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Ontario's Teaching Regulator  
L'organisme de réglementation  
de l'enseignement en Ontario

## Council Decision Note

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### Item: Indigenous Languages Certification Pathway and Conceptual Framework

**Public Interest Rationale:** Creating a certification pathway for Indigenous languages speakers through a community endorsement model would support Indigenous education, expand the number of Indigenous languages teachers for provincially funded schools, and help revitalize and preserve Indigenous languages while maintaining the College's regulatory oversight and public interest mandate.

**Strategic Alignment:** A regulatory model that strives to be free from barriers to truth and reconciliation, and equity, diversity, inclusion, and access.

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**Issue** – The purpose of this Briefing Note is to provide Council with an update on a proposed licensure pathway for prospective Indigenous languages teacher candidates seeking to become Ontario Certified Teachers (OCTs) in Indigenous Languages through a community endorsement pathway. The licensure pathway and associated regulations would authorize First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities to establish, under regulation, community endorsement circles or committees<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> A community endorsement circle or committee refers to a body established by a First Nations, Métis, or Inuit Community/Nation that is responsible for the assessment and endorsement of an Indigenous languages teacher candidate.

Community endorsement circles or committees would assess and endorse Indigenous languages teacher candidates for certification without the prerequisite of completing an accredited initial teacher education program. Following an endorsement, these Indigenous languages teacher candidates would apply for licensure with the College. If licensed, the candidates would become OCTs in Indigenous languages and would be permitted to teach Indigenous languages for which they have been endorsed, from Grades 1 to 12, in Ontario's school system.

The College, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and partners such as the Chiefs & Technical Committee on Languages and Learning, has engaged in multi-year extensive consultation with First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and urban Indigenous communities and partners on the development of a conceptual framework which lays out the regulatory and operational foundation of the new proposed certification pathway.

## **Background**

Ontario is home to many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit languages, with several – such as Oneida, Mohawk, Ojibwe, Cree, and Inuktitut – taught in schools from Grades 1 to 12. However, there are only two teacher education programs in the province that specialize in Indigenous languages, and some schools rely on non-fluent teachers or Letters of Permission (LOPs), which does not support long-term language revitalization or address the growing demand for language learning in provincially funded schools.

Indigenous languages are at risk due to the impacts of the Residential School System, the low numbers of Indigenous language teachers being certified and the aging population of fluent speakers. The current education system in Ontario has significant gaps in the recognition of the knowledge and expertise of Indigenous

languages speakers. Without change to remove barriers and create better pathways for teachers, these languages face continued decline and possible loss.

### **Developing a Proposed Pathway through Engagement with First Nations, Métis, Urban Indigenous, and Inuit Partners**

From May 22-23, 2024, the College hosted initial sharing sessions with First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and urban Indigenous partners and the Ministry of Education to discuss a potential new pathway for Indigenous languages teacher certification.

In August 2024, the College and the Ministry of Education established a working group to begin work on a new certification pathway.

The College reconvened with our partners over two dates in November 2024. We provided consolidated notes taken from the May 2024 sharing sessions and asked partners to expand on key themes heard during the spring sessions.

Concurrent to the College's sharing sessions, the Ministry held numerous engagements with Indigenous partners, notably but not exclusively through the First Nation Lifelong Learning and the Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous Education Priorities Tables and with partners from the Chiefs of Ontario Chiefs and Technical Committee on Languages and Learning.

### **Overall Themes and Development of the Conceptual Framework**

Several themes and competencies were identified including, but not limited to:

- importance of culture and language
- previous teaching experience and/or experience with children
- importance of community-driven work, principles, and values
- supports for candidates and certified individuals

The First Nation Lifelong Learning and the Métis, Inuit and Urban Indigenous Education Priorities Tables respectively identified the above themes and competencies as well as others with the culmination of the engagements leading to the development of a draft Indigenous Languages Pathway Conceptual Framework in the summer of 2025. Ongoing engagement with these tables continued into the Fall and Winter of 2025/2026 and offered opportunities for partners to provide additional feedback and input on specific components of the pathway and the framework to ensure alignment with partner priorities.

