

University of Portland

**Pilot Scholars**

---

Graduate Theses and Dissertations

---

Spring 2023

**Effectiveness of Engaging Parents of Indigenous Students as Measured by the Engaging Parents of Indigenous Students Survey for School Leaders (EPIS-SSL) and the Relationship Between EPIS-SSL Results and Indigenous Student Attendance and Achievement Results in Alberta, Canada**

Karen D. Gartner

Follow this and additional works at: <https://pilotscholars.up.edu/etd>



Part of the [Education Commons](#)

---

This Doctoral Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by Pilot Scholars. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Pilot Scholars. For more information, please contact [library@up.edu](mailto:library@up.edu).

**Effectiveness of Engaging Parents of Indigenous Students as Measured by the  
Engaging Parents of Indigenous Students Survey for School Leaders (EPIS-SSL)  
and the Relationship Between EPIS-SSL Results and Indigenous Student  
Attendance and Achievement Results in Alberta, Canada**

by

Karen D. Gartner

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

in

Learning and Leadership

University of Portland

School of Education

2023

**Signature Page**

**Effectiveness of Engaging Parents of Indigenous Students as Measured by the Engaging Parents of Indigenous Students Survey for School Leaders (EPIS-SSL) and the Relationship Between EPIS-SSL Results and Indigenous Student Attendance and Achievement Results in Alberta, Canada**

by

**Karen D. Gartner**

This dissertation is completed as a partial requirement for the Doctor of Education (EdD) degree at the University of Portland in Portland, Oregon.

Approved:

Redacted	_____	3-28-23
Chairperson		Date
Redacted	_____	3-28-23
Committee Member		Date
Redacted	_____	3-28-23
Committee Member		Date

If applicable:

DocuSigned by:	_____	3/14/2023
Redacted		Date
Additional Committee Member	_____	3/28/2023
Redacted		Date
Additional Committee Member	_____	_____

Approved:

Redacted	_____	3-28-23
Graduate Program Director		Date
Redacted	_____	3/28/23
Dean of the Up		Date
Redacted	_____	3/28/23
Dean of the Graduate School or Representative		Date

## Abstract

Significant achievement and attainment gaps exist between students who are registered at their schools as Indigenous and students who are not registered as Indigenous. Research indicates that engaging parents of Indigenous students can improve student achievement outcomes. The purpose of this quantitative descriptive analysis was to describe practices schools use to engage parents of Indigenous students, principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of parent engagement practices as measured by the Engaging Parents of Indigenous Students Survey for School Leaders (EPIS-SSL), and whether these engagement practices have a relationship with previously collected Indigenous student attendance and achievement data. This study used three instruments to examine practices schools use to engage parents of Indigenous students: the EPIS-SSL, Average Daily Attendance reports, and Alberta education assurance measures—First Nations, Métis, and Inuit reports. This study was unique from other studies of practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students as it sought to use quantitative measures to examine the effectiveness of those practices.

The study used a quantitative descriptive analysis design, which included both qualitative and quantitative analysis. Participants in the study included 30 principals across five school districts.

The study described several practices that schools use to engage parents of Indigenous students, including hiring school liaisons, facilitating cultural celebrations, initiating communication, offering transitional supports, encouraging parent council participation, building relationships, and offering Indigenous language programs. Effective strategies for engaging with parents of Indigenous students included having

a liaison, facilitating cultural celebrations and informal events, and offering texting as a communication option. The study examined barriers to engaging with parents of Indigenous students, which included technological barriers, nonrecognition of family structures, and staff attitudes. The study revealed that schools that use texting as their primary form of communication scored higher on achievement tests.

*Keywords.* parent engagement, Indigenous students, parent–school relationships, Indigenous liaison, parent communication

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the amazing people in my life who have supported me through this dissertation process. I would not have been able to do this on my own.

I would like to acknowledge and thank my Chair, Dr. Jacqueline Waggoner, who has been a mentor to me throughout this journey. I am so deeply grateful that I had the opportunity to work with and learn from her. Her endless patience and encouragement empowered me through this process. I admire both her confidence and her example of being a lifelong learner. I could not have asked for a better Chair.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to my other committee members, Dr. Hillary Merk and Dr. Bruce Weitzel, for their encouragement and guidance in this study. Your guidance and support helped shape this study. I would also like to thank my Canadian committee member, Dr. Emily Milne, for taking time out of her busy schedule to read my work. It was your own work that inspired this study in the first place.

I would also like to thank my professors at the University of Portland. Each of you has played a critical role in helping me construct my understanding of the field of education while encouraging me further. You have been cheerleaders and challengers who have always made time for me.

I would also like to offer my deepest gratitude to the colleagues I work with every day. You have encouraged me and made me laugh through this journey. I feel confident declaring that you will never let me get too full of myself.

I would also like to thank my mini cohort members Sherri Humphries and Sarah Fedoration. Sherri, we have shared so much of our educational journey together

over these past 5 years. I will treasure our memories. Sarah, your work ethic and willingness to learn have spurred me on and inspired me. I am so grateful to both of you for accompanying me along the way.

I would also like to thank my amazing cohort. Even as I write this, I can't help but smile at the laughter, wine, and memories we have shared together. As we have climbed this mountain together, I can't think of any other people with whom I am grateful to share the view.

Finally, thank you to my editor, Karen Lowry, who took all my old rags and turned them into a Cinderella gown!

## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to my family, who have supported my work in so many ways. I would like to thank my husband Jesse for his willingness to be chauffeur and caregiver all those times I was locked up in my office. I would like to thank my daughter Hannah for all the hard work and responsibility she took on while I was working on this dissertation. I would also like to acknowledge Hannah's birthday that I MISSED because I was defending my dissertation in Portland! You are loved Hannah! I would also like to thank my son Ben for bringing a smile to my face every single day. Your resilience and humour lift my soul and teach me to be a better person. I would like to thank my oldest daughter Alecia for her kindness, compassion, and friendship. You are the one whom I call when I am discouraged. You are my rock. I would also like to acknowledge my granddaughter Peyton. I am so looking forward to spending more time with you and your soon-to-be-born brother. Finally, I would like to acknowledge my father, Ken, who was so incredibly proud when I started this journey. I look forward to celebrating its completion with you.



## Table of Contents

<b>Signature Page</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>v</b>
<b>Dedication</b> .....	<b>vii</b>
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	<b>viii</b>
<b>List of Tables</b> .....	<b>xii</b>
<b>Chapter 1: Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Land Acknowledgement .....	1
Positionality of Researcher .....	2
Purpose Statement .....	3
Research Questions .....	4
Research Strategies .....	4
Terminology .....	6
Indigenous Educational History in Canada .....	8
Residential Schools .....	8
Intergenerational Trauma .....	13
Indigenous Parent Engagement .....	15
Indigenous Self-Identification .....	16
AEAM Accountability Framework .....	17
Indigenous Student Attendance .....	18
High School Completion .....	20
Reducing Education Gaps .....	21
Significance .....	22
Call to Action .....	25
Summary .....	26
<b>Chapter 2: Review of the Literature</b> .....	<b>28</b>
Parent Frameworks .....	28
Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory of Human Development .....	29
Epstein’s Overlapping Spheres of Influence .....	31
Epstein’s Types of Family Involvement .....	32
Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler’s Parent Involvement Process .....	32
Cultural Theories .....	33
Cultural Capital Theory .....	34
Culturally Responsive School Leadership .....	35
Indigenous Decolonizing School Leadership .....	37
Role of Parents in Learning .....	40
Benefits of Parent Engagement .....	43
Benefits to Students .....	43
Benefits to Families .....	47
Benefits to Educators and Schools .....	47
Barriers to Indigenous Parent Engagement .....	49
Psychological Barriers .....	49
Practical Barriers .....	51

