Achieving Equity in Graduation Rates and Other Indicators of Success for Indigenous Learners in Canada

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Abstract

This research project was designed to attend to inequity for Indigenous students, communities, and knowledges in a northern British Columbian district. The aims of the article are to share the systemic and individual transformation for Indigenous learners and their families based on the strengths and barriers they perceive in the system. Presented here are the results of extensive engagement with students, parents or guardians, teachers, administrators, and Indigenous communities that have led to novel practical approaches to governance, policy, programmatic design, and practice in a mainstream school district, resulting in improved school experiences for Indigenous learners. Through this research we illuminate the voices of Indigenous students and show how they guided the pursuit of equity in a Canadian school district. We examined the unconscious colonial agenda to understand how it emerges visibly and invisibly in a given context (Louie, 2020), while

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simultaneously creating distinct responses emerging from the teachings of Indigenous stakeholders and rights holders. Internal and external pressures on school districts often result in urgent demands for transformation, or at minimum, the urgent shift in perception of transformation (Daigle, 2019), but real and sustaining change cannot be rushed, borrowed, or created in isolation from the rest of the system.

Keywords: Indigenous Education, decolonizing education, reconciliation

Résumé

Ce projet d'étude avait pour objet de remédier à l'inégalité des étudiants, des communautés et des connaissances indigènes dans une école du nord de la Colombie-Britannique. L'objectif de ce document est de partager la transformation systémique et individuelle des apprenants indigènes et de leurs familles selon les forces et les obstacles qu'ils perçoivent dans le système. Cette étude présente les résultats d'un engagement approfondi avec les élèves, les parents/tuteurs, les enseignants, l'administration et les communautés indigènes, qui a conduit à de nouvelles approches pratiques relatives à la gouvernance, aux politiques, à la conception de programmes et à la pratique au sein d'un district scolaire ordinaire, permettant ainsi d'améliorer les expériences scolaires des apprenants indigènes. Elle met en lumière les voix des élèves indigènes et montre comment ces derniers ont guidé la recherche de l'équité dans un district scolaire canadien. Pour ce faire, nous examinons les projets coloniaux inconscients afin de comprendre comment ils émergent de manière visible et invisible dans un contexte donné, tout en créant simultanément des réponses distinctes issues des enseignements des parties prenantes et des détenteurs de droits indigènes. En effet, les pressions internes et externes exercées sur les districts scolaires se traduisent souvent par des demandes urgentes de transformation, ou au moins par un changement urgent de la perception de la transformation. Cependant, un changement réel et durable ne peut être précipité, emprunté ou créé de manière isolée du reste du système.

Mots-clés : Education Indigénes, Education décoloniser, réconciliation

Introduction

Inequity in education for Indigenous learners remains pervasive despite an emerging recognition of oppression in Canadian society (Daigle, 2019) that has come to light as a result of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and other truth-telling. Myriad programming and curricular approaches designed to achieve equity in education over the decades have resulted in negligible improvements in well-being for Indigenous students due to lingering apprehension to reckon with the reality of colonization and the invisible and normalized manner in which it is reproduced (Louie, 2020). We contend that, despite increasing goodwill toward reconciliation in Canadian schools (Murry & James, 2021), there has been limited interest in drawing transformation from the self-stated needs of Indigenous peoples. Each school district presents a unique challenge that requires bespoke solutions bearing in mind context, strengths, local culture, and school faculty. However, the voices of students whom educators hope to empower are conspicuously absent in the formation of district and schoolwide plans (Louie & Gereluk, 2021). The research question of this article asks," How can we harness Indigenous student and community voices to guide change in K–12 education?"

Canadian education has entered an era that emphasizes meaningful incorporation of Indigenous voices and knowledges to a system that has historically aligned solely with Western aims and values. Building on the momentum of decades of resistance, scholars can revise the strategy from persuading Canadians that oppression in schools is a constant reality for Indigenous peoples (Battiste, 2017), to transforming the system in practical ways to rid itself of colonial foundations. Instead of insisting on imposing solutions for problems that schools have participated in creating, interventions guided by the needs and priorities of Indigenous students and rights holders should take precedence.

It is typical for school leaders to request ready-made programming or prescriptive designs from Indigenous experts. Frequently we meet with district leadership from across western Canada who are eager to implement innovative programs or curriculum that will function as the panacea for disparities in educational achievement. The instinct is not misguided, but it omits sustaining components that confront institutional culture, colonization, and commitment to authentic partnering with Indigenous communities. As a means of transformation, it is critical to enter reflective processes to understand the implications of colonization on a practical level. In this research we examine the unconscious colo-

nial agenda to understand how it emerges visibly and invisibly in a given context (Louie, 2020), while simultaneously creating distinct responses emerging from the teachings of Indigenous stakeholders and rights holders.[1] Internal and external pressures on school districts often result in urgent demands for transformation, or at minimum, the urgent shift in perception of transformation (Daigle, 2019). But real and sustaining change cannot be rushed, borrowed, or created in isolation from the rest of the system.

Our research project was designed to attend to inequity for Indigenous students, communities, and knowledges in School District 91 in northern British Columbia. The primary aims were to generate systemic and individual transformation for Indigenous learners and their families based on the strengths and barriers they perceive in the system. Contrary to decades of research that has positioned Indigenous learners in a deficit position, we instead investigated the deficits of the systems in which they are educated (Scott & Louie, 2020) Presented here are the results of extensive engagement with students, parents or guardians, teachers, administrators and Indigenous communities through action research that has led to novel practical approaches and program creation in governance, policy, programmatic design, and practice in mainstream school, which has then resulted in improved school experiences for Indigenous students.

Positioning Ourselves

We are two Indigenous scholars and educators who come from the territory in which this research and work is undertaken. Dr. Dustin Louie is a First Nations scholar of mixed ancestry from Nadleh Whut'en and Nee Tahi Buhn First Nations (Beaver Clan) of the Dakelh people. He is an associate professor and the Director of the Indigenous Teacher Education Program (NITEP) at the University of British Columbia, and has extensive experience and leadership in Indigenous education while leading a number of districts, organizations, and agencies across western Canada through decolonizing and indigenizing transformation. Leona Prince is a Director of Instruction – Indigenous Education and comes from the Lake Babine Nation (Beaver Clan). She has been a teacher and administrator in the region and now works in the senior administration of the school district.

1 The distinction between a stakeholder and rights holder was made by the Ministry of Education in an effort to distinguish the relationships between the rights holder First Nations and school districts and the stakeholder relationships we hold with organizations that do not hold rights and title to the land.