### **The Indigenous Languages Pathway Conceptual Framework**

Throughout Spring 2026, the College and the Ministry met with partner groups and held sharing sessions with First Nations, Métis, Inuit and urban Indigenous partners on May 20 and May 26 to finalize the review of the framework. In addition, the Ministry and the College shared the conceptual framework with Indigenous partners of the Métis, Inuit, and Urban Indigenous Education Priorities Table on June 3 and with members of the Chiefs & Technical Committee on Languages and Learning on June 4.

As Council members will note in Appendix "A", the Indigenous Languages Pathway Conceptual Framework is divided into four core competency areas and provides a proposed pathway for an Indigenous languages candidate to become an OCT. The framework reflects the key competencies developed by partners that Indigenous languages teacher candidates must demonstrate to be certified by the College.

The four core competency areas on which Indigenous languages teacher candidates will be assessed are:

- language proficiency and cultural expertise
- relevant experience with children and youth
- dispositions, principles and values for individuals working with elementary and secondary students
- professional suitability valued for the teaching of elementary and secondary students

Following an assessment by a community endorsement circle or committee, a community-endorsed Indigenous languages teacher candidate may apply to the College for certification. An Indigenous languages teacher candidate must meet the College's certification requirements unrelated to a teacher education program, including a criminal background check, complete the Sexual Abuse Prevention Program and pay their fees. Candidates would then be awarded their Ontario Certified Teacher in Indigenous Languages credential, enabling them to teach in the Indigenous language they were endorsed for at any grade level in any publicly funded Ontario school.

### **Risks and Mitigating Factors**

Regulatory oversight over community endorsement circles and committees would remain within the College's regulatory authority, though deference would be afforded to communities for the oversight and operation of their endorsement circle or committee. Similarly, Indigenous languages teachers would be subject to the College's *Professional Standards* and the College's professional conduct regulatory jurisdiction.

Notably, the proposed pathway is limited only to speakers working towards becoming Indigenous languages teachers and supports broader policy objectives related to Indigenous education and teacher workforce development, while preserving the College's regulatory requirements and public interest mandate.

The College also engaged with the B.C. Ministry of Education and Childcare to gain insight into their “First Nations Language Teacher Certificate” licensing framework. Established in 1994, B.C.’s “First Nations Language Teacher Certificate” enables fluent speakers to teach language and culture in public schools. The certification pathway requires a recommendation by a recognized First Nations Language Authority (an entity established by a band or First Nations Community), which attests to language, dialect, and cultural proficiency. B.C.’s Teacher Regulation Branch then certifies an applicant upon receiving testimonial from the First Nations Language Authority, an application and other administrative requirements. The proposed Ontario pathway draws lessons from B.C. on community authority in attestation, while situating certification and oversight within the College’s regulatory framework. The Ontario model is in broad alignment with the proven B.C. model.

### **Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Impact**

The proposed pathway aligns with the College’s strategic plan’s commitment to a regulatory model that strives to be free from barriers to truth and reconciliation, and equity, diversity, inclusion, and access.

Regulatory permission for First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and urban Indigenous communities to appoint their own respective endorsement circles or committees with the authority to endorse Indigenous languages teacher-candidates for College certification would remove a structural eligibility barrier that limits Indigenous languages teacher candidates from completing initial teacher education programs.

The pathway supports Indigenous self-determination in postsecondary education and teacher preparation, helps to preserve and promote Indigenous languages,

and contributes to strengthening the Indigenous languages teacher workforce in Ontario.

### **Next Steps**

That Council approve engagement with the Ministry of Education to develop proposed regulatory amendments for the Indigenous Languages Certificate pathway to bring back to Council at a future date

# Proposed Certification Pathway – First Nations, Métis and Inuit Community-Endorsed Language Teacher

## Background

This First Nations, Métis and Inuit Language Certification Pathway framework reflects insights and priorities shared by First Nations, Métis, Inuit and urban Indigenous partners during meetings and sharing sessions.

The visual framework is divided into four core competency areas:

- Language Proficiency and Cultural Expertise
- Relevant Experience with Children and Youth
- Dispositions, Principles and Values for individuals working with elementary and secondary students
- Professional Suitability valued for the teaching of elementary and secondary students.

