co-owner of White Rabbit EDU, Alex bridges the gap between technology and teaching by helping educators integrate digital tools into their classrooms. He leads professional development sessions, mentors school staff, and provides practical, classroom-based training tailored to the realities of northern education. Alex empowers teachers to use technology to enhance learning outcomes and student engagement.



Michelle Arnaud

Project Based Learning is Indigenous Education

Michelle Arnaud is a teacher at Children of the Earth High School, an Indigenous high school, in Wînipêk (Winnipeg). She was born and raised on Treaty 1 Territory, the homelands of her Metis kin; her ancestral lands are on Treaty 2 Territory, Sandy Bay First Nation, and the town of St Rose du Lac. Recently graduating with a Post-Baccalaureate Diploma in Education, with a focus on Indigenous Knowledge, Michelle has been on a personal journey to reconnect with her Indigenous culture and ensuring that the ways of knowing/being/living are present in her educational practices. Her late great-grandmother Olivine is a Residential School survivor, being the anchor for her classroom and classroom practices – ensuring that everything her chapan was denied is very much present in the classroom – language, knowledge, and practices. As a relative to Louis Riel and his right-hand-man Ambrose Lepine, fighting for Indigenous Rights through Indigenous Education has become her life, and heart, work – all children matter, and it is important for them to see the beauty of their culture; understanding how we have been land defenders and champions of sustainability, since time immemorial.

Michelle, along with her co-teacher Tyler, were thrust into the world of Project Based Learning through the Big Picture Learning education model in February 2024. In this new journey with their students, Michelle was able to make the connections between Project Based Learning and Indigenous Education/Indigenous Ways of Knowing. In this presentation, Michelle will share with you that journey and the projects the students tackled since the implementation of PBL in the classroom. You will be provided with a copy of a unit plan, Big Picture Learning goals, and a graphic organizer of the Guided Principles of Learning for you to take with you.



Ashley Jellema

Mental Wellness Presentation

Ashley Jellema is an educator and consultant based in Thunder Bay, Ontario, with nearly two decades of experience in mental health, harm reduction, housing, and trauma education. She is the owner of Koru Training and Consulting, where she offers services in community-based education, program development, leadership development, and organizational culture, with a focus on Indigenous organizations and social services. Her role involves delivering training in Mental Health First Aid, overdose prevention and response, trauma-informed self-care, and supporting crisis work in communities.

Ashley's contributions to the community were recognized in 2023 when she received the NAN Staff Recognition Award from Nishnawbe Aski Nation for her work as a Mental Health Training Coordinator.

She was born and raised in Thunder Bay before studying, working, and traveling across Canada and working in a bi-cultural organization in Aotearoa or New Zealand. After 27 years, she returned to Thunder Bay to be closer to family and now has two young sons who keep her busy.

Her presentation, titled Youth Mental Health, explores key topics including understanding youth mental health, the importance of mental health awareness, promoting mental wellness, accessing support systems and resources, strategies for addressing mental health challenges among youth, and the impact of initiatives like the Kindness Campaign.

Miles Orakwelu

Cyberbullying Presentation

Miles Orakwelu, also known as Uchenna Orakwelu, is a dedicated officer with the Nishnawbe Aski Police Service in Canada. Originally from Nigeria, he immigrated to Canada and has since become a passionate advocate for community policing. Miles credits his community policing training at the Ontario Police College for equipping him with the skills to build meaningful relationships within the communities he serves. His work exemplifies his commitment to making a positive impact and strengthening ties between law enforcement and First Nations communities.



Polly Francis and Kristy Hankila

Meet the Early Years Department Management duo.

Polly Francis is the Manager of the Early Years Team and Kristy Hankila is the Manager of Early Learning and Child Care team.

The Early Years Department supports community led initiatives that enhance capacity, skill building and mentorship at the community level to meet the needs of families and children within communities and establishes collaborative relationships with children service providers across the region, province and nationally to build better pathways of service, reduce duplication and enhance better practices. The department advocates at the federal and provincial level to develop and implement long term sustainable community solutions to close gaps in services for children, including early learning and childcare initiatives. The department has successfully engaged diverse people across Nishnawbe Aski Nation, including parents, caregivers, Elders and Knowledge Keepers, in working together on implementation of identified priorities and actions.`



Brian Edwards

Opioid Poisoning Awareness and Nasal Naloxone Response Training

This workshop will offer foundational knowledge about opioids, an understanding of opioid usage, harm reduction strategies, prevention methods, risk factors for a poisoning, and the rescue procedures involving nasal Naloxone and other life-saving measures. It will provide two nasal naloxone kits to explore their kits and become familiar on how to use. The acronym 'SAVE ME' will also be introduced in detail.