Communication Barriers .....	52
Transition Barriers.....	52
Cultural Barriers.....	53
School Barriers.....	55
Factors Affecting Parent Engagement.....	55
Effective Methods for Engaging Parents .....	57
Practices for Engaging Parents of Indigenous Students.....	59
Indigenous Liaisons .....	59
Indigenous Languages.....	60
Communication .....	61
Parent Councils .....	63
Summary .....	64
<b>Chapter 3: Methodology .....</b>	<b>65</b>
Purpose Statement.....	65
Research Questions .....	66
Ethical Considerations .....	66
Research Design and Rationale.....	68
Instrumentation .....	70
EPIS-SSL .....	71
Average Daily Attendance Report.....	77
AEAM-FNMI Report.....	78
Procedures .....	80
Participants and Settings .....	80
District A .....	82
District B .....	85
District C .....	87
District D.....	89
District E .....	91
Data Analysis .....	93
Quantitative Survey Data .....	93
Qualitative Survey Data .....	94
AEAM-FNMI Reports .....	95
ADA Reports.....	95
Delimitations .....	96
Summary .....	96
<b>Chapter 4: Results.....</b>	<b>98</b>
Research Questions .....	99
Research Question 1: Practices to Engage Parents of Indigenous Students .....	101
Liaison Support .....	101
Cultural Celebrations .....	108
Communication.....	109
Educational Transitions.....	115
Parent Council.....	120
Relationship Building.....	122
Indigenous Languages.....	123

Research Question 2: Barriers to Engaging Parents of Indigenous Students.....	124
Communication and Technological Barriers.....	124
Staff Limitations.....	126
Negative School Experiences.....	127
Practical Barriers.....	128
Bureaucratic Barriers .....	128
Research Question 3: Principals' Perceptions of Effectiveness of Practices .....	130
Research Question 4: Relationship Between Practices and Attendance .....	136
Research Question 5: Relationship Between Practices and Achievement .....	146
Summary .....	151
<b>Chapter 5: Discussion .....</b>	<b>152</b>
Summary of the Study.....	152
Overview of Data Collection .....	155
Findings.....	156
Research Question 1: Practices to Engage Parents of Indigenous Students .....	156
Finding 1: Schools Use a Variety of Practices to Engage Parents of Indigenous Students .....	156
Research Question 2: Barriers to Engaging Indigenous Parents.....	165
Finding 2: Technology Can Create Barriers for Engaging With Some Parents of Indigenous Students .....	165
Finding 3: Nonrecognition of Indigenous Family Structures Can Pose Barriers to Engagement.....	166
Finding 4: Staff Limitations Can Act as Barriers to Engaging With Parents of Indigenous Students .....	168
Finding 5: Negative School Experiences Create Barriers to Engaging With Parents of Indigenous Students .....	169
Research Question 3: Principal's Perceptions of Effectiveness .....	170
Finding 6: Having a Liaison at School Builds Relationships Between Schools and Parents of Indigenous Students .....	170
Finding 7: Informal Events and Cultural Celebrations Offer Excellent Opportunities to Engage Parents of Indigenous Students .....	171
Finding 8: Texting Should Be Available for Communicating with Parents of Indigenous Students .....	172
Research Question 4: Engagement Practices and Indigenous Student Attendance	173
Finding 9: Indigenous Student Attendance Was Not Statistically Significantly Correlated With Specific Engagement Practices But Did Reveal the Need for Further Research .....	173
Research Question 5: Engagement Practices and Indigenous Student Achievement .....	175
Finding 10: Schools that Use Texting as Their Primary Form of Communication Scored Higher on Achievement Tests .....	175
Implications.....	176
Improving Education Attainment Levels and Success Rates.....	177
Enabling Parents to Fully Participate in the Education of Their Children.....	178
Diminishing Barriers That Prevent Parents From Participating in Their Children's	

Education.....	179
Limitations .....	181
Recommendations for Future Research .....	183
Summary .....	185
<b>References .....</b>	<b>187</b>
<b>Appendix A Permission.....</b>	<b>211</b>
<b>Appendix B Research Project Application.....</b>	<b>213</b>
<b>Appendix C Email to Principals .....</b>	<b>217</b>
<b>Appendix D Transcript of Video Introduction Sent to Principals .....</b>	<b>218</b>
<b>Appendix E Indigenous Parent Engagement Questionnaire for School Leaders .....</b>	<b>219</b>
<b>Appendix F Cultural Celebrations .....</b>	<b>228</b>

## List of Tables

Table 1	<i>Education Gaps for Students Registered and Not Registered as Indigenous</i> ..	21
Table 2	<i>District A: School Demographics for Indigenous Students</i> .....	84
Table 3	<i>District A: Self-Identification of Indigenous Student Population</i> .....	85
Table 4	<i>District B: School Demographics for Indigenous Students</i> .....	86
Table 5	<i>District B: Self-Identification of Indigenous Student Population</i> .....	87
Table 6	<i>District C: School Demographics for Indigenous Students</i> .....	88
Table 7	<i>District C: Self-Identification of Indigenous Student Population</i> .....	89
Table 8	<i>District D: School Demographics for Indigenous Students</i> .....	90
Table 9	<i>District D: Self-Identification of Indigenous Student Population</i> .....	90
Table 10	<i>District E: School Demographics for Indigenous Students</i> .....	91
Table 11	<i>District E: Self-Identification of Indigenous Student Population</i> .....	92
Table 12	<i>Timeline Used for This Study</i> .....	97
Table 13	<i>School District Geography</i> .....	101
Table 14	<i>Demographics of School Liaisons</i> .....	103
Table 15	<i>Title and Number of Liaison Roles for Schools and Districts</i> .....	103
Table 16	<i>Primary Form of Communication With Parents of Indigenous Students</i> ....	111
Table 17	<i>Transition Support by Category</i> .....	116
Table 18	<i>Schools With Indigenous Representation on Parent Council</i> .....	121
Table 19	<i>Principals' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Engaging Parents of Indigenous Students</i> .....	134
Table 20	<i>Means and Standard Deviations of Attendance and Achievement Based on Principals' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Engaging Parents of Indigenous Students</i> .....	135
Table 21	<i>Means and Standard Deviations of Average Daily Attendance by School District</i> .....	137
Table 22	<i>Analysis of Variance Between Self-Reported Indigenous Groups and Student Attendance</i> .....	140
Table 23	<i>Average Daily Attendance for District A by Indigenous Status</i> .....	140
Table 24	<i>Average Daily Attendance for District B by Indigenous Status</i> .....	141
Table 25	<i>Average Daily Attendance for District C by Indigenous Status</i> .....	141
Table 26	<i>Average Daily Attendance for District D by Indigenous Status</i> .....	142
Table 27	<i>Average Daily Attendance for District E by Indigenous Status</i> .....	142
Table 28	<i>Comparing Average Daily Attendance Means for Practices for Engaging Parents of Indigenous Students</i> .....	145
Table 29	<i>Comparing Achievement Means for Practices for Engaging Parents of Indigenous Students</i> .....	150

## Chapter 1: Introduction

How does one go from living with cultural genocide through schools to embracing partnership with the same type of institution? This is the challenge facing many Canadian parents of Indigenous children today. Although residential schools no longer exist in Canada, there is growing evidence that the trauma associated with these schools endures (Bombay et al., 2009). Achievement gaps, higher dropout rates, and lack of Indigenous parent engagement in schools all demonstrate that despite purposeful efforts towards reconciliation, significant barriers to Indigenous student success still exist (Friesen & Krauth, 2012). These barriers can include racism, marginalization, and the legacy of residential schools (Friesen & Krauth, 2012). Finding cost-effective ways to engage Indigenous families could be critical to reducing Indigenous student achievement gaps. This chapter begins with a land acknowledgement to recognize those whose footsteps have gone before mine. The purpose of the study is introduced along with research questions used to guide the study. The chapter examines Indigenous educational history in Canada, then looks at the intergenerational effects of *Indian* residential schools (IRS). The chapter discusses the importance of engaging parents of Indigenous. The significance of the study is addressed through current data on achievement and attainment gaps for students who identify as Indigenous. The study uses Call to Action 10 as a framework for examining study findings and to address the underlying motivation for the study (Truth and Reconciliation Commission [TRC], 2015).