Leona has also worked at the provincial level with FocusedEd, OpenSchoolsBC, and on the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) whose mandate is imbedding Indigenous perspectives authentically in the curriculum and within educational practice. In addition to our membership in the First Nations on this territory, we both graduated from schools in the district, which has equipped us with unique insight into student and educational experiences.

Establishing the Research Context

To appreciate our approach requires a fulsome understanding of the context in which this project was located. School District 91 is in central British Columbia (B.C.) and covers more than 70,000 square kilometres within the boundaries of 14 distinct First Nations. There are four major Indigenous language groups within this region, 4,500 students, and the Indigenous population accounts for 28.9% of the student body (School District 91 Nechako Lakes, 2021). All the brick and mortar schools are located in five main town sites and are positioned directly or indirectly on the Highway of Tears. The Highway of Tears is a 725-kilometre corridor of Highway 16 between Prince George and Prince Rupert, B.C., which has been the location of many murders and disappearances of Indigenous women and girls since 1970 (McDiarmid, 2019). Additionally, the Lejac Residential School is located centrally in the district between Nadleh Whut'en and Stellat'en First Nation.

The Lejac Residential School was operated by the Catholic Church under contract to the Canadian government from 1922 to 1976. Being in the heart of Dakelh territory, most of the thousands of children who attended the school were of Dakelh descent, which included many of our relatives. The school was named after Father Jean Marie Lejac, an Oblate missionary who cofounded the mission at Fort Saint James in 1873. After the school was closed in 1976, the land was transferred to Nadleh Whut'en First Nation and the buildings were razed. All that remains today are the cemetery and the Rose Prince memorial (Diocesan Pastoral Centre, n.d.). In addition to Lejac, Indian day schools were located in Burns Lake (Immaculata) and Fort St. James (St. Maria Goretti). The historical significance of the establishment of these colonial educational structures cannot be understated as educators attempt to dismantle and recover from the impacts of these imposed systems and their legacy in public education. Colonial schooling did

not end with the decommissioning of residential schools. Rather, we contend that the dehumanization and intentional disconnection of Indigenous peoples from their ways of being were transferred to public schooling and sustained into the present era.

Framing the Research

We also contend that both decolonizing and indigenizing interventions are required to pursue equity in schooling in this region. In conceptualizing decolonizing, we rely on my (Louie, forthcoming) definition that includes three primary components. First, decolonizing is challenging the single Western viewpoint, story, or perspective that defines and interprets knowledge, ways of being, and people. Second, decolonizing is disrupting the belief that Western culture is the standard form of humanity with which every other culture does or should align their ways of being and knowing. Finally, decolonizing is dismantling White supremacy that places everything White, whether it be individuals, their culture, or systems, as being better or more valid than those identities and ways of being of racialized communities.

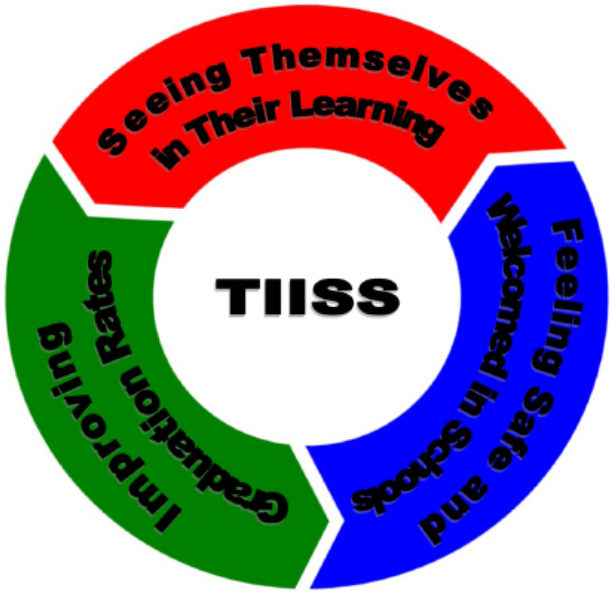
At many access points through our research, we have employed decolonizing principles as our guide, which started at the heart of this work: honouring the viewpoints, voices, and lived experiences of Indigenous students and community members as the critical knowledge that has led our understanding and responses to inequity in education. In addition, we have understood indigenizing as the infusion of Indigenous Knowledges into colonial spaces. Building from conversations with Ardoch Algonquin scholar Lindsay Morcom, we added the additional frame of differentiating between incorporation and Indigenization. The former is the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges in a siloed or isolated manner, whereas the latter is an embedding of Indigenous knowledges that radiate beyond the initial spaces they are practiced. We conceive of decolonization and Indigenization as the two streams we follow to achieve equity in education for Indigenous learners.

In this research we reframed our conception of Indigenous school success to embody the perspectives and voices of Indigenous students and families. Rather than entering our research with assumptions about Indigenous student success, we completed an iterative loop that first gathered knowledge from Indigenous peoples on their definitions and examples of successful learning. Although we do not view graduation rates as the sole or definitive criterion of school success (Draper, 2016), in the district in question,

they are positioned as one indicator of successful learning, amongst others. Based on our research, starting with the standard of graduation rates, we found two additional criteria: Indigenous students feeling safe and welcomed in schools, and Indigenous students being able to recognize themselves in their learning. Upon completion of our research, the recommendations and program creation were based on these Three Indicators of Indigenous Student Success (TIISS; see Figure 1). We challenged our research to decolonize by placing control of defining student success in the hands of the Indigenous community (Smith, 2021), instead of having academics and educational leaders impose criteria as they have done since the inception of schools in this region.

Figure 1

The Three Indicators of Indigenous Student Success (TIISS) Model



Between 2015 and 2020, School District 91 saw an increase of Indigenous graduation rates from 64.6% to 72.6% (see Table 1). Over the same period, the graduation rates of non-Indigenous learners in the district increased from 73.2% to 74.3% (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2021). A key contribution of this article is the examination of engagement with Indigenous peoples that permitted success in this domain. Of critical importance is recognition of the district demographics that position parity in achievement as such an outlier. Over the same timeframe, graduation rates for Indigenous

learners across British Columbia increased from 54% to 62%, a substantial growth, but nowhere near parity of the provincial average for non-Indigenous learners of 84% (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2021). Indigenous peoples comprise 11.3% of the student body in the province (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2021), far lower than the 28.9% they comprise in the district where our research is located (School District 91 Nechako Lakes, 2021). In addition, 32% of the Indigenous students in the district are living on-reserve, which is a far higher percentage than the provincial average of 11.8% for all Indigenous learners. Moreover, there is a recent history in Canada of Indigenous students receiving Evergreen Certificates upon graduation, which does not enable an immediate transition into post-secondary education (Scully, 2012).