These four core competency areas are to be assessed by communities and provide a pathway for an Indigenous languages speaker to become an Ontario Certified Teacher (OCT).

Following an assessment by a community Endorsement Circle,<sup>1</sup> a community-endorsed Indigenous languages teacher candidate may apply to the Ontario College of Teachers (the College) for certification. Before being

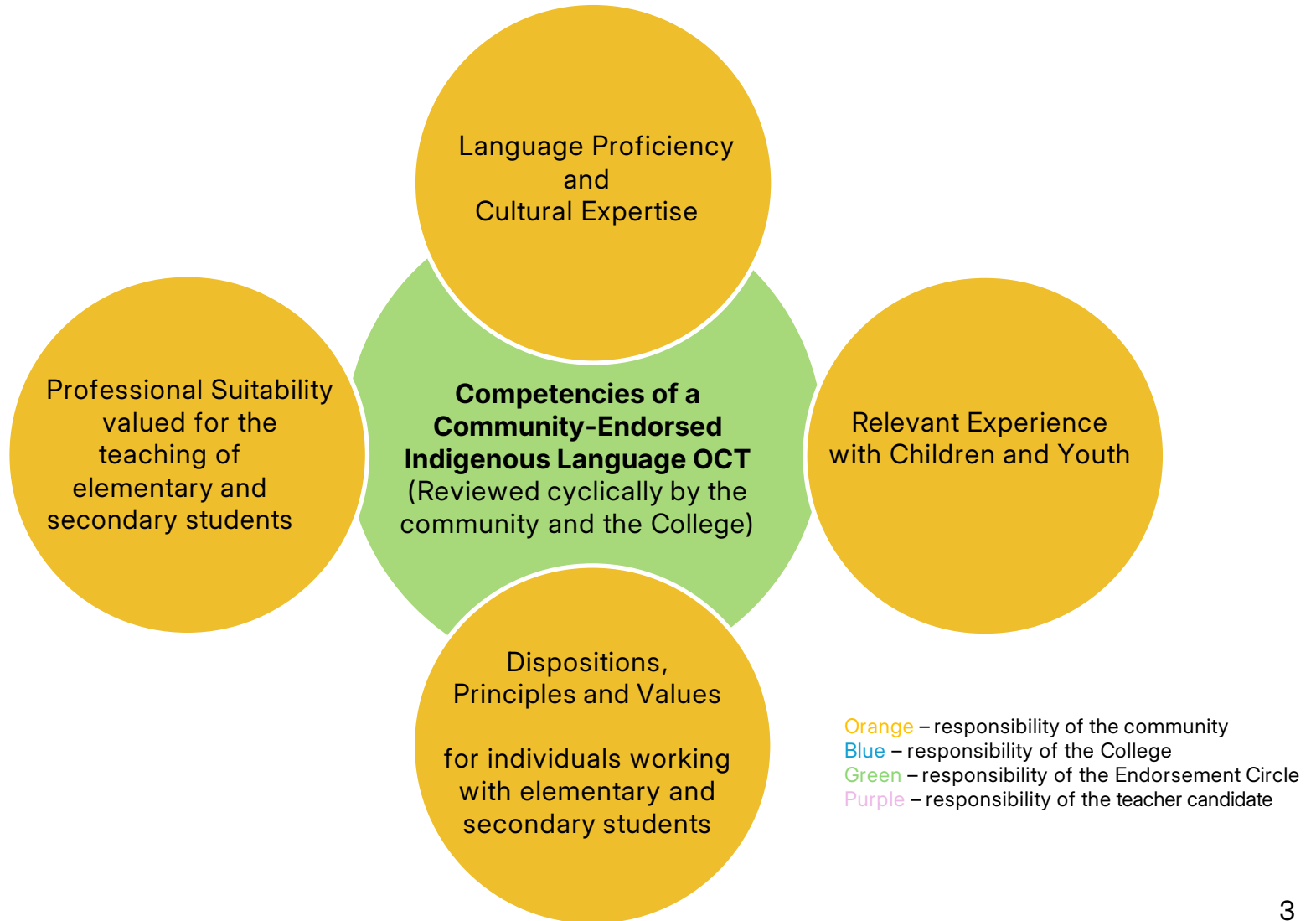
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<sup>1</sup> An Endorsement Circle (or any variation of this term) refers to a body established by a First Nations, Métis, or Inuit Community/ Nation that is responsible for the assessment and endorsement of an Indigenous languages teacher candidate.

