



Submission for The Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs
Improving Graduation Rates and Successful Outcomes for Indigenous Students

To improve graduation rates and successful outcomes for Indigenous students, a focus must be on equitable access to learning resources and opportunities that are inspiring, culturally relevant, and customized to their unique learning goals. Harnessing the power of technology is also an essential component for creating accessible opportunities. Given the challenges of reaching students in some of Canada’s most remote and isolated communities, many students lack the access to the educational resources, mental wellness programming and future pathways guidance readily available to Kindergarten - Grade 12 students in the South.

Graduation rates can only be increased if students are inspired and engaged in the classroom from the beginning of their educational experience, and that is the goal of Connected North.

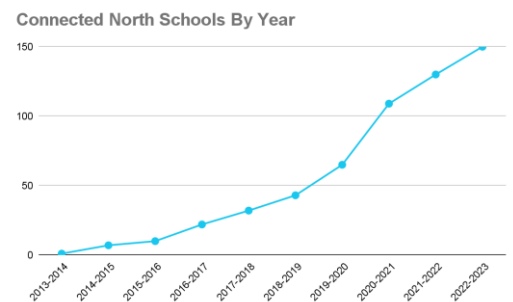
A program operated by Canadian registered charity TakingITGlobal, Connected North uses a technology driven, classroom-based approach to connect First Nations, Inuit and Métis students and teachers living in remote communities across Canada to live virtual learning experiences and opportunities not available to them locally. Previously, students would have been unlikely to access experiences like post-secondary campus tours, museum visits, hands-on coding programs and conversations with Indigenous professionals from diverse sectors.

Through Connected North, they can now participate from the comfort of their home community.

The program currently operates in 150 schools, serving over 30,000 Kindergarten-Grade 12 students and more than 500 active teachers. During the 2022-2023 school year to date, the program has delivered over 206,000 minutes of interactive digital learning. All sessions are customized to meet the unique needs of every school, teacher and classroom, with a focus on delivery by Indigenous educators, mentors and role models.

CONNECTED NORTH: BACKGROUND

Connected North was created through a collaboration between Cisco Canada and Her Excellency Mary Simon, focusing on her work on the 2011 National Strategy on Inuit Education. The program was launched as an innovative way to harness technology to engage students and provide 21st century digital access to resources to help close the education gap. After a successful pilot project in one school in Iqaluit in 2013-2014, the program expanded across Canada, with demand surging post-2020. TakingITGlobal took over operations of the program in late 2015 and has led its rapid growth. Cisco and an ecosystem of private sector technology partners remain engaged to provide and support best in class technology solutions.



CONNECTED NORTH: THE APPROACH

The program’s commitment is to provide access to virtual content that makes the classroom engaging and innovative, with the hope of increasing feelings of empowerment in school and in life. At the heart of the program is the commitment to an approach that holds



Indigenous perspectives at the centre of both content and process. This includes developing culturally relevant content where students’ cultures are respected and valued, supporting the work of Truth and Reconciliation. Sessions are sourced and developed in partnership with teachers and communities in direct response to their needs, and First Nations, Inuit and Métis role models are involved wherever possible as critical sources of knowledge and inspiration. There are currently over 2,250 sessions available to be booked. Each session has been developed by one of the more than 300 active lesson providers, 132 of whom are Indigenous. The program offers stipends to all providers, bringing new economic development opportunities to many Indigenous artists, Elders, and scientists. The interactive sessions held



in real time average 45 minutes in length, and cover any topic or subject matter. The most popular subjects are science and environmental studies, arts and music. Examples include:

- Virtual field trips to museums, science centres, galleries, aquariums and more
- Teacher professional development workshops and training
- Exploring future pathways for education and careers featuring Indigenous leaders
- Cross-cultural sharing and language revitalization between Indigenous communities
- Mental wellness programming and resources aligned to our Well-being Framework

The program is made possible thanks to a large ecosystem of donors and supporters, ranging from corporate partners, regional governments, family foundations and private individuals.

CONNECTED NORTH: THE RESULTS

Connected North delivers meaningful outcomes for students and has proven its impact across three key areas:

Program Demand:

- The program has grown from one pilot school in Iqaluit launched in 2013 to 150 schools across Canada currently active. Not a single school has dropped out since founding, and many more are eager to join.
- Over 1,130,623 minutes of digital learning has been delivered since founding, with 2,749 curriculum expectations now aligned to provincial and territorial curriculum.
- The number of sessions has grown each year, with a 44% increase in 2022 alone.

Teacher Ratings and Feedback

- Through the live rating system available to teachers, the quality of the sessions and ease of use rating sits at an average of 94% percent (4.7/5).
- 96.5% of teachers agree Connected North sessions help to engage their students, contributing to attendance in class and motivation for learning (2022 Teacher Survey).



- Anecdotes: “I now have about 18 kids in my classroom. Our attendance is getting better with Connected North!” (Saskatchewan educator)

Student Engagement:

- It is widely acknowledged that that student engagement has a positive impact on graduation rates
- 89% of students felt Connected North virtual sessions made learning more enjoyable. (York University study)

5) What was something you learned through Connected North this year?

that I can do any
thing

Connected North has been recognized internationally for excellence in innovation in education. Awards include: 2022 WISE Award Finalist, 2022 HundrED Global Collection - Top 100 Education Innovations in the World, 2020 Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) Humanitarian Award, 2018 Outstanding Contribution for Video Conferencing in Education, International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), and the 2015 Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business Award for Excellence in Aboriginal Relations, and others.

CONNECTED NORTH: THE FUTURE

As the project grows, we continue to move to the long-term sustainable model of community co-investment. The Government of Nunavut’s Department of Education is the first Territory to fully fund program adoption, active in all 45 Nunavut schools. We have cost-sharing partnerships with other regions including Windigo First Nations Council and the Keewatin Patricia District School Board. We have launched an innovative booking app that allows for a more self-service model to support in-community or regional program delivery.



FEDERAL INITIATIVES BENEFITING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

We have appreciated initiatives in recent years from the Government of Canada that have made investments in resources and capacity-building for high school students across the country. CanCode, led by ISED Canada, has provided funding to non-profits like ours to ensure students have learning experiences that build their coding, computational thinking, and digital content production skills. The Supports for Student Learning (SSLP) program managed by ESDC has invested in many wrap-around supports to help students succeed in their education, including more than 2,000 Digital Inclusion Grants offered to students through Connected North. These students would otherwise have a challenging time completing assignments, applying for post-secondary education, and connecting to digital learning resources. We are open to discuss continued and expanded initiatives from any department within the Government of Canada to offer funding programs that enhance Indigenous student learning opportunities in response to community and educator needs. We have a history of working with multiple levels of government and partners (charities, non-profit, corporate Canada) for the maximum impact.

ABOUT TAKINGITGLOBAL

TakingITGlobal designs and delivers youth engagement programs. Our initiatives include Connected North, the Sprout Fellowship for Social Innovation, and Code to Learn, with a focus on supporting and promoting diversity, inclusion, culture and knowledge. Founded in 1999 by two young Canadians, TakingITGlobal has received international recognition for its programs fostering creative confidence, intercultural understanding, and social entrepreneurship in millions of young people.