### Land Acknowledgement

I want to recognize that the land on which most of this research work was

completed is in Treaty 6 territory. This is within and surrounding the traditional meeting grounds and home for many Indigenous peoples, including, but not limited to, the Cree, Blackfoot, Nakota Sioux, Dene, Salteaux, and Inuit. This land is also home to the Métis communities of Buffalo Lake, Fishing Lake, Elizabeth, and Kikino. I recognize that it is not my ancestors who first stepped on this land, but the ancestors of the aforementioned people. I offer this acknowledgement as a show of gratitude as well as an offer of reconciliation.

I would also like to acknowledge Treaty 8 territory. Although I was not physically present on Treaty 8 territory while conducting this research study, some of the data for my study were gathered in that area. Treaty 8 territory is the ancestral and traditional territory of the Cree and Dene, as well as the Métis. I recognize this land with gratitude and hope that this study will contribute in some small way towards reconciliation with the Indigenous populations who reside there.

### **Positionality of Researcher**

I recognize that as a White researcher, I have biases that may limit my understanding of some of the complexities of this study. Throughout the study, I have regularly reflected to examine my biases and shift my perspective as needed. This reflection helped guide my decisions throughout this study.

Initially, I thought I would question parents of Indigenous students about the parent engagement practices used at their schools and how relevant the parents felt they were. As I began to learn and study, I recognized that my cultural experiences and limited timeframe would prohibit me from developing relationships in an authentic way with parents of Indigenous students. I sought out a Cree colleague who

helped me better understand my role. She told me that there was already significant research published with Indigenous parent voices about their roles with schools. She suggested I shift my gaze to the institutions I was familiar with rather than questioning the parents of Indigenous students whose culture I was somewhat unfamiliar with. I felt confident in this new role when I recognized how my previous experience would benefit me through this perspective. I also recognized how important this research is as few studies examine educational institutions' roles in reconciliation.

### **Purpose Statement**

Significant achievement and attainment gaps exist between students who are registered at their schools as Indigenous (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) and students who are not registered as Indigenous. Finding ways to reduce these gaps is an important step in reconciliation. Research indicates that engaging parents of Indigenous students can offer the highest impact on student achievement outcomes (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] Directorate for Education and Skills, 2017, p. 20). Describing and measuring practices schools use to engage Indigenous parents can be helpful steps to reduce achievement and attainment gaps.

The purpose of this quantitative descriptive analysis was to describe practices schools use to engage parents of Indigenous students, principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of parent engagement practices as measured by the Engaging Parents of Indigenous Students Survey for School Leaders (EPIS-SSL), and whether these engagement practices have a relationship with previously collected Indigenous student attendance and achievement data.



Parents in this study include parents, guardians, or kinship caregivers of Indigenous students. *Engagement* is “parents and school staff working together to support and improve the learning, development, and health of children and adolescents” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018, para. 1). This study is guided by the following research questions.

### **Research Questions**

1. What practices do schools use to engage parents of Indigenous students?
2. What barriers exist to prevent schools from engaging with parents of Indigenous students?
3. What are principals’ perceptions of the effectiveness of practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students?
4. What is the relationship between practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students and Indigenous student attendance?
5. What is the relationship between practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students and the level of acceptable provincial achievement tests (PATs) and diploma exam results from the Alberta education assurance measures—First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (AEAM-FNMI) report?

### **Research Strategies**

My goal in this research was to look through the lens of principals and describe what engagement practices schools use to engage with parents of Indigenous students. Many elements in this research study are foreign to Indigenous ways and positioned more within Western culture (Battiste & Barman, 1995). Throughout this study, I incorporated two techniques that I think are somewhat limited in Indigenous

research: The first was the use of quantitative statistics for measuring parent engagement. According to Walter and Andersen (2013), Indigenous methodologies have been “dominated” (p. 65) by qualitative methodologies, which has caused a problematic absence of data when evaluating best methods or techniques. I hope that my research offers a form of measurement of practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students. When attempting to examine achievement equity, some sort of measurement is necessary (Skrla et al., 2004). The study also gathered qualitative information through open-ended questions to increase the depth of understanding and gather information that might not be collected through quantitative data alone (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The other purposeful technique I used in this study was to not compare Indigenous populations to non-Indigenous populations. Although I did make comparisons early in the study to recognize significant and systemic gaps, I was cautious to limit comparisons as continuing to compare Indigenous and non-Indigenous differences can be seen as a binary, oppositional position to reaffirm White superiority (Walter & Andersen, 2013). I was cautious of deficit thinking when exploring Indigenous differences; however, my study needed to balance that caution with the recognition of disparities that demonstrate the need for change (OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, 2017). When measuring practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students, I focused on Indigenous–Indigenous comparisons. I tried to meet the delicate balance between comparing for superiority and comparing to highlight the need for change. The focus of this research was not on Indigenous peoples but on educational institutions and their implementation of practices

promoting the engagement of Indigenous parents.

### **Terminology**

I acknowledge that the use of some of the terms in this document may be considered offensive and problematic. The language used to describe Indigenous peoples in Canada is evolving to be more respectful and reflective of Indigenous communities. Although the term *Indian* is considered outdated and has negative connotations, its existence is still a part of legal language in society today. This document references prior works and legislation that contain this term that could be received as offensive, for example, in the legislation named the Indian Act.

The Indian Act is a contentious piece of legislation that is internationally recognized as discriminatory (Bartlett, 1980; Hanson, 2009). However, it is important legislation as it recognizes Indigenous history and affirms Indigenous peoples' rights in Canada (Hanson, 2009). Indigenous people recognize the discriminatory nature of this legislation but will not allow the government to change it until some of the content it contains has been rectified. Indigenous people would rather "live in bondage under the inequitable Indian Act than surrender [their] sacred rights" (Cardinal, 1999, p. 119). This can make the use of language such as *Indian*, which refers to the legal status of Indigenous people in Canada, confusing.

Within this document, older terms reflect the discriminatory history of Canada, and I do not attempt to gloss over terms that were used at the time. I want people to recognize the harshness that was evident. Changing the language within this research document could also be confusing to the reader and blur the meaning. As this study progresses from the past to the current, I take care to use terms that are more

respectful; however, these terms are changing all the time. Many of these terms may become outdated within a short amount of time.

In this study, I use the word *Indigenous* as a blanket term to include First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples. This is currently preferred over the term Aboriginal, which was used previously in Canada (Animiiki Indigenous Innovation, 2020). Language shifted after the official release of the TRC's final report in 2015. After that, organizations such as Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada changed their name to Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (Animiiki Indigenous Innovation, 2020). Indigenous comes from the Latin word *indigena*, which means from the land, native, so its use further supports land claims. However, Indigenous is an umbrella term, and where possible, I use the preferred Nation-specific terms (Animiiki Indigenous Innovation, 2020).

I also use the term *parents of Indigenous students* frequently through the study. For the purposes of this study, the term refers to the parents, families, or kinship of students who are registered by their caregivers as Indigenous within the school system. However, within the study, I also discuss the problematic nature of nonrecognition of family or kin who are not considered legal guardians. At the time of school registration, parents can select to identify their child as First Nations–Status, First Nations–Non-Status, Métis, or Inuit.