The Evergreen Certificate rate in this district has remained consistent during the increase in graduation rates, which means it cannot be attributed to guiding students toward streams that will limit options for post-secondary education. Specifically, School District 91 created a standard practice for the Director of Indigenous Education, who reviews the students' files to ensure Indigenous students are not streamed into an Evergreen pathway, consultations with families occur, and the system supports students' potential for educational success.

Table 1

Graduation Success Rates 2015 to 2020

Six-year Completion Rate*

	Aboriginal			Non-Aboriginal		
School Year	All Students %	Female %	Male %	All Students %	Female %	Male %
2015/16	65	64	65	73	74	72
2016/17	63	69	56	73	78	68
2017/18	69	74	65	75	72	79
2018/19	65	61	68	74	71	77
2019/20	73	72	73	74	72	76

Source: British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2021, p. 36.

Historically, on-reserve First Nations students have had substantially lower graduation rates than their off-reserve First Nations or Métis counterparts (Louie & Gereluk, 2021). In many districts across western Canada that achieve near parity, Métis student populations comprise a larger percentage of the Indigenous student body, which is not the case in this context. In SD91, near parity in graduation rates was achieved in a region with a significantly higher percentage of Indigenous learners, including a far higher number of on-reserve First Nations students. These factors would typically predict far lower than average graduation rates. As one of the criteria of the TIISS, the achievement of near parity in graduation rates is an encouraging sign of successful approaches in the district.

Beyond graduation rates, we believe there are relevant criteria for determining student success that are assumed from the perspective of those who control the hidden curriculum (Rahman, 2013). Indigenous scholars contend that equity in education entails ethical spaces, which are places where students can be who they are while being heard and valued (Donald, 2012; Ermine, 2005). Schools are critical sites of modelling and enacting what it means to be human in society. Canadian schools have dehumanized Indigenous students by requiring them to discard their culture and align their ways of being and knowing with the West to gain acknowledgement (Battiste, 2017), success, and recognition as being fully human. Moreover, we perceive access to learning based on Indigenous knowledges as an essential criterion for recognizing school success.

There are myriad other criteria, but, directed by the voices of Indigenous students, parents or guardians, and rights holders, we felt it important to name educational goals beyond graduation rates as guiding our process. Through the creation of TIISS, we hold criteria to evaluate the imagining and development of interventions in the district, asking if they will improve the conditions for Indigenous students through academic success, creating a welcoming environment, and ensuring they are educated in a space that honours their identity. We contend that increases in these criteria will inevitably lead to increases in graduation rates, as achieving such goals are not simply the ultimate goal, but rather ensuring humanity for all students and an environment where learning is possible.

Under the leadership of Leona Prince, the Director of Instruction – Indigenous Education and coauthor of this article, and of the superintendent Manu Madhok, the district has experienced substantial growth in Indigenous graduation rates, while also engaging in a robust campaign to ensure welcoming environments where Indigenous students can see themselves in their learning. Contributing to and building upon the

strengths that have allowed substantial growth, we have engaged in research and district transformation that locates Indigenous voices and community relationships at the centre of our practice and conceptualization of quality education.

Simply adopting the practices and policies of SD91 will not suffice in leading transformation; however, we believe there are wise practices that can help establish learning communities that are conducive and receptive to change. The innovative approach of this research is the process of engaging with stakeholders and rights holders to direct programmatic and practical transformation, and then creating and evaluating the interventions collaboratively, which has contributed to improved equity in graduation rates, the welcoming environment of schools, and representation in learning in the district.

Moreover, the space of praxis has been critical in our engagement with transformative approaches in decolonizing education. Too often general or abstract directives are given to districts, school leaders, and teachers to take on reconciliation or decolonization, establish stronger relationships with Indigenous learners, rid ourselves of unconscious bias, or adopt one of the litany of buzzword approaches. The complex and contested nature of these approaches leave teachers (or whomever is expected to implement change) with the overwhelming task of deciphering intentions and designing blueprints of change based on nebulous grand statements coming down from provincial mandates. In this research, we do not intend to impose expectations on leaders or educators to interpret our findings and create interventions without support. It is not enough to uncover that racism is a barrier to Indigenous student success. We must design, implement, evaluate, and redesign approaches to disrupt racism in collaboration with faculty and school leadership. A plethora of scholarship is available that can list the limitations of schooling in creating equity for Indigenous learners. Our goal is to be specific about the limitations and strengths of schools from the perspectives of Indigenous learners and community, then design, implement, and test interventions that can disrupt and dismantle the colonial and oppressive remnants named by those Indigenous students and their communities.

A New Canadian Reality

Prior to examining our approach in SD91, we would be remiss in not acknowledging the infuriating and heartbreaking revelations about residential schools that have come to light in Kamloops, Cowessess, Penelakut, and Lower Kootenay communities. As scholars who focus on decolonization for Indigenous peoples and who have had grandparents and countless family members attend residential schools, we are not surprised, but still traumatized, by the systemic disregard for Indigenous life that is pervasive in our nation's history. Our experiences examining the rhetoric used to describe our people by politicians and educators during the residential school era (Stanley, 2020), hearing the testimony of the brave survivors in our communities (TRC, 2015); knowing the widespread physical, sexual, emotional, and spiritual abuse; and learning about the abhorrent medical testing (Mosby, 2013) on Indigenous children in these institutions, the revelations emerging in the summer of 2021 are not surprising and remain consistent with the Canadian relationship to Indigenous people during this era. These are not outliers, nor should they be treated as divorced from Canada's relationship to Indigenous people.

The research we conducted and the responses we implemented happened prior to learning about the horrors of mass graves, which are likely to expand as researchers examine additional residential school sites in the coming years. We believe there will be a stronger commitment in the systems, and with educators individually, to engage in acts of reconciliation as the true nature of colonization emerges in our national consciousness. We also believe it is our responsibility to illuminate for educators how the same fundamental dehumanization of Indigenous children exists in less overt and visible ways in contemporary schooling. Reconciliation is not merely apologizing for the horrific past, but instead unearthing the continued remnants of colonial attitudes that harm Indigenous peoples in the present.