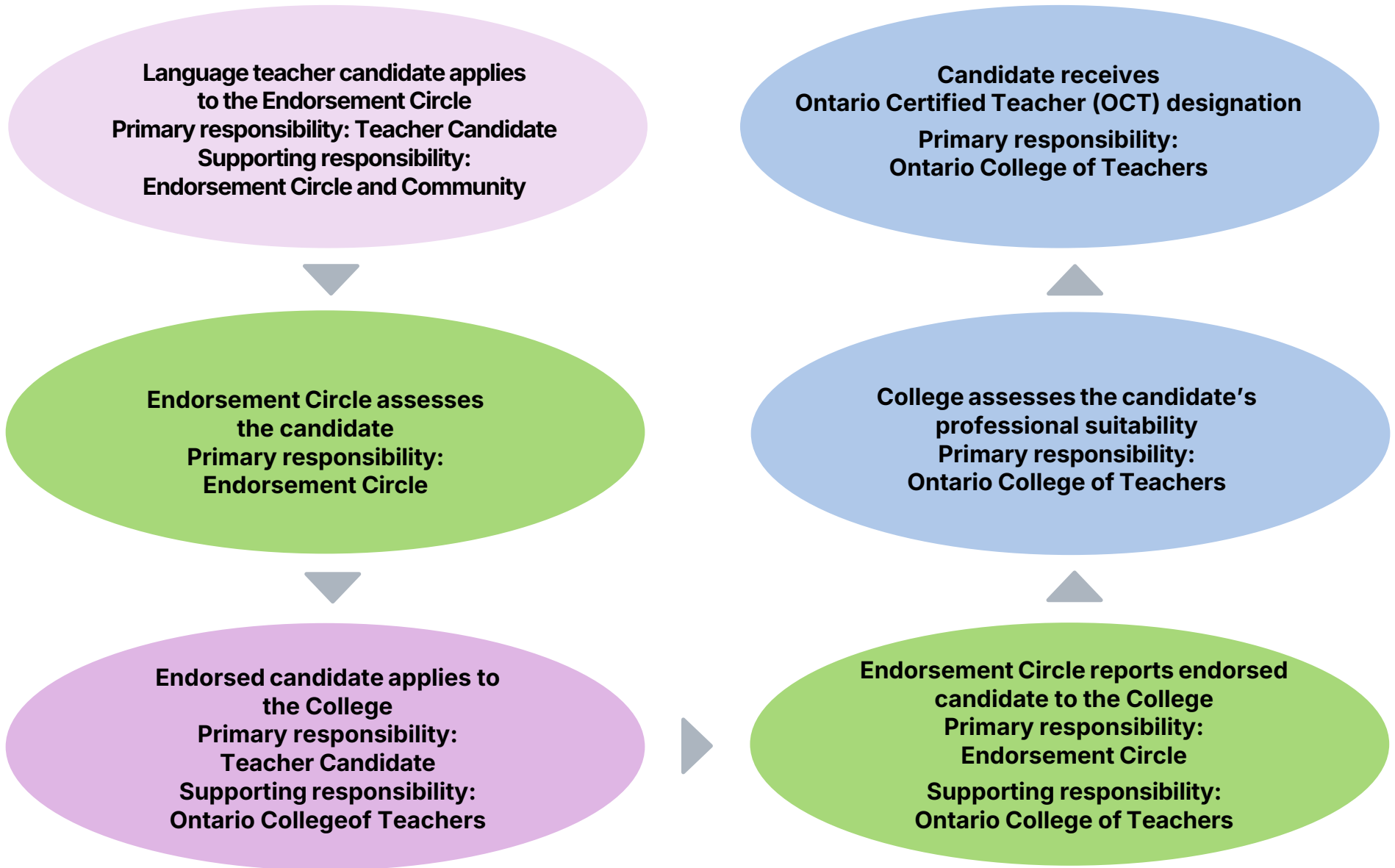
certified by the College, an Indigenous languages teacher candidate must meet the College's minimum professional standards requirements, including a criminal background check, completion of the Sexual Abuse Prevention Program and payment of all fees. Teacher candidates would then be awarded their Ontario Certified Teacher designation, enabling them to teach in the Indigenous language they were endorsed for at any grade level in any Ontario school.