The term *First Nation* often refers to a larger ethnic group of Indigenous peoples; however, it can also refer to smaller communities of Indigenous peoples (Gadacz, 2022). The term is often shortened to Nation (still capitalized). Formally, many of these Nations are specified by language, such as Cree Nation or Dene Nation

(Gadacz, 2022).

### **Indigenous Educational History in Canada**

One cannot begin to explore current Indigenous parent engagement at schools without addressing the traumatic history between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian government. The relationship has been tumultuous and unpredictable. Indigenous peoples were never viewed as equals but rather as savages to be saved through colonial religious conversions (Bombay et al., 2009). Through this lens, the Europeans endeavoured to save the Indigenous populations through religious conversions when trading fur and participating in other missionary types of activities. Eventually, the focus shifted to the offspring of the Indigenous parents, and education became an agent of assimilation.

#### ***Residential Schools***

Although there is some indication of attempts to start boarding schools for Indigenous children in Canada by the Franciscans as early as 1620 and by the Ursuline nuns who opened a school for females in 1668, none of these attempts succeeded because of their failure to attract students (Claes & Clifton, 1998). However, the relationship between Indigenous peoples and colonists began to change in the nineteenth century. Scott, the highest official in the Canadian Department of Indian Affairs, was credited with suggesting that the solution to political pressures was to “kill the *Indian* [italics added] in him, and save the man” (Pratt, 1892, p. 46). He also

declared education as the solution to the complicated issue of *Indian*<sup>1</sup> savagery (Pratt, 1892). In the early 1800s, churches established *Indian* industrial schools; however, attendance again was not mandatory (Claes & Clifton, 1998).

In the early 1820s, homesteaders began to demand that *Indians* be removed from the land. This may have prompted political changes because, in 1847, a report was presented to the legislative assembly in Upper Canada recommending *Indian* boarding schools (Claes & Clifton, 1998). Also in 1847, a report was published by Dr. Ryerson, the chief superintendent of education for Upper Canada, referred to as the Ryerson report, that described how these schools would benefit *Indian* children by training their minds and weaning them from their ancestors (King et al., 2004). Ryerson also suggested that *Indian* education be religious in nature. After his report was published, two industrial schools were established: Alnwick School at Alderville in 1848 and Mount Elgin School at Muncey in 1851 (Nishnawbe Aski Nation, 2022b). However, in 1858, the school experiment was deemed a failure because of the late age of admission (and thus short overall attendance), parental prejudice against the school, and lack of funding.

During this time, legislative changes through the British North America Act (1867) made legislation relevant to *Indians* and lands reserved for *Indians* a federal responsibility (Section 91 [24]). This included *Indian* education as a federal

---

<sup>1</sup> The term *Indian* here refers to the common term used at the time. This term, although still used in legal contexts in Canada, is considered offensive and outdated. Please refer to notes in the terminology section of this research paper for further explanation.

responsibility. *Indian* day schools were established to fulfill the treaty requirements (Claes & Clifton, 1998). In 1879, MacDonald's government was under pressure from both Methodists and Catholics to implement the education provisions designated in the treaties (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). Davin was assigned to report on schools in the United States set up in the heart of "*Indian* [italics added] territory" (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). The Davin (1879) report suggested the implementation of industrial schools as the "most effective means of civilising" (Claes & Clifton, 1998, p. 12) the *Indian* population. Davin was particularly impressed with an industrial school set up in Pennsylvania designed to teach children aged 7 to 14 various trades (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). This school was based on a British model designed to reform delinquent and vagrant children (Bousquet, 2021; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). Through his touring, Davin also wrote about the impressive idea of getting the government to fund a per-student fee to the churches (Nishnawbe Aski Nation, 2022a). This report was well received by the Canadian government in its pursuit of aggressive civilization, where education was deemed the vehicle to best promote assimilation (Nishnawbe Aski Nation, 2022a).

During this time, treaties were also being established across the country; they are still referred to as the *Numbered Treaties* (Government of Canada, 2020). These treaties are agreements made between the government and First Nations (Government of Canada, 2020). Eleven numbered treaties that are significant to First Nations people were signed between 1871 and 1921. These treaties represented huge land transfers from First Nations to the Crown. Treaties 1 to 7 were the first treaties to include

provisions for education and identified the need for the Crown to provide both teachers and a building to support this provision to provide a “future of promise” (Morris, 1991/1880, Preface; see also Carr-Stewart, 2001). These earlier treaties represented the foundation of the government’s legal obligation to provide education for Indigenous students (Carr-Stewart, 2001). Beyond the treaties, further legislation through the Indian Act in 1876 also had devastating effects on the Indigenous population (Claes & Clifton, 1998). The primary purpose of this document was to define the federal government’s jurisdiction over Indigenous people (Bartlett, 1980). This act also promoted cultural suppression for the Indigenous community; it made all children wards of the government, setting the tone for a traumatic future.

IRS were intentionally designed to separate children from their parents and intentionally destroy their culture and identity. This purposeful assimilation was articulated by Prime Minister Macdonald, the first prime minister of Canada, in 1883: “When the school is on the reserve the child lives with its parents, who are savages; he is surrounded by savages, and though he may learn to read and write, his habits and training and mode of thought are *Indian* [italics added]” (TRC, 2015a. p. 2).

The conditions within these schools were unhealthy. The buildings were located in disadvantaged areas, and they were not well built or well maintained (TRC, 2015a). The schools had little funding, so deprivation of the basic needs of these children was common. When available, the food was of poor quality (Claes & Clifton, 1998; TRC, 2015a). The schools used harsh and often humiliating forms of discipline in abundance (Claes & Clifton, 1998). There was little intention of high academic expectations, and many of the teachers were untrained.



The purposeful elimination of Indigenous languages was documented throughout policies in the 1800s (TRC, 2015a). In one 1883 policy, Commissioner Dewdney, spoke of the attention needed in reading and writing English instead of Cree (TRC, 2015a). These policies supported the promotion of the English language with a focused effort on the suppression of Indigenous languages. Suppression of Indigenous languages was often paired with suppression of Indigenous cultures (TRC, 2015a). One participant reported being told that if students participated in a sun worship dance over the summer, they would be strapped upon return to school as this was viewed as a type of devil worship (TRC, 2015a).

In the establishment of these schools, the Government of Canada declared Indigenous people unfit parents (TRC, 2015a), and separation from their families left these children with little protection. In many schools, there was a culture of negligence, and students were often prey to both sexual and physical abuse (TRC, 2015a). This abuse and neglect also contributed to student deaths. Lack of nutritious food, harsh living conditions, and few medical interventions, along with hopeless conditions, contributed to student deaths (Claes & Clifton, 1998; TRC, 2015a). Even when the unthinkable happened – the death of a child – the schools often refused to send the bodies of the children back to their parents due to the cost (TRC, 2015a).

Many parents tried to withdraw their children from IRS because of the high death rates (TRC, 2015a). However, IRS were often the only educational option for students, so withdrawing them meant losing the opportunity to educate their children (TRC, 2015a). In some cases, parents who kept their children out of the residential school system were denied food rations and treaty payments (TRC, 2015a). The

TRC's final report contains many examples of parents questioning and standing up to the residential school system both collectively and individually, but they were excluded from having any influence over the governing systems that controlled these schools (TRC, 2015a). Parent concerns were invalidated and "were judged by school and government officials to be negative and backward" (TRC, 2015a, p. 114). Parents of Indigenous students' viewpoints were often considered invalid.

