

First Nations student safety in Thunder Bay: 9 things inquest lawyers agree on

Federal government takes 'no position' on joint slate of 118 recommendations at student death inquest

By Jody Porter, [CBC News](#) Posted: May 27, 2016 6:30 AM ET Last Updated: May 27, 2016 8:59 AM ET



Lawyers at the student deaths inquest say Canada should fund high schools in every First Nation so kids don't have to leave home to get an education. (Martine Laberge/Radio-Canada)

Jurors at the inquest into the deaths of seven First Nations students in Thunder Bay were presented this week with hundreds of proposed recommendations to consider.

The inquest is examining the deaths of Jethro Anderson, Paul Panacheese, Curran Strang, Robyn Harper, Reggie Bushie, Kyle Morriseau and Jordan Wabasse. All of them had travelled from remote communities to Thunder Bay to attend high school and died between 2000 and 2011.

The inquest began in October 2015 and is expected to end in June with jurors making recommendations that could help keep First Nations students safe in the city.

"It's sad to have to say this, but First Nations schools need sufficient sources of heat, clean water and sanitation," Mary Catherine Chambers, the lawyer for Matawa Learning Centre told jurors.

She urged jurors not to let concerns about money deter them from making bold recommendations to increase government funding for First Nations education.

"Do not allow fear of costs to lead you to reject recommendations that you feel would save lives," she said. "Efficiencies and reasonableness are not good arguments in the face of the consequences for these children — which is death."

Lawyers for 11 parties with standing at the inquest presented a joint slate of 118 proposed recommendations to jurors.

Here are nine of them, paraphrased:

- 1. Canada should provide sufficient funding for First Nations schools on and off reserve so that the gap in education outcomes for Indigenous students is eliminated within 10 years
- 2. Canada should fund a pre-school, an elementary school, a high school and an adult learning centre in each of the Nishnawbe Aski Nation communities
- 3. Canada and Ontario should fund an orientation trip for Grade 7 and 8 students who will be travelling to Thunder Bay to attend high school
- 4. Canada and Nishnawbe Aski Nation should establish minimum standards for boarding homes for students living in the city and ensure boarding home parents are trained in care of intoxicated students
- 5. Thunder Bay police, the City of Thunder Bay and First Nations organizations should form a working group to develop policies around missing persons, searches and investigations
- 6. The City of Thunder Bay should identify the need and find funding sources for a youth recreation facility
- 7. A safety audit should be conducted of the areas by the rivers where First Nations students are known to hang out
- 8. Families, former students, Dennis Franklin Cromarty high school and Matawa Learning Centre should work together to develop a memorial to honour the seven students who died
- 9. Ontario should ensure that the verdict in the inquest and the explanation of the verdict be translated into Cree, Ojibway and Oji-Cree

Indigenous Affairs Canada is represented at the inquest, but made no recommendations and has taken no position on the recommendations proposed by others.

The Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth consulted with First Nations youth in Thunder Bay and proposed an additional 206 recommendations.

The lawyer for the Thunder Bay Police Service said his client rejects all of the recommendations from the child advocate's office and said police found some of them "offensive."