Methodology

Dakelh Oral Analysis

Oral analysis of data was a method we naturally observed without intentionality. As a critical element of our work, we ensured freedom for our hearts' reactions prior to conventional forms of academic analysis. Given that we are personally located at the core of this emotionally provocative work, separating our heart and our experiences was

untenable. Rather than removing our natural responses, we honoured our hearts' reactions and preserved them as essential in our analysis. Our work is strengths-based, yet we inescapably faced disheartening stories from our communities in the findings. Once we had acknowledged and processed our feelings, we could incorporate them into the intellectual lens based on analytical perspectives. Moreover, as Dakelh scholars who share cultural norms, we removed demands to rationalize our epistemologies in order to collaborate. Our methodology builds from the work of Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2021), who contends that research should be empowering and decolonizing, while based on the self-stated needs and processes of Indigenous communities.

In addition to extensive interviews with students and community members through equity scans, additional data sources for the study included three separate surveys conducted with Indigenous students from Grades 7 to 10, their parents or guardians, and teachers in the district. Moreover, for a connected study we held additional surveys for Indigenous high school girls and follow-up focus groups. We acknowledge and recognize criticisms of including surveys for Indigenous research, which do not necessarily adhere to iterations of Indigenous methodologies (Kovach, 2010). However, the process of completing surveys was prefaced by extensive collaboration and communication with all 14 First Nations in the district, and the Indigenous home-school coordinators in each community had in-person conversations with parents about the research and sat with the students to support them through the survey. The delivery was not sterile and disconnected; instead, district leadership and the home and school coordinators were brilliant in creating a supportive and engaging environment that adheres to Dakelh conceptions of visiting.

In leading this project, we utilized a research methodology that was written and acted from a position of passion and urgency. We have made no attempt to hide our emotional connection and investment in our work. In this district we have children, nieces, nephews, cousins, and clan members in the school system, which promotes a sense of urgency to create change and an equitable system. By no means are we unique in having a familial stake in our research context, but we have also seen repeated iterations of programs directed toward Indigenous peoples without their input. We intend our passion, excitement, and frustrations to be visible and alive in our writing and approach to decolonizing education. Moreover, in this context we do not see ourselves in opposition to district leadership or the education system. Instead, we were granted the freedom to learn, collaborate, and transform a district intent on being better and ridding itself of the colo-

nial and oppressive foundations ubiquitous in Canadian schooling. Our relationship with the district and fellow educators was not adversarial, and instead was collaborative, a privilege not everyone in our position enjoys.

Inciting Moment

Equity scan. In August 2016, the B.C. Ministry of Education embarked on the construction of an Equity Scanning Tool to support school districts in identifying barriers that were impacting Indigenous student achievement. This action was undertaken in response to the Auditor General of British Columbia's (2015) report on the education of Aboriginal students in the B.C. public school system, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (United Nations, 2007), and the TRC's (2015) Calls to Action. During the 2018–2019 school year, SD91 started the Equity in Action Pilot Project. The scan was conducted with both stakeholder and rights holder representatives invited from the community to take part in the scanning process. At the time, the district's Indigenous graduation rate was 64.6%, well below the district average (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2021).

The purpose was to understand the current context of Indigenous education within the communities to improve outcomes for Indigenous learners and attend to the pervasive gaps in educational achievement. The four pillars of an equity scan are the learning profile, the learning environment, policy and governance, and the pedagogical core. The superintendent of schools for SD91, Manu Madhok, stated early in the process that this would be "an opportunity to hold a mirror up to ourselves and be truly honest about what we see in our reflection" (personal communication, September 27, 2018). This sentiment is echoed in the Auditor General of British Columbia's (2015) report on the education of Indigenous students in the B.C. public school system, which stated that there is a "racism of low expectations for Aboriginal learners" (p. 37). At the conclusion of the scanning process, an action plan was developed based on the outcomes of the 32 questions that were asked.

In all communities, three key areas were identified as needing growth: culture and language, communication, and connectedness and relationships. There was consensus that a strong foundation already existed in these areas, and they have guided the decolonizing work of SD91. Additionally, a theory of change was co-constructed with the groups. The statement that continues to guide the work of SD91 reads: "Together, we hold to the truth

that our narrative must be transparent. We learn, in collaboration, from the land, culture and language of the local communities by communicating that learning with each other and building strong relationships" (School District 91 Nechako Lakes, 2022, para. 1). The strong collaborative relationship between the 14 First Nations and SD91 continues to support the efforts to decolonize the system. Emerging from equity scan was a clear directive to conduct further research to embrace the voice of Indigenous students and transform their perspectives into realities in the school system.

Relationship with Nations and Indigenous communities. Any meaningful attempt at establishing equity in education for Indigenous learners must reflect upon the relationship with the Indigenous community. Indigenous peoples are justifiably apprehensive to engage with educators due to a history of unbalanced and often abusive relationships (Battiste, 2017). Such discussions often elicit notions of residential schools, but one need not venture that far back to find an abundance of examples of schools being unwelcoming (Scott & Louie, 2020) and harmful places (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2020) for Indigenous peoples. The relationship forged between the school district and the Indigenous communities is a vital prerequisite for the success of transformational initiatives (Smith et al., 2017). Depending on the district, Indigenous stakeholders may have diverse representation that lacks solidary or is diffused in an urban population. By no means is the relationship perfect in SD91, yet sufficient trust was present to propel genuine collaboration and mutual respect. In addition to the school-level leadership, which cannot be emphasized enough, the relationship that Leona maintains as the district principal of Indigenous education, and Manu Madhok's long-term reputation and relationship with the Indigenous community as the superintendent, formed the foundation of strong communal bonds.

The first evidence of a strong relationship is the Aboriginal Education Committee (AEC), which is made up primarily of the 14 First Nations representatives, school district senior leadership (including the superintendent), Board of Trustee representatives, the district principal of Aboriginal education, site-based administrators, and two urban representatives from the east and west ends of the district. Several key aspects reinforced the relationships with the rights holder First Nations: being transparent, not meeting with predetermined outcomes, meeting them within their communities, providing constant communication and involvement, and listening to and reflecting on their feedback. All partners continued to hold up these principles to move the work forward. Without these relationships, success would not have been impossible.

The second, and probably the most surprising to Dustin, as an academic, was the speed at which Leona and Manu were able to a secure memorandum of understanding (MOU) with all 14 First Nations in the district. Dustin has been involved in projects that required months or years to secure an MOU with a single First Nation. In this case, we were able to establish 14 MOUs in mere weeks, which speaks to the strong ties that have been established through the AEC, as well as the personal relationships with the district principal, superintendent, and communities that have been fostered over decades.