Most residential schools were closed by the 1980s; the last federally funded IRS was closed in 1996 (TRC, 2015a). In 2006, the Canadian government announced a \$1.6 billion package in compensation to the survivors of IRS in response to legal actions (Battiste, 2013). The government of Canada formally apologized for its involvement in the abuse and mistreatment of Indigenous students in 2008 (TRC, 2015a). At that time, the Canadian government instituted the TRC and began the laborious task of documenting the horrors of IRS and preparing a report designed to lay the foundations on how to move forward as a country to begin the long process of reconciliation. The TRC then presented the government with 94 calls to action in 2015 (TRC, 2015a). In the summer of 2022, the head of the Catholic church, Pope Francis, officially apologized for the Catholic church's role in IRS.

### ***Intergenerational Trauma***

The Government of Canada estimated that approximately 150,000 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children passed through the IRS system between 1879 and 1996 (Government of Canada, 2020). Although all residential schools in Canada have now been closed, the effects of this devastation on Indigenous families remain.

Residual effects of this trauma can be passed forward from generation to

generation, affecting parenting styles and family involvement (Friedel, 1999; Kim-Meneen, 2018). Anishinabe teachings suggest the effects of one generation can have implications for at least seven generations (Gaywish & Mordoch, 2018). The effects of intergenerational trauma can include lower levels of educational attainment, social problems, and interpersonal problems (Government of Canada, 2020). Educational attainment, according to Statistics Canada (2021a), is “the highest level of education that a person has successfully completed” (para. 1). The trauma associated with IRS also influences parent–child relationships and loss of culture and language. While living in residential schools, many Indigenous students did not benefit from positive parental role models; instead, they were raised with harsh discipline and a punitive environment (Morrissette, 1994).

For many Indigenous parents, the traumatic effects they endured during their own lives continue to affect their lives as parents. The lack of affection and kindness that many Indigenous children received in IRS was often replicated in how they raised their own children. A qualitative study of 20 second-generation parents living in Treaty 8 territory revealed common themes of second-generation parenting that included little affection, alcohol and substance abuse, lack of positive reinforcement, heavy chores, coparenting with extended family and friends, and spanking and yelling (Kim-Meneen, 2018). A study of adults whose parents attended IRS reported greater depressive symptoms than those whose parents did not attend residential schools (Bombay et al., 2011). A further study of information from the 2001 *Aboriginal Peoples Survey of Children and Youth* examined the effects of educational experiences between mothers who attended residential schools and those whose

mothers did not attend residential schools (Feir, 2016). Results indicated that children whose mothers attended residential schools were more likely to be expelled or suspended than those whose mothers did not attend residential schools. Understanding the influence of IRS and its lingering effects on parent–school involvement is relevant to the ongoing academic success of Indigenous students.

### **Indigenous Parent Engagement**

The benefits of parent engagement have been well documented in research (American Psychological Association, 2014; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018; Ferlazzo, 2011; Hill and Tyson, 2009; Sheridan et al., 2020; T. E. Smith et al., 2019). Students receive academic and social benefits as well as improved future educational outcomes when their parents are engaged with their children’s schools (Benner et al., 2016; Ferlazzo, 2011; Hill & Tyson, 2009; T. E. Smith et al., 2019). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2018) suggested that parent engagement can also help students decrease unhealthy behaviours, such as substance abuse, violence, and other problematic behaviours. One study suggested parent engagement could also decrease student absenteeism by as much as 20% (Sheldon & Jung, 2015).

Indigenous parent engagement is equally important as it can be used to support academic achievement. OECD Directorate for Education and Skills (2017) suggested that Indigenous parent engagement offers the highest impact to Indigenous student outcomes and is considered one of the three main areas of focus for improving outcomes. The other two areas of focus for Indigenous students are quality and effectiveness of teaching and support for students (OECD Directorate for Education

and Skills, 2017). Moses's (2013) study with nine Indigenous participants reported that parents of Indigenous students wanted to become involved in the education of their children. However, several studies also indicated that parents of Indigenous students harbour an intrinsic mistrust against educational institutions, which can create disconnection between schools and families and make education more difficult (Education Connections, 2017; Milne, 2016; Moses, 2013). Finding ways to build bridges between parents of Indigenous students and schools can produce positive benefits for Indigenous students (OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, 2019). One student in Milne's (2020) study stated, "If Mom doesn't belong, then by extension, I don't belong." Finding ways to increase engagement of parents of Indigenous students could benefit both attendance and achievement gaps (OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, 2017; Sheldon & Jung, 2015).

### **Indigenous Self-Identification**

This study uses Indigenous self-identification to aggregate groups used to analyze data. To better develop Indigenous policies, it is important to have accurate demographic information; however, measuring data for Indigenous peoples can prove challenging at times (Friesen & Krauth, 2012). All school registrations in Alberta, whether public, separate, Francophone, or charter, ask school registrants if they identify as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit (Alberta Government, 2020). First Nations people are asked to further indicate if they are Status or Non-Status (Alberta Government, 2020). These self-identification sections are informed by section 35(2) of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, 1982.

Self-identification for Indigenous people is important as it allows for accurate

numbers for investigating programs and services for the Indigenous peoples (OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, 2017). However, there is a significant amount of mistrust within the Indigenous community about what the information will be used for, which can be problematic when trying to collect accurate measures. There are also inconsistent measurements and attention to detail throughout the country, which makes evaluating these data challenging (Friesen & Krauth, 2012).

### **AEAM Accountability Framework**

This study uses the AEAM-FNMI report as an instrument to measure achievement data for Indigenous students. In Alberta, a new assurance and accountability framework replaced the previous accountability pillar framework (Government of Alberta, 2022). The pilot for this replacement occurred during 2020–2021, so it has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The framework provides a form of accountability or measurement, and reports results to the public. This framework measures five different areas of accountability: student growth and achievement, teaching and leading, learning support, governance, and local and societal contexts (Government of Alberta, 2022). Results are reported through an annual education results report (AERR), which comprises a variety of measurements and components in the AEAM. The framework offers measurements for all students, but it also reports separate results for FNMI students.

AEAMs are collected and curated to provide a targeted picture of growth and learning for school divisions and individual schools as reported in the AERR. Student growth and achievement are measured using standardized PATs, diploma exam results, and high school completion results. These measures are also combined with

survey results reporting on citizenship and student learning engagement. The surveys are the same each year and are sent to students in Grades 4, 7, and 10 and their parents and teachers annually.

Teaching and leading are measured by survey results about the quality of education. The learning supports section of the AERR reflects survey results about the schools being welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe. This category also reflects on access to supports and services. The governance section of the AERR looks at measures of parent involvement as well as school budgeting and expenses for the previous years. Finally, the local and societal context does not use survey or reporting data; instead, it includes local data and information about the school district.

Other measures are used and reported in the AERR. These include dropout rates, high school completion rates, and diploma exam participation rates. Individual schools and districts are compared to other schools and districts and to past results. They are given an overall rating showing a combination of achievements and improvement. The AERR reports not only overall measurements for schools and districts but also releases provincial summaries of results for Indigenous students.

### **Indigenous Student Attendance**

This study uses Indigenous student attendance data as one form of measurement in the study to evaluate practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students. Attendance can be a good indicator of underlying issues or lack of expectations as Indigenous students vote with their feet, suggesting that if they value the education system they are in, they will attend (OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, 2017, p. 13). Reid (2008) suggested that many attendance issues were

caused by schools with rigid structures, outdated policies, and overbearing rules. Across all ages, Indigenous student absences were higher than non-Indigenous students' (OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, 2017).

The history of IRS can be responsible for leaving some Indigenous families with a sense of mistrust for the education system (Education Connections, 2017). Lack of attendance in school is harmful to achieving successful student outcomes for any student (Reid, 2008). The OECD Directorate for Education and Skills report (2017) pointed out that Indigenous students' absences increase once they reach the age of 13. At one school cited in the report, Indigenous teens were at school approximately three to four times per week, whereas non-Indigenous students were at school four to five times per week (OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, 2017).

