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MEDIA RELEASE

Indigenous Land-Based STEM Education - The Classroom of the Future

Ottawa, Ontario, November 26, 2020/ Over the past week, 100 Indigenous educators, thought leaders, and representatives of education authorities across Canada convened to set the stage for systemic change in Indigenous land-based education. The gatherings were hosted by the Actua network, a leader in land-based STEM education.

As parents and educators nationwide struggle with how to make education work in a pandemic environment, Indigenous students, particularly in northern remote parts of the country, have headed back to the land. As Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers take the lead, there is an opportunity to work with Indigenous communities, education authorities, industry and post-secondary institutions in reshaping the classroom of the future for Indigenous youth and for all Canadian youth.

Actua is Canada's largest science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) outreach organization and supports a network of university and college-based members across the country working to engage Indigenous and other youth in STEM programming. Actua played a leadership role in hosting a virtual national forum on Indigenous land-based education.

The national forum presented the outcomes of a series of seven regional roundtable events on Indigenous land-based STEM education. Over 100 thought leaders, Indigenous educators, representatives of education authorities, and practitioners of land-based education across Canada set the groundwork for what is hoped will result in vastly improved educational outcomes for Indigenous students and a real path forward towards reconciliation.

The outcomes of the discussions were very clear. "Land-based learning, grounded in Indigenous knowledge provides Indigenous students with a sense of pride in their identity; and confidence that the knowledge and perspectives of their culture are not only validated —but also valued," explains Doug Dokis, Actua's Director of Indigenous Youth in STEM (InSTEM)™ program. He further adds, "there must be a recognition and acceptance that Indigenous and Western science educational pedagogies do not need to be in opposition to one another."

Pam Damoff, Member of Parliament for Oakville North-Burlington and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indigenous Services opened the national forum. "The Government of Canada recognizes the critical importance of land-based education and combining Traditional Indigenous Knowledge with Western science," said MP Damoff. "We are committed to working collaboratively with communities to ensure that all Indigenous students receive a culturally-responsive, high-quality education that improves student outcomes while respecting the principle of Indigenous control of education through the development and implementation of innovative education pilot programs related to STEM, land-based learning and Indigenous language and culture."

“Indigenous perspectives play a critical role in the understanding of major issues like climate change, food sustainability, clean water and air and sustainable development. This model of learning can prepare Indigenous students — and all students for their future roles as leaders, innovators, and drivers of social and economic prosperity in their own communities,” says Jennifer Flanagan, President and CEO of Actua.

“What we heard was that there is a strong national consensus on the value of Indigenous-led land-based STEM education, and there is a critical role to play at the federal and provincial levels of government, with industry, and with communities and youth to build systemic change in the way education is experienced in classrooms across Canada,” says Flanagan.

About Actua: Actua is Canada’s largest science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) youth outreach network representing 41 university and college-based members. Each year, Actua’s growing network of member organizations reach over 300,000 young Canadians in 500 communities nationwide. Actua focuses on the engagement of underrepresented youth through specialized programs for Indigenous youth, girls and young women, at-risk youth and youth living in Northern and remote communities. Its national InSTEM program reaches over 35,000 Indigenous youth per year in over 200 Indigenous communities. Actua’s major funding partners include: Government of Canada, Google.org, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), RBC Foundation, Suncor Energy Foundation, TD Bank Group, Toyota Canada Foundation, Finning Canada, Microsoft Canada, Imperial, Lockheed Martin Canada. For more information about Actua, visit actua.ca.

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