Third, we collaborated on the questions and aims of the surveys, signed MOUs with all 14 Nations, consistently reported on the process and outcomes (including the needs of the Nations in the survey data), and were intentional and transparent regarding how the findings would drive programmatic and policy changes in the district. Māori scholar L. T. Smith (2021) has contended that decolonizing research must be directed by the needs and desires of Indigenous peoples, not the researchers. Despite the researchers in this case being Indigenous and from the communities in question, for true decolonizing methodologies to occur researchers must genuinely collaborate in the design, implementation, analysis, and outcomes with community partners (Kovach, 2010; Smith, 2021). This means listening to and implementing their input as collaborators and consistently reporting back and drawing attention to their recommendations and knowledge living in the research and ensuing programming.

In this research we made a commitment to evaluating school success beyond graduation rates. Democratization of decision making and reconceptualizing quality education through productive relationships in the AEC supports the establishment of schools where Indigenous students are valued and Indigenous knowledges can be meaningfully incorporated. The healthy and productive relationships in the AEC are a prerequisite for achieving the additional indicators we have established for quality education of Indigenous students.

Our process. The district was entering the potential series of projects from a position of strength due to progressive and effective senior leadership, strong relationships with the Nations, a recent history of continued growing success in this field, and the knowledge gained from the equity scan. Building from this momentum, we wanted to be bold in our thinking about transformation. Indigenous scholars and educators have fought for generations to gain an opportunity to enact a vision of what education can be (Hare, 2004), and in this context we were given freedom and support to imagine and enact

policy, programs, or practice in a district with a significant Indigenous population (School District 91 Nechako Lakes, 2021) and a desire for equity.

Given the robust opportunity we had to create change, we wanted to approach any recommendation through evidence-based and collaborative means. We examined the district data to understand the demographics, five- and six-year graduation rates, attendance, transitions, and existing programs. Building from the contextual knowledge, we relied on scholarship that could support us through this process by understanding the work that came before us and the theoretical and practical recommendations of Indigenous academics. The next step in creating policy, programs, or shifting practice in the district was to ensure we were collaborative in our approach, not merely pursuing our visions of success and enacting our methods of transformation.

In our pursuit of systemic change, we began with extensive research, discussions, and surveying of stakeholders and rights holders in the district. First, we share the findings of surveys with Indigenous students from Grades 7 to 10 in all four high schools, and their parents or guardians. Next, we examine the findings from surveys completed by 138 teachers, who made up 52% percent of the district faculty. Finally, we introduce ongoing research that has emerged in our study that we are conducting with Indigenous girls in one high school in the district. In subsequent sections we reveal how the research findings informed the development of programs, policy, and practice in the district. Moreover, we also show the iterative loop embedded in this process that includes research to validate the success of the programs to align with the overall aims of the campaign.

Results: Gathering Knowledge and Experiences

Student and parent survey responses. Following the success of the equity scan, we built upon the available data to direct educational decisions. It became apparent that student and parent voices were conspicuously absent. Battiste (2017), Goulet and Goulet (2014), and other Indigenous academics have stressed the necessity of raising Indigenous voices and meaningfully taking up their recommendations.

The sample size we were able to attain in this study was substantial given the relatively small population in the schools. Of the 119 surveys that were conducted, 51 were from parents or guardians and 68 were from students. These numbers gave us a significant sample to ensure programmatic development was informed by the respondents' stated needs.

The wording varied slightly between the parent and student surveys, but both surveys fundamentally asked the same questions. In addition to demographic questions, the surveys inquired about students' strengths and successes, community support, transitions, and experiences of racism.[2] We designed our inquiry to be strengths-based, opening with questions that positioned and inquired about Indigenous learner success, as all students are successful in some manner. Conventional approaches typically position Indigenous learners from a deficit perspective (Sutherland, 2005) and problematize their behaviour or backgrounds as the primary barrier to quality education. Our aim was to understand student and parent/guardian perspectives on what makes them successful and what is impeding their success.

Given the varied nature of the questions posed, we received wide-ranging and expansive responses that can inform a multitude of decisions for teachers, schools, the district, and First Nations communities. In the student and parent/guardian surveys alone there are enough data for an entire research program; however, we narrow our focus in this article to the notable findings related to the aims of our study: to create systemic change through policy, programs, and practice that will influence academic success, feelings of safety and belonging in the school, and provide learning where Indigenous students can see themselves. Emerging from the survey data are clear strengths we can build upon and barriers we should begin to dismantle.

In each of the schools, teachers were recognized as playing a critical role in student engagement and success. In one school, 17 of the 20 (85%) students surveyed in an open-ended question acknowledged teachers as the central reason for their ability to achieve success. Similarly, in another school, teachers were recognized as having the most significant contribution to students' success (42%). Clearly, teachers are playing a substantial role in Indigenous student success, and this factor can be built upon in each school and is a strength of the district. In subsequent focus groups with Indigenous students a clear delineation emerged between the teachers who are supportive and understanding, and the few teachers who can be adversarial toward Indigenous students.

2 What has helped you achieve success in education? How do you feel about your potential for success in education? What has been your experience moving from elementary school into high school? Is there anything getting in the way of your success as a student? How does your home community support your success in education? Have you experienced racism in school? If so, how have you experienced it? Did you report it? How was it handled?

Despite the significant positivity toward teachers, students and parents or guardians also shared examples of poor relationships with teachers. In a subsequent survey we conducted with high school Indigenous girls in the district, we found that 58.7% of participants had trusting relationships with two or more adults at school, with an additional 19.6% having a trusting relationship with one adult. We recognized early in the research that relationships formed between Indigenous students and teachers are critical, and we tasked ourselves with leveraging them to improve well-being for Indigenous learners. Moreover, given that establishing a welcoming environment for Indigenous students was one of our TIISS criteria for success, supporting teachers to enhance their knowledge in this area was an obvious response.