A study conducted in Alberta compared Indigenous student attendance rates to developmental asset scores and sense of cultural heritage (Sanderson et al., 2013). The study classified students whose attendance was 90–100% as having high attendance rates; those who attended 75%–89% were considered to have moderate attendance, and those who attended 50%–74% were considered to have low attendance. Students with very low attendance rates – below 50% – did not complete the survey; therefore, very low attendance results could not be examined. The study revealed a strong positive correlation between attendance rates and developmental asset scores as measured by the Developmental Assets Profile, a scale used to assess students' strengths and supports and other noncognitive factors that contribute to successful student outcomes. The study did not report any correlation between attendance rates



and perceptions of positive community contexts or a sense of cultural heritage.

A New Brunswick school that significantly reduced education gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students used an Indigenous liaison worker to reduce absenteeism and inform the reservation when students were not in attendance (OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, 2017). Education Connections (2017) claimed that embedding the importance of attendance to families, classrooms, and communities is an important step in reducing absenteeism.

### **High School Completion**

A recent survey released by Statistics Canada (2021c) indicated more Indigenous youth are completing high school than in the past. Seventy percent of Indigenous youth aged 20 to 24 completed high school in 2016, which is significantly higher than 57% 10 years earlier. Of students completing high school in this age bracket, 64% were First Nations people, 83% were Métis, and 47% were Inuit. Although these increases are positive to see, non-Indigenous youth had a 91% completion rate over the same time period, suggesting there continues to be significant educational attainment gaps in Canada.

This high school completion gap is also evident in the province of Alberta. For the 2021–2022 school year, Alberta Education reported that 62% of Indigenous students graduated within 3 years of entering high school. In comparison, 83% of all students in Alberta graduated within 3 years; this is a significant difference (Alberta Government, 2022a, 2022b). Table 1 shows some of the current achievement and attainment gaps between students who are registered as Indigenous and those who are not.

**Table 1*****Education Gaps for Students Registered and Not Registered as Indigenous***

Measure	Indigenous students %	Students not registered as Indigenous %
3-year high school completion	60	83
5-year high school completion	68	87
PAT acceptable <sup>a</sup>	46	67
Diploma acceptable <sup>b</sup>	69	75

*Note.* PAT = provincial achievement test. Data were province-wide percentages from Alberta Education (2022a, 2022b). Use caution when interpreting high school completion rate results because 2019–2020 and 2020–2021 diploma exam results were impacted by the pandemic.

<sup>a</sup> PATs for students in Grades 6 and 9 are criterion-referenced with a cutoff score for acceptable that is usually around 50% (Alberta Education, 2023). <sup>b</sup> Alberta Education typically considers a score of 50% or higher as an acceptable standard on Grade 12 diploma exams (Alberta Education, 2022b).

**Reducing Education Gaps**

The above statistics are relevant to this study as Indigenous parents have highlighted for many years the desire to have an increased number of Indigenous students attend postsecondary programs, allowing Indigenous citizens to contribute to the future development of Canada (Assembly of First Nations, 2010). As early as 1972, Indigenous parents sought the opportunity to have their children provided with the training to make a good living within modern society (National Indian Brotherhood/Assembly of First Nations, 1972). The education gap between students registered as Indigenous and those who are not registered as Indigenous is still

significant. Ongoing investigation to find ways to reduce these gaps is important.

An in-depth report from the OECD on promising practices for Indigenous education suggested that engaging parents of Indigenous students at the school level offered the highest impact on student learning outcomes (OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, 2017, p. 20). Finding the most effective means to reduce education gaps is an important consideration for policymakers. The OECD document also stated that one of the highest-impact/lowest-cost priorities at the school level is engaging families. Engaging with families of Indigenous students is not only important for reducing achievement and attainment gaps but is also fiscally responsible.

### **Significance**

This research study will help to inform educational stakeholders, policymakers, and others to better understand the practices schools use to purposely engage Indigenous parents. The Indigenous student population is the fastest-growing demographic in Canada as a result of higher fertility rates and increased self-reporting of Indigenous people (Assembly of First Nations, 2012; Statistics Canada, 2021b). Regular programs consist of off-reserve public schools that are publicly funded and operated by either the province or territory or school boards (Statistics Canada, 2022). According to 2020–2021 data, 264,642 self-identified Indigenous youth attended regular programs throughout the country; this number may be lower than the actual number as self-identification is optional and many Indigenous families are still hesitant to report this information as they are not sure how it will be used (OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, 2017; Statistics Canada, 2022). Over this time,

54,540 Indigenous youth attended regular programs in the province of Alberta; this represents approximately one quarter of all Indigenous youth in programs across all 13 provinces (Statistics Canada, 2022). Friesen and Krauth (2012) suggested that there is a lack of empirical research with this population and it is necessary to have “meaningful measures of outcomes of interest” for Indigenous students (p. 8). They also suggested that data in areas such as Indigenous student attendance and educational transitions were not regularly reported along with data measuring barriers to Indigenous student achievement. Walter and Andersen (2013) suggested that the lack of quantitative evidence in Indigenous research is “troubling” (p. 64). Having this high density of Indigenous youth attending regular programming and the current achievement and attainment gaps throughout Alberta suggests this is an appropriate venue for Indigenous student academic research.

In a mini documentary produced by the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation of Canada (2019), Senator Sinclair discussed what is meant by the idea of reconciliation. In his words, he explained that seven generations of Indigenous children were taught that they were inferior to non-Indigenous people. While this was occurring, seven generations of non-Indigenous children were taught that they were superior to Indigenous people. He cited the educational system as causing this systemic harm, and, therefore, the educational system needs to provide the solution. He pointed out that this is not a simple or quick fix. Sinclair stated that to reconcile and undo this multigenerational, systemic issue of racism will not easily be undone and may take three, four, five, or even seven generations. Although much of the focus of Sinclair’s comments were reflective of problems in education, systemic racism

encompasses all aspects of Indigenous lives (Wotherspoon & Milne, 2020, 2021).

Reading (2020) claimed that Indigenous people have “experienced several forms of racism, which have negatively affected all aspects of their lives and well-being” (p. 1).

This study will not solve the generational impact of IRS and the systemic racism that abundantly existed in the past and continues to have significant implications to Indigenous student outcomes. The road to reconciliation will be long. My study offers a small opportunity to reflect on what the education system is doing in the early 2020s. It puts the onus on institutions to measure and change and work towards a world that is truly equitable for all school families. This study provides information about what practices educators are using to improve the education conditions for students and their families. Many forms of racism are experienced by Indigenous people in Canada (Reading, 2020). The problem of racism for Indigenous people can include epistemic racism (acquisition of knowledge), relational racism (racism affecting human relationships), structural racism (racism through economic, social, or political structures), social exclusion (social isolation), symbolic racism (negative responses to specialized treatment), and embodied racism (physical reactions to the anxieties of racism; Reading, 2020). As mentioned earlier, Senator Sinclair addressed the idea that these problems of racism have existed for more than seven generations, so changing these systems will be complex and will require purposeful commitment (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation of Canada, 2019). According to the TRC Final Report (2015), “Canadians must do more than just talk about reconciliation...[they] must learn how to practice reconciliation in [their] daily lives” (p. 21).

## **Call to Action**

In acknowledging the horrors of residential schools and beginning the process of reconciliation, the TRC created 94 calls to action for the government (TRC, 2015b). Number 10 of these calls stated,

We call on the Federal Government to draft new Aboriginal education legislation with the full participation and informed consent of Aboriginal peoples. The new legislation would include a commitment to sufficient funding and would incorporate the following principles:

Providing sufficient funding to close identified educational achievement gaps within one generation.