## Proposed Certification Pathway – First Nations, Métis and Inuit Community-Endorsed Language Teacher Candidates

Competency Areas of Indigenous Language Teacher Candidates to be Assessed by Community Endorsement Circles



### Proposed Pathway for an Indigenous Language Speaker to Become an Ontario Certified Teacher



## **Elements and Criteria Proposed by First Nations, Métis and Inuit Language Partners**

### **Competencies of a Community-endorsed First Nations, Métis and Inuit Language Ontario Certified Teacher**

The suggested elements and criteria outlined for each competency area below are based on feedback and input shared by First Nations, Métis and Inuit partners and are intended to be recommended practices for how Endorsement Circles may assess candidates. It is the responsibility of community Endorsement Circles to determine how Indigenous languages speakers are assessed and endorsed.

#### **Language Proficiency and Cultural Expertise**

- Interview assessment is conducted by the Endorsement Circle in the First Nation, Métis or Inuit language.
- Language and culture are intertwined – understanding of culture seen by many as a necessary skillset to complement the teaching of language.
- Cultural and linguistic testing – cultural proficiency could be built into the oral interview. For example, when you're answering questions about who you are, about your clan, and about your community at school and in the natural world.
- Knowledge of relevant cultural history, as determined by the community, may be demonstrated through methods such as an oral interview or a formal assessment.
- An assessment of a candidate's expertise and knowledge of language revitalization.
- May need to prioritize language over dialect in determining proficiency.

- Can include recognition for candidates who attended Indigenous language immersion schools and community-based programs, camps, or both.
- Suggested guidelines and reference materials, developed and led by communities, can be provided to Endorsement Circles to assist with evaluating candidates' language competency and to support consistency.

### **Relevant Experience with Children and Youth**

- Demonstrated ability to emotionally, spiritually and mentally guide or lead students.
- Direct (First Nations, Métis and Inuit classroom teaching experience) or established (demonstrated through other teaching experiences such as mentorship, cultural or community teaching involving children and youth) teaching experiences.
- Consider candidates who have already taught under Letters of Permission or are teaching within the community.
- Consider candidates' work experience within their communities, such as teaching an evening language class or afterschool involvement.
- Consider partnership with immersion schools where candidates can be provided with additional pedagogical<sup>2</sup> training.

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<sup>2</sup> Suggested guidelines concerning instructional and classroom management competencies, developed and led by communities, can be provided to Endorsement Circles to assist with evaluating candidates' pedagogical competencies and to support consistency.

## **Dispositions, Principles and Values**

### **Examples of dispositions, principles and values that Endorsement Circles might choose to look for:**

- Kind, caring, trustworthy, loving, nurturing spirit.
- Partners have noted that there are diverse perspectives on cultural competence, and care should be taken not to turn specific cultural elements into mandatory requirements. It is important that any such considerations involve consensus-building with Elders and Knowledge Holders.
- Teachers must be able to teach in a way that is relevant and connected to the learner's way of life.
- Teachers must understand not only the value of education, but also the responsibility that being a teacher entails.

## **Professional Suitability**

- Applied through:
  - the lens of loss of language
  - culture, generational trauma
  - the urgency of language revitalization.
- Community members, such as former or current Ontario Certified Teachers, could be relied on to assess suitability and to address potential hesitations and challenges with assessing teaching competencies.
- As part of the application process, teacher candidates could be asked to answer questions such as, "What is

your prior learning?” or “What is your understanding of language and culture?”