A second finding was the number of Indigenous students who reported experiences of racism. Although not surprising, given our experiences as Indigenous students in the same schools, we were hopeful that contemporary generations were more progressive and racism had become less pervasive. We noted a discrepancy between the number of surveys completed and responses to the question about racism: only 46 of the 68 student surveys and 33 of the 51 parent/guardian surveys included responses. It is hard to say why some participants declined to answer this question. Perhaps they felt uncomfortable responding to something so painful, did not understand the question, or simply had lost interest toward the end of the survey. In the surveys that included responses, there were substantial reports of racism. Notably, 21 of the 24 (87%) students who answered this question reported experiencing racism in a single school. Across the entire district, 81.8% of the students reported overt acts of racism, and parents or guardians reported being aware of overt racism at a rate of 60.6%. Survey responses typically did not mention less overt examples of racism, which include ignoring, avoidance, and negative assumptions, that account for the majority of oppressive acts (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). If we were to educate students and parents or guardians on the invisible and normalized ways racism is reproduced, we believe the already alarming percentages of reported racism would increase.

Most reported cases of overt racism (name calling, violence, or direct statements denigrating culture) involved peers. Students shared some of the following experiences: “One time an Aboriginal student was spitting into the garbage and the White kid said, ‘They should just go back to residential school again’”; “Some White kids called me and about five of my friends a bunch of ‘N’ words. It was the wrong race to call us.” Students

also reported examples of teachers marginalizing students and Indigenous peoples: "I've witnessed our Indigenous support worker talking about the genocide of our people and wiping out our culture, and the teacher said, 'Oh well, you're still here'"; "I felt targeted by my grade eight teacher. If I didn't hand in my work, she would say, 'Oh, that's so typical.'" Parents or guardians reported the heart-breaking experiences that their children have shared about racism in the schools: "Students know he's in a different program, so other kids call him a dumb Indian"; "For my son, he says, 'The White kids are hard on me.'"

Teacher survey responses. We sent the teacher survey to all 265 teachers in the district to get a sense of their understanding of anti-oppressive education as it relates to the personal and social core competency of the B.C. curriculum; we received 138 responses. The British Columbia Ministry of Education (n.d.) stated, "The Personal and Social competency is the set of abilities that relate to students' identity in the world, both as individuals and as members of their community and society" ("Unpacking the Three Core Competencies" section, para. 3). Given that provincial directives already address anti-oppressive education, we opted to examine teacher understanding and commitment to Indigenous equity through the core competencies. At times, decolonizing or indigenizing work can be viewed as onerous by teachers who misunderstand the concepts (Louie, forthcoming). Our overall goal was to embed decolonizing principles into the district's practice to improve educational experiences for Indigenous learners. We used the framework of the ministry's competencies and positioned our questions so that our district-wide approach would be viewed through the lens of supporting teachers to meet the existing provincial requirements, instead of adding an additional burden.

In the survey, following the demographic inquiries, we asked multiple questions about teachers' knowledge of and comfort with the personal and social core competency, its applicability to their discipline, and their confidence teaching about various aspects of identity as they relate to gender, race, sexuality, and class, among other factors. The subsequent section posed questions about the importance of knowing and teaching Indigenous history and culture, as well as how the teachers could receive additional support to teach these topics. The next section asked about supports and barriers in the schools for Indigenous students. Finally, the last set of questions asked about racism toward Indigenous students, how it has been dealt with, and the specific experiences of Indigenous girls in the region.

The findings provided us with direction as to which areas need attention in the district and the productive foundations to build from. We asked if teachers felt they had a responsibility to know about Indigenous history and peoples of the region; 52.9% strongly agreed and 40.58% agreed with that statement. An overwhelming consensus emerged that teachers have a responsibility to hold certain knowledge when teaching in this region. We saw this finding as a call to action to ensure every teacher and student in the district has access to learning opportunities. Conversely, when asked if they felt they had the requisite training, the most common responses were "some training" (57.25%) and "no training" (16.67%). Given that teachers saw this training as important and were not getting it, a clear path has emerged for the district to attend to a glaring gap in attending to the needs of Indigenous learners.

The next survey section was an open-ended inquiry on teacher perspectives of the factors supporting success for Indigenous students. Similar to the student and parent/guardian surveys, one of the most common responses we heard from teachers was about connections with adults in the school, as shown in one statement that, "Staff puts in effort into making connections with students." However, the most common response for students was "seeing themselves reflected in the curriculum" or "having members of the staff that are part of their local Indigenous group." Variations on the same theme appeared repeatedly, highlighting the need for Indigenous students to feel represented, welcomed, and valued in the school, which supported the TIISS criteria we established.

Answers to the next question on the teacher survey were likely the most glaring in comparison to what we learned from parents and students. In response to the question, "Do you think racism is a barrier to Indigenous student success in your school," we received the following results: strongly agree (7.25%), agree (27.54%), unsure (29.71%), disagree (26.81%), and strongly disagree (8.70%). Looking at these data another way, nearly two-thirds of the teachers in the district (65.22%) were either unsure or disagreed that racism was a barrier. In contrast, 81.8% of Indigenous students reported having personally experienced overt acts of racism, and those students may have been unable to recognize the more pervasive and normalized acts of racism through systemic or individual behaviour. The research elucidates that teachers and students are living in different worlds. Part of the necessary work is not only to eliminate acts of racism, but to educate teachers to recognize racism in their environment so that such a discrepancy no longer exists.

However, it bears acknowledging the difference in the phrasing of the questions

between the student and teacher surveys. Student surveys posed an open-ended question that asked if students experienced racism, whereas the teachers were asked if they believed racism was a barrier for Indigenous students in their school. While we would contend that the recognition of Indigenous students experiencing racism should be conceived as a barrier to educational success, there is the possibility that some teachers may have witnessed racism, yet did not believe it served as a barrier to educational success. Despite the possibility of confusion, we contend that not recognizing racism or not perceiving racism as a barrier are both causes for concern. Moreover, since the research is student-centred, we originally posed the question to the students and moved forward with their response as our truth. Given that 81% of Indigenous students reported personally experiencing overt acts of racism, we asked follow-up questions to teachers based on this truth. We contend that racism tells Indigenous people that we are deficient and do not belong in educational spaces, so any experiences of racism will inherently be a barrier to education.

The final question was meant to help us understand if the teachers recognized the intersectionality amongst the Indigenous students and if certain aspects of identity were being acknowledged. In this section we asked about unique challenges faced by Indigenous girls. The most common response, by far, was “I don’t know.” We found this response to be extraordinary, given that Nechako Lakes is the heart of the Highway of Tears and that the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls campaigns have gained substantial attention in recent years (McDiarmid, 2019; Morton, 2016). The next most common response was that “they are quiet.” Teachers often interpreted Indigenous students’ discomfort in the education system or the silencing they have experienced as an innate quietness. Future research by Leona will examine the perception of “quiet” Indigenous girls and women in systems of education. Moreover, de Finney (2014) has challenged the perceptions of Indigenous girls in colonial spaces and explored the methods through which they practice resurgence by their presence, albeit misunderstood by school leaders and teachers.