Improving education attainment levels and success rates.

Developing culturally appropriate curricula.

Protecting the right to Aboriginal languages, including the teaching of Aboriginal languages as credit courses.

Enabling parental and community responsibility, control, and accountability similar to what parents enjoy in public school systems.

Enabling parents to fully participate in the education of their children.

Respecting and honouring Treaty relationships. (TRC, 2015b, p. 2)

This research study seeks ways to support Call to Action 10 with a particular focus on Principles i, ii, and vi (TRC, 2015b, p. 2) within the provincial public school system. This study focuses on the following principles: improving education attainment levels and success rates, involving Indigenous parents in the education of their children, and closing achievement gaps for Indigenous students within one

generation. In the past, the relationship between Indigenous people and the education system has not been marked by trust and openness (OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, 2017). It is important to find ways to build bridges between Indigenous families and educators to increase student outcomes. As described earlier and according to the OECD, the most effective models are those that increase participation between parents and the school.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I expressed gratitude and recognition of the Indigenous peoples and their ancestors as the first inhabitants of Treaty 6 and Treaty 8 territories where this study took place. This chapter also contained descriptions of my positionality within this study, research strategies, and terminology used. This is followed by the study's purpose and research questions which were used to guide the study. Chapter 1 included an outline of Indigenous history in Canada, including residential schools and the ongoing effects of trauma on the Indigenous peoples and their families. This chapter also discussed Indigenous student achievement and attainment gaps. Finally, Chapter 1 addressed the significance of the study while highlighting Calls to Action that establish the importance and demand for reconciliation.

Chapter 2 provides a more detailed examination of existing literature that pertains to the role of the parents in education and the benefits and barriers that can accompany that role. It outlines common conceptual frameworks that illuminate the importance of Indigenous parent involvement within developmental and school contexts. Study findings are analyzed through the frameworks described in Chapter 2. Topics relevant to parent engagement for all parents and more specifically for parents

of Indigenous students are also examined, including both benefits and barriers to parent engagement. Finally, this chapter concludes with an examination of best practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology used in this quantitative descriptive study and details of its setting, participants, and ethical requirements. Chapter 4 examines the data collected through the EPIS-SSL and compares that data to Indigenous attendance and achievement data. Chapter 5 concludes with the findings of the study followed by implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.



## **Chapter 2: Review of the Literature**

Investigating practices schools use to engage parents of Indigenous students can assist in understanding progress in educational reconciliation. This literature review examines several frameworks to better understand the role of parents in the development of their children. It also discusses literature concerning the role of parents of Indigenous students in education. This chapter examines culturally relevant leadership theories to consider when examining decolonization in education. Topics relevant to parent engagement for all parents and specifically for parents of Indigenous students are also examined, including both benefits and barriers to parent engagement. Finally, this chapter concludes with an examination of best practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students as discussed in the literature reviewed.

### **Parent Frameworks**

Frameworks show a connection between concepts, assumptions, beliefs, and theories that support research and beliefs (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yamauchi et al., 2017). Frameworks are used to describe and inform relationships between ideas. They can be either written in narrative form or illustrated and can be models to explain the main things to be studied within a certain topic. According to Leshem and Trafford (2007), frameworks offer two functions to a research topic: The first is clarifying what researchers intend to investigate, and the second function is to guide how the researchers intend to achieve that goal.

This next section articulates four intersecting analytical orientations that inform the study of family–school relationships. These frameworks reinforce the role of parents in child development, then expand to a broader understanding of how the

roles of schools and family intersect to support student success.

This section begins with an understanding of how the relationship between the roles of family and schools is significant to children's growth. Bronfenbrenner and Epstein developed two common theories focusing on the role of child development in education. The first, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, outlined the importance of family and community working together in supporting the children's development. The second framework, Epstein's overlapping spheres of influence, Epstein's seminal work, explored the ways in which families, schools, and communities work together to support children in education (Epstein, 1987). The discussion of frameworks continues with Epstein's types of family involvement, a framework often used to specify the roles of parents, communicators, and schools (Epstein, 1995/2010, 2018). The discussion concludes with Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's framework for parent involvement, which examines motivations for parent involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005).

### ***Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory of Human Development***

The importance of family in a child's development has been discussed in the literature for a long time. In the early 1970s, Bronfenbrenner was questioned by colleagues about the differences between male and female parenting models (as mothers were beginning to enter the workforce at that time) and the importance of the child spending the first 3 years of their life with the mother (Bronfenbrenner, 1974). Bronfenbrenner expressed frustration with the lack of substantial research to support his ideas, and he postulated that existing laboratory-type experiments could not validate the complexity of child development. He also criticized previous laboratory

theories of human development as being invalid, as they only measured the person doing the experiment's effect on the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1974; Guy-Evans, 2020). Bronfenbrenner recognized that children had many layers of influence in their lives and understanding these complexities formed the basis of his child development theory.

Bronfenbrenner first articulated his ecological systems theory of human development in 1979. This theory placed the child in the centre of five different systems influencing their development. This was a great step in child development theory, as it took a step back from child characteristics to the environments in which the characteristics were developed. The influential systems in this theory consist of a microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The microsystem consists of the close interpersonal relationships that affect the development of a child over time and includes family, relatives, peers, school, church, and health services. In his development of the ecological systems theory of human development (later changed to the bioecological model in 1994), Bronfenbrenner (1979) was particularly concerned with the increasing isolation between school and home and suggested significant consequences of that isolation on both the behaviour and the development of the child. He referred to this trend as a "potent breeding ground of alienation in American society" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 848). Finding ways to reduce this alienation and bring school and family together is critical. This theory recognizes the importance of the interconnectedness of those who directly influence child development.

Some researchers have criticized Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory for being embedded in Western culture philosophies. Forrest et al. (2021) considered the Bronfenbrenner model in the context of Indigenous tribes of the South Pacific and stated that when the model is applied cross-culturally, it assumes that Indigenous culture is a microsystem rather than a macrosystem. Rose (2018) argued that Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory worked well in the context of residential schools and the intergenerational legacy through its emphasis on process-person-context-time.

### ***Epstein's Overlapping Spheres of Influence***

Another popular theory that informs child development research and is directly related to family–school partnerships is Epstein's overlapping spheres of influence theory. This theory was developed by Epstein in 1987 and was influenced by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory of human development. Epstein's theory looks at the overlapping nature of the spheres of influence in a child's life, including family and school spheres (Epstein, 1987; Epstein & Connors, 1992; Yamauchi et al., 2017).

Epstein readdressed the overlapping spheres of influence theory (Epstein & Connors, 1992) to further describe the relationship among parents, schools, and local environments from psychological, educational, and sociological perspectives (Epstein, 1987; Epstein & Connors, 1992). Epstein's framework was then modified to include the community as a sphere of influence as well. Epstein's framework addressed the need for policies around including communities in education as well as specific teacher training to prepare teachers to integrate families and communities into their

practice. One of the main issues addressed within Epstein's theoretical framework is the interconnection between the spheres of influence, family, school, and community, and the shared responsibility between these spheres for child development.

### ***Epstein's Types of Family Involvement***

Epstein's types of family involvement framework was an extension of her seminal work on overlapping spheres of influence, which was inspired by Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bioecological model (Epstein, 1987). Epstein's conceptual framework outlined the different ways in which families can become involved in schools. Her six types of family involvement include parenting, communication, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaboration. This framework is considered comprehensive in describing the importance of engaging families to improve student success while categorizing and outlining practices for each type of involvement.