- Evaluate a teacher’s candidate’s desire and intention to teach.
- Ongoing onboarding and pedagogical supports provided to teachers certified through the pathway with an emphasis on lifelong learning, including potential mentorship opportunities with an associate teacher or senior teacher once hired by a school, resource development supports, teaching and supports in areas related to technology, classroom management, assessments, etc.
- *Note:* Indigenous languages teachers certified through this pathway will have access to existing Additional Qualifications to assist with ongoing professional development. For example, Special Education Schedule D.

## **Description of Page 2 of the Framework: Roles and Responsibilities**

### **Responsibilities of the Language Teacher Candidate:**

- Applies to the Endorsement Circle. (The Endorsement Circle will determine the document to be used to apply for an endorsement.)
- Applies to the College by submitting an Indigenous language teacher candidate application once they are endorsed by the Endorsement Circle.

**Role of the Endorsement Circle:**

- Assesses whether candidates satisfy the community’s own criteria to become certified language teachers.
- If the language teacher candidate is successful, reports them to the College (endorsement form or other similar document such as a letter to be agreed upon between the College and Endorsement Circle).

**Role of the College:**

- Once a candidate is recommended as suitable by the Endorsement Circle:
- Assess the candidate’s professional suitability and whether they meet College requirements:
  - Criminal Record Check
  - successful completion of the Sexual Abuse Prevention Program
  - fee payment.

**Governance – Endorsement Circle Reviewed Cyclically in Partnership between the Community and the College**

An agreement would need to be established confirming that an Endorsement Circle has authority to endorse candidates on behalf of a community or group of communities. This recognition could be formalized through a memorandum of understanding or other document to confirm the authority granted by the community to the Circle and to inform the College.

## **Approved by a Community (or Group of Communities) to Endorse Language Speakers**

- Circle members are vetted by their communities through a nomination process and include first language speakers and language experts. The College will provide suggested guidelines on Endorsement Circle composition.
- The endorsement model is community created and led and is composed of experts, linguists, educators, first language speakers, etc. It is an expert panel and should be acknowledged as a body with the authority to make these judgements.
- The criteria and processes for recognizing distinctions-based committees must be aligned with governance structures that exist for each partner, including considerations for partners that do not rely on an Elder-led certification or language authority model. Some governance and language initiatives may operate through advisory, community-driven and program-based structures.
- The Circle believes that by acknowledging fluent speakers as valued and recognized experts in their specialized field, this can add value and motivation to language learning.

## **Considerations**

- Indigenous Institutes could be invited by Endorsement Circles to form part of their Circle.
- Endorsement Circle members should have demonstrated language proficiency, an understanding of classroom pedagogical and instructional skills and an understanding of the unique delivery requirements for teaching the language.
- Consider strategies and models to support the establishment and long-term success of Endorsement

Circles, including a potential guiding resource to support communities or tools to obtain funding.

- Establish or encourage processes to share knowledge among Endorsement Circles, such as regular check-in meetings between Circles to discuss challenges and best practices or a formal centre of excellence.
- Consider the well-being of Endorsement Circle members, Elders, and other relevant individuals and recognizing the labour and commitment that may be placed on them through this certification pathway.

### **Reviewed cyclically for approval**

- Identify a timeline to review the criteria for competencies and composition of the Endorsement Circle and update the College.

**Additional information provided by First Nations, Métis and Inuit partners related to the proposed competencies can be found at Appendix A.**

**Additional information provided by First Nations, Métis and Inuit partners who presented their respective conceptual frameworks at the College's sharing sessions can be found at Appendix B.**

## **Appendix A: Additional Feedback from Partners**

### **Language Proficiency and Cultural Expertise**

- Consider using American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language Assessment (ACTFL) assessment protocol. First Nations Language benchmarks could be used to assess language proficiency.
- Expertise and knowledge in language revitalization.

### **Relevant Experience with Children and Youth**

- Alternatives – could also consider non-teaching staff (support staff) who already work with students in the school and speak the language to be developed into teachers in a supervised practicum model (give people different entryways, perhaps less qualifications initially).
- Teachers have the tools and skills to address mental health and bullying.
- Teacher’s ability to keep students safe.
- Supervised practicum – community-level based learning is a great practicum opportunity, this is where the language comes from (for example, summer camp).
- Circles might be cautious about accepting a letter of experience signed by a person unknown to the community, and opportunities to supervise and approve relevant experience could be considered.