Conclusions

The findings of this study indicate that substantial education is needed for the teaching staff as well as programming for Indigenous girls. We have begun a subsequent study and program based on this research that focuses specifically on the needs and experiences

of Indigenous girls. We will not go deeply into that project here, but it is important to understand that all of this work and research are connected and leading to future programming and approaches. Our research is action-oriented, as we are looking not only to unearth problems, but to develop and test solutions.

We wish to reiterate that this section is not meant to read as critical of educators in the district. We were thrilled with the levels of honesty in teachers' responses, and we believe our findings would be representative of school districts across the province and country. The decolonizing and indigenizing mandate we take on as scholars and educators is not uniform across educational spaces, nor does everyone inhabit the same place along our journey of learning. We believe that teachers in this district want what is best for their students, but not everyone has had opportunities for deep learning about the experiences of Indigenous learners, anti-racism education, and decolonization. A lack of access to learning does not mean a deficiency in character or empathy, and instead points to a necessity to develop meaningful learning opportunities for students and teachers alike. This is a call to action we have responded to and highlight in subsequent sections.

Combining student, parent/guardian, and teacher responses to guide practice. The data from the teacher survey gave clear direction as to which areas need support to foster an equitable educational environment for Indigenous students. We learned that teachers were only somewhat familiar with the primary provincial mechanism to support students' identity. In addition, teachers overwhelmingly supported the requirement of teachers to learn about the Indigenous peoples of the region, while also stating that most do not know enough. Teachers recognized that Indigenous students seeing themselves in their curriculum and practice, and connecting with adults in the building, were the strongest supports for student success. Similarly, Indigenous students talked about the need to feel connected to adults and have the support of family members. Teachers also, in the majority, were either unsure or disagreed that racism is a barrier for Indigenous student success in the district (65.22%), in stark contrast to Indigenous students who reported being the victims of overt acts of racism (81.8%) and parents or guardians who were aware of overt racism against their child at school (61%). The significant chasm between the students' experiences and what staff (and parents) were aware of proved ripe for programming and education.

Indigenous students pointed to peer racism as the prevailing manifestation of oppression, making it vital to use prevention education from the earliest ages to curtail and

challenge racist attitudes and unconscious bias (Shields, 2019). In addition, the responses from all three groups indicated that nearly everyone had limited their understanding of racism to overt acts of aggression or disparaging comments. The district needed to provide education on the vast majority of oppressive acts, often invisible and normalized (Louie, 2020), and experienced through ignoring, lowered assumptions, or unconscious privileging (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). Given the feedback we received, we had ample direction from stakeholders and rights holders regarding the direction of programming, policy, and practical interventions. As noted, we deem it insufficient to simply name these complex problems and expect teachers or administrators to solve them. Our roles as scholars and educators are to collaborate with the Indigenous and school community to imagine, create, implement, and test our interventions collectively as a means of disrupting inequity for Indigenous learners.

Implementation

The implementation phase of our work was informed by combining our newly established theory, the TIISS, with the voices of Indigenous students, parents or guardians, and district teachers. This confluence has given a clear direction and mandate for governance, policy, programs, and practical approaches. In what follows, we examine four approaches that emerged from this process that each intend to address one aspect of quality education as we have established in our TIISS framework. These four primary interventions are only the most notable attempts in the multitude of projects the district is taking up to establish equity for Indigenous learners. Each year, we are designing and implementing more programming based on the data, continuing to be bold in our approach to transformation. The following four examples of implementation include the creation of a core course (Honouring Diversity), addressing governance through strategic planning, establishing targeted professional development, and addressing intersectionality through an Indigenous girl-specific program.

Creating Honouring Diversity

Given the resounding response from Indigenous students who reported accounts of peer racism in their school experience (81.8%), our first course of action was directed toward diminishing and eventually removing this barrier. One of our criteria for quality education in TIISS is Indigenous students feeling welcomed and safe in schools since reports of racism revealed a hostile and oppressive environment. In subsequent focus group discussions, Indigenous girls noted the prevalence of racism, homophobia, and body-shaming that came from a small group of senior students in athletics. Peer racism tells Indigenous students they do not belong, are not welcome, should be ashamed of their culture, and cannot succeed in education—the hallmarks of colonization. In addition, teachers and parents consistently referred to the necessity of Indigenous students seeing themselves in the school and in their education. Emerging from the nexus of findings was the indication that an anti-oppressive, decolonizing, and diversity course was necessary at the earliest stages of high school. The original aims of the course were fivefold:

- confront the stereotypical assumptions of non-Indigenous students to disrupt peer racism;
- challenge the unconscious and conscious forms of internalized oppression of Indigenous students;
- provide all students with knowledge of power and oppression to educate about Indigenous peoples, knowledge, and histories;
- provide insight into colonization and how it has impacted people's lived experience and perspectives; and
- give students experience in applying indigenizing practices in their education.

Beyond an anti-oppressive course, we were responding to the identified need to offer curriculum and pedagogy that reflected Indigenous cultures and ways of knowing. Upon completing this framework, we decided to include other aspects of identity to challenge oppression for non-Indigenous students and attend to intersectionality. The final version of the course included the following units: Why Learning About Diversity Is Important; What Is Oppression, Power, and Privilege; Understanding Our Various Identities; Race; Indigenous Peoples and Colonization; Sexism; Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity; Lateral Violence in Indigenous Communities; Classism; Religion; Ableism; and Allyship.

Although we led the course design, we collaborated closely with the district, including a team of educators, First Nations education leadership, administration, and senior leadership. Initial designs were vetted, edited, and amalgamated based on continued feedback. Changes included the aims of the course, the units, activities, and approaches to teaching and assessment. It was decided with the district that each student in Grade 8 would be required to take the Honouring Diversity course. Upon completion of the collaborative design, we developed a course manual to guide teachers. Included in the manual were the aims of the course, student outputs, the background research that informed the design, and a section for each unit. The unit-specific sections contained a summary of the topic, a list of resources for the teachers to gain greater knowledge, a proposed activity, an assessment recommendation, and a list of questions. Prior to the school year starting, we held a two-day training session on the syllabus and collaborated with the teachers on any appropriate improvements. The teachers were also given a survey to distribute to students before and after the course to evaluate its success. Moreover, the course instructors and design team met monthly to discuss how the course was progressing, share resources, and make any necessary changes. Monthly meetings are imperative to support educators through what can prove a challenging course to teach. Resistance from students, parents, community, and staff can add a degree of difficulty to content that is already emotionally challenging for many students (Poitras Pratt et al., 2018).