Brian Edwards was born in Timmins, raised in Thunder Bay, and has family ties to the Chapleau area. He has worked in mental health and rehabilitation, supporting clients living with the effects of stroke and brain injury. Since 2016, Brian has been an instructor with St. John Ambulance, delivering training in Physical and Mental Health First Aid, as well as Opioid Poisoning & Naloxone Response. Now with Nishnawbe Aski Nation, he serves as a Crisis Response Training Coordinator, sharing life-saving knowledge with our 49 First Nation communities. Outside of work, Brian volunteers with St. John Ambulance and enjoys spending time outdoors with his dog Eleanor, restoring his '84 Dodge Pickup, and fishing—even if the fish don't always bite.





Oshki-Pimache-O-Win

Oshki-Pimache-O-Win: The Wenjack Education Institute (Oshki-Wenjack) is honoured to engage with Siigwan 2025 NAN Education Directors Forum on two programs currently under development. These programs are a First Nations Classroom Assistant and an Anishinaabemowin Language Program.

This is an opportunity for communities to tell us what topics to include to meet their community needs. Together we will share ideas, reflections, and exchange knowledge to inform course development for these two programs.

Raven Linklater



Raven Linklater is Anishinaabekwe from Couchiching First Nation and Oshki-Wenjack's Anishinaabe Curriculum Coordinator. She brings to this role experience walking in two worlds. Her education began as a child being her granny's shkaabewis (helper) during ceremonies, conferences and while she performed elder duties. Raven also attended western academia. Raven's passion to bring Indigenous knowledge sets to academia and beyond drives her to do this good work.

Samantha Servi



Samantha Servi has been the Curriculum Development Coordinator at Oshki-Wenjack for three years and has experience in the field of academic quality assurance, program design and delivery. Samantha is grateful to be involved in this very important work that can make a difference for all NAN communities.

Emily Drake



Emily Drake is an assistant at Oshki-Wenjack. She is a recent high school graduate and brings a youth perspective to the team. Her family comes from Eabametoong and Whitewater Lake First Nation. She's been involved with NAN from a young age, going to events and conferences with her Kokum as a Chief. Now, she spends time being a passionate advocate for Indigenous language revitalization, which brought her to Oshki-Wenjack.



Spirit North

Spirit North is a national charitable organization that uses land-based activities to improve the health and well-being of Indigenous youth, empowering them to become unstoppable in sport, school and life. Our programs prioritize providing equitable opportunities for cultural, collaborative learning for Indigenous youth and how we as an organization engage with communities in a good way, offer high-quality, culturally relevant programs for youth, and get youth active. In this session, Taylor and Allison will share about where we work, how programs are developed, what program options are available across the country with an emphasis on Spirit North programs available for Northwestern Ontario.



Taylor Bell (she/her)

Taylor is a settler currently living on the traditional territory of the Robinson-Superior Treaty. She is a student at Lakehead University, where she is studying Outdoor Recreation and Education with the hope to create meaningful and inclusive outdoor experiences for youth. Over the past four years, Taylor has been a Community Program Leader with Spirit North in Northern Manitoba, the Northwest Territories, and now Northwestern Ontario. She is passionate about getting youth outdoors and loves facilitating water safety, canoeing, and swimming programs, empowering the youth to build confidence through skill-building, games, and having a lot of fun!



Allison Curtaz (she/her/they/them)

Allison is a Red River Métis and Dene-Métis 2Spirit woman from Richer/Ste. Anne, Manitoba now living, working, and playing in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Allison is Spirit North's Regional Director for Central Canada, coordinating Spirit North programs in Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Northwestern Ontario (Kenora region), and the Northwest Territories. Allison is a heart-led facilitator that believes in healing through cultural reclamation, providing connective opportunities for youth to practice their cultures, and mentoring young people out on the land.