### **Dispositions, Principles and Values**

- Language and culture are intertwined – understanding of culture seen by many as a necessary skillset to compliment the teaching of language.

**Professional Suitability (Assessed by the Endorsement Circle)**

- Teachings should revolve around traditional learning and be based on community standards, with potential considerations to provincial standards related to numeracy and literacy.
- Consider alternates to criminal record check (this may not be necessary if community leaders understand that a criminal record does not necessarily bar an individual from becoming an OCT – rather, they must be of good character).
- Omit degree requirement (B.Ed.), however be committed to lifelong learning = teachers are learners.
- Ensure learning on the current history, identity and truth of First Nations communities (the current Ontario curriculum does not reflect this).

## Appendix B: Additional Partner Conceptual Frameworks

In addition to elements and criteria shared by First Nations, Métis and Inuit language partners in sharing sessions, the following three Endorsement Circles presented their endorsement models and are referenced throughout the competency areas below:

- Kanien'keha (Mohawk language) Circle
- Uquasilirijit (Inuit language) Elders Circle
- Seven Generations Education Institute (Anishinaabemowin language) Elder Circle Model (in development).

### **Kanien'keha Language Circle – Interview questions as part of the assessment process:**

- Read and write exercise – A visual prompt, such as a comic strip with speech bubbles, is provided to the interviewee and they are asked to describe what they see.
- Oral interview – introducing oneself in the spoken language (tell me who you are, tell me about your family).
- By posing questions relating to identity, an interviewer is able to gather cultural proficiency from the responses, which can provide insights into an individual's connection to community and culture, their clan systems, relationships, etc.
- Utilize American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language Assessment (ACTFL) to grant a language proficiency rating to each candidate for their professional use on resumes.
- ACTFL proficiency tests are used worldwide by academic institutions, government agencies and private corporations. The ACTFL certification is a validation of one's understanding of the principles and concepts of proficiency-based language assessment and of one's ability to apply theory to practice in language teaching and learning settings.

**Uquasilirijiit Elders Circle – Guiding principles of the culture – Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ)  
Principles:**

- Respecting others, relationships and caring for people
- Fostering good spirit by being open, welcoming and inclusive
- Serving and providing for family and/or community
- Decision making through discussion and consensus
- Development of skills through observation, mentoring, practice, and effort
- Working together for a common cause
- Being innovative and resourceful
- Respect and care for the land, animals and the environment.

**Seven Generations Education Institute (SGEI) Elder Circle Model**

- Utilize existing proficiency assessment for French language - Diplome d'Etudes en Langue Francaise (DELF).
- Six Learning Domains.
- A conversational video is shown to applicants as part of the language assessment to assess candidates' language proficiency competency.
- Elders utilize the Indigenous Languages Assessment Tool, which operates on a point system to assess skills:
  - 1 point for each correct response.
  - 0 points for incorrect responses.

- Candidates can achieve a maximum score of 15 points.
- Vision for teaching:
  - Personality (for example, Social-Emotional Capacity): A personality trait or capacity identified by Elders as critical, as stress significantly contributes to educators leaving the classroom.
  - Self-Monitoring: Encouraging teachers to reflect on and maintain their well-being to ensure they are in the right mindset to teach effectively.
  - Equity: Ensuring every child has equal opportunities to succeed, recognizing and addressing individual needs.
  - Cultural Competence: A challenging yet essential component that remains a work in progress to fully define and implement.
  - Empathy: Cultivating a deep understanding and compassion for others, integral to building meaningful connections in education.
- **Six distinct components:**
  - Elders define and build assessments for “great candidates”
  - Recruitment of “superior” candidates
  - Training of “could be great” candidates
  - Onboarding into a school – New Indigenous Teacher Induction Program (NITIP)
  - Research – student learning side, teacher “delightment” side
  - Creation of Full H/E credentialling pathway.