We have surveyed the teachers who collaborated in the course design and delivery, conducted pre- and post-surveys with students to assess attitudinal shifts and anti-oppression knowledge growth, and documented a vocal minority of parents who have raised significant opposition to the course. Some of that opposition was based on needing clarity; others have been opposed to the social justice foundations of Honouring Diversity. Some of the narratives of resistance we have experienced mirror the backlash seen internationally based on the misconstrued popular interpretation of critical race theory. From our perspective, resistance to social justice justifies the necessity of the course. We position Honouring Diversity as ensuring humanity and equity for every student who attends school in this district, a basic human right we see as a foundation of public education.

A forthcoming article will probe deeper into the development and successes of the course, the findings of the surveys, and the community engagement. For this article it is critical to understand that this course emerged to fulfill the self-stated needs of Indigenous students and their parents or guardians and to satisfy the additional criteria we esta-

blished for quality education in TIISS beyond graduation rates. Through the course we pursue welcoming environments for Indigenous learners while ensuring learning based on Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing.

A central indigenizing component is the application of Dakelh conceptions of witnessing as the foundational pedagogy and assessment model. Developed originally for use in post-secondary classrooms (Louie & Poitras Pratt, forthcoming), this pedagogy was inspired by the practices of Indigenous peoples in the SD91 region. Witnessing provides all students the opportunity to embody Indigenous knowledges and ensures Indigenous students see themselves in their learning and are able to expand their knowledge of their own community through public education.

In addition to curriculum and pedagogy creation, the responses from the Indigenous students and community have influenced a shift in governance through strategic planning. In what follows we will share the practical changes created in governance that have been directed by harnessing Indigenous community voice.

Shifting Strategic Planning

Governance is overlooked in many Indigenous education projects, as Western approaches to school governance are viewed as being the natural order (Louie, forthcoming), or the governance of a school district is deemed too essential to fit within the purview of decolonizing. SD91 deemed it imperative to challenge its approach at each level of education, which includes governance and policy. Collaborators decided in the earliest stages of transformation that the strategic plan needed to be reimagined to align with district goals, specifically as they related to Indigenous education. The superintendent, Manu Madhok, acknowledged the need to start with strategic planning so that every level of policy and funding would be directed through a top-down process that started with a consensus among senior leadership and trustees regarding priorities of the district. The final version of the strategic plan included honouring diversity as one of the pillars of education. Taking leadership through strategic planning sent a signal to the entire district that Indigenous education emerged as a priority in governance, policy, programming, and practice. Moving forward, school leaders and teachers would be both accountable and supported in their approach to Indigenous identity and honouring diversity.

The establishment of decolonizing governance ensures a foundation from which district work can happen. Building on the strategic planning we now share the implications of our research and Indigenous community voice on professional development.

Establishing Professional Development Opportunities

One of the ways in which we are responding to the needs identified by students, parents, community members, and teachers is using professional growth opportunities to build capacity within the system. In 2018, the First Nations Education Steering Committee, the B.C. government, and the federal government signed the *BC Tripartite Education Agreement*. Section 4.17 states that "commencing in the 2019/20 school year, and for the duration of this Agreement, British Columbia will ensure not less than one non-instructional day per school year is focused on enhancing First Nation student learning outcomes" (Government of Canada et al., 2018, p. 9). We have and will continue to design this day strategically not only to address specific needs but to create a culture of collective efficacy and establish standards and norms as they relate to the teaching and learning of Indigenous knowledges.

In addition to the annual Indigenous education conference, the district has expanded opportunities for teachers, staff, students, and community members to learn from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars. In 2021–2022, we have embarked on Transformative Reconciliation training that Dustin is leading for all principals and vice-principals in the district. The training is based on a decolonization and social justice program Dustin created for social service organizational leaders.

Conclusion

Although we have great pride in the governance, programmatic, and practice interventions we have developed and are in the process of creating in this jurisdiction, we must warn other districts from taking up our designs as solutions to their unique problems. Shifting strategic planning, creating an anti-oppressive course, or establishing professional development opportunities would likely be beneficial in most contexts, yet readers should reflect on their own contexts and consider whether the environment has the capacity to see such transformation through. Having undertaken similar projects elsewhere, we can confirm that no two districts are alike. Unique barriers and strengths emerge that are relevant to establishing

equity for Indigenous learners. Moreover, the pursuit and inclusion of Indigenous voices are invaluable in establishing a learning community where Indigenous people are genuinely valued. Through meeting, collaborating, interviewing, and reporting back to Indigenous communities with accountability, the culture of learning communities is shifted from one of imposition to partnership. We do believe our programs are replicable and impactful, but equally important is replicating the trusting and productive relationships that were imperative in establishing a democratic learning community with our Indigenous partners.

This research has demonstrated that teachers and Indigenous students occupy different spaces in schools—our research question was on how to bridge this difference. After conducting extensive surveys and interviews, our research has developed district and school-based approaches to improve teacher–student relationships, increase teachers' Indigenous knowledge, and increase Indigenous student graduation. We contend that Canadian schools should consider: an emphasis on building positive relationships crucial for Indigenous student success, Indigenous students seeing themselves in their learning, teachers and administration participating in ongoing professional development bespoke for their context and continuing growing their skills and knowledge, and building an inclusive and welcoming school environment based on equity not equality.

The headline associated with the transformational work in School District 91 is assuredly near parity in graduation rates for Indigenous learners. Parity has been achieved despite SD91 having Indigenous and on-reserve demographics that would predict those rates to be among the lowest in the province. As a result of strong leadership, resolve, and close relationships with Indigenous community, the district has achieved transformation and is primed for continued growth and equity. Although graduation rates occupy the lowest hanging fruit of recognition, we contend that strong relationships are foundational for transformation. Through this project we have highlighted the myriad ways we have not only captured and pursued Indigenous voices, but also ensured that those voices are guiding our governance, policy, programmatic, and practical approaches. Moreover, we have included additional criteria in the TIISS for evaluation of quality education that highlight welcoming spaces for Indigenous learners and ensuring they can see themselves in their learning. We celebrate victories and honour the strength of our communities, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike. We perceive early success as a directive to continue to be bold and passionate in our pursuit of equity in education. The era of reconciliation requires rethinking quality education for the benefit of all learners, a call to action we take to heart.

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