### ***Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's Parent Involvement Process***

When looking at parent-involvement strategies, some researchers have examined why parents become involved in their children's education. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's conceptual framework parent-involvement process not only addressed why parents become involved, it also examined why this involvement seemed to have positive effects on student learning (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). The model delineated five levels that influence the involvement process: parental beliefs, school-based behaviours that support learning, attitudes that reinforce children's behaviours, supporting strategies, and student outcomes (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Yamauchi et al., 2017).

Work under this model highlights the links between parents' psychological motivations for involvement and their resulting involvement behaviour.

All the above theories connect to show how important the role of family is in child development and provide an understanding of the purposeful efforts needed to connect parents and schools to provide better opportunities for students. Seeking to welcome parents of Indigenous students requires seeking out cultural theories to inform engagement practices.

### **Cultural Theories**

Theories that use a cultural lens are relevant when engaging families of minoritized cultures. Bourdieu's (1989) cultural capital theory looked at the impacts of culture and class on societal hierarchies. Lareau and Horvat (1999) incorporated the importance of Bourdieu's cultural role and applied it to family involvement in schools. Milne (2016) then overlaid Lareau and Horvat's (1999) theory to examine the influence of Indigenous parent involvement in education.

The culturally responsive school leadership framework (CRSL; Khalifa et al., 2016) highlighted the important role the school leader has in advocating for the rights and equality of minoritized students. The framework examines how school leaders can best support minoritized students and their families. Another framework useful for examining the importance of leadership for Indigenous families is the Indigenous decolonizing school leadership (IDSL) framework (Khalifa et al., 2019). This framework seeks to find norms and beliefs that existed prior to colonization (Khalifa et al., 2019). Detailed descriptions of each of these frameworks follow.

### *Cultural Capital Theory*

Studying parent involvement for Indigenous students requires looking beyond traditional frameworks of family involvement. The idea of cultural capital has been around for decades. The concept was developed in the early 1960s and 1970s by Bourdieu (1989; see also Davies & Rizk, 2018). Although sometimes inconsistently defined, even by Bourdieu himself, cultural capital refers to those traits that are systemically rewarded by society (Bourdieu, 1989; Davies & Rizk, 2018). Bourdieu argued that there was an overrepresentation in French universities of upper-middle-class students. He later added a class cultural component to his research and suggested that institutions like schools, who had previously been considered neutral, were class-biased and dominant, reproducing the social hierarchies that existed in society. Although well represented in literature, this model of social reproduction has been criticized for being overly philosophical (Lareau & Horvat, 1999).

Lareau and Horvat (1999) built on Bourdieu's (1989) ideas using qualitative research techniques to examine families and their involvement with schools (Davies & Rizk, 2018). They suggested that race as well as social class played significant roles in parents' involvement in education (Lareau & Horvat, 1999). Lareau and Horvat suggested that Bourdieu underemphasized the role that institutions such as schools play in activating capital by families. They used the conceptual framework of moments of inclusion and moments of exclusion to describe these activation roles. Lareau and Horvat defined moments of inclusion as advantages provided for a child, such as encouragement and help in applying to universities, and moments of exclusion as disadvantages, such as placement in a low reading group or failure to complete

appropriate credits for college (Lareau & Horvat, 1999).

Building on Lareau and Horvat's (1999) work, research suggested that racial discrimination played a significant role in school standards (Milne, 2016; Milne & Wotherspoon, 2019, 2020a). This type of discrimination has been particularly prevalent among Indigenous Canadians within the education system. Viewing Indigenous education in Canada through Lareau and Horvat's (1999) framework of moments of inclusion and exclusion can help highlight the underlying cultural capital represented when Indigenous parents seek out educational advantages for their children in a society that has a history of being disadvantageous to Indigenous students.

### ***Culturally Responsive School Leadership***

CRSL is a leadership framework derived from previous literature based on culturally responsive education, systems reform, and social justice in education (Khalifa et al., 2016). This leadership framework is designed to better address the complex needs of minoritized students and is a good model to use for leaders of Indigenous students in resisting colonization practices.

The CRSL model states that it is the school leader's responsibility to promote school climates that support marginalized students and to develop an awareness of the history of oppressing Indigenous people (Khalifa et al., 2016). The CRSL model can be categorized into four main strands: The first strand is critical self-reflection on leadership. The CRSL needs to continuously reflect on values and beliefs that have implications when serving minoritized cultures (Khalifa et al., 2016). The second strand revolves around the importance of developing culturally responsive teachers. A



CRSL will play a significant role in challenging teachers about their beliefs and questioning them on assumptions about race and culture.

The principal much present themselves as a leader of cultural responsiveness. The third strand of a CRSL is to consider the school's inclusion systems and culturally responsive environment. The CRSL will regular scan and challenge disproportionate practices for minoritized students (Khalifa et al., 2016). Using school data to understand and track inequities for minoritized students is critical to understanding school inclusionary systems (Skrla et al., 2004). The CRSL will also challenge colour-blind epistemologies both within themselves and in the teachers they support. Continuously scanning staff and self for a lack of awareness of the uniqueness of some minoritized students is also a responsibility of a CRSL.

Finally, the fourth strand involves school leaders seeking ways to engage students, parents, and the community. Seeking ways to support culture, such as supporting languages, creating physical spaces for minoritized students, and appropriately accommodating families will promote positive school–community relationships (Khalifa, et al., 2016). The CRSL seeks out ways to validate home cultures and provide a space for cultural identities to flourish (Khalifa et al., 2016). Finding ways to address family needs can leverage the position of the school in the community. Many minoritized parents have economic, social, and physical needs that prevent them from engaging with schools. The CRSL will address those needs prior to seeking out on-site parent involvement (Khalifa et al., 2016; Lopez et al., 2001). Promoting self-reflection, supporting teacher training, seeking ways to reduce school-based inequities, and initiating practices to promote family and community

engagement are important aspects of this type of leadership (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Two other behaviours associated with the CRSL are maintaining high student expectations and advocating for students and families (Khalifa et al., 2016). The onus of relationship is on educators to first care for their minoritized students, then challenge them (Khalifa et al., 2016). The CRSL will also use their position to advocate for the needs of the school and community, which in turn will build trust and enhance relationships (Khalifa et al., 2016).

This CRSL framework was used to inform this study because of the key role the school leader plays in practices that schools use to engage parents of Indigenous students (Khalifa et al., 2016). The CRSL model informs how principals reflect on their own practices in the study and is relevant to discussions about the development of culturally responsive teacher. This model is also effective when principals examine the effectiveness of their own practices and in examining which practices are most relevant to engaging students, parents, and the community.

### ***Indigenous Decolonizing School Leadership***

The IDSL framework ensures that leaders recognize that the near elimination or erasure of Indigenous cultures resulted from deliberate efforts to assimilate Indigenous people to colonization (Khalifa et al., 2019). In contrast to CRSL, IDSL is not about resisting colonization; rather, it is about seeking out ancestral norms and beliefs that existed before colonization. One of the themes identified in this study is how deeply embedded the practices of colonization are within the school context and the marginalization that results from these practices (Khalifa et al., 2019). IDSL should be considered independent of Western leadership frameworks as it is designed

to stand on its own and not use colonized practices as a form of measurement (Khalifa et al., 2019).

Understanding the intricacies of Indigenous parent engagement goes beyond traditional engagement techniques to fully incorporate the cultural aspects of these relationships. Khalifa et al.'s (2019) IDSL framework identified five strands of worldviews related to values and approaches used by Indigenous leaders worldwide. This framework can be used as a lens through which to measure existing institutional progress in working towards reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. The five strands of worldviews of IDSL are listed as “(1) prioritization of self-knowledge and self-reflection, (2) the empowerment of the community through self-determination, (3) the centering of community voices and values, (4) service based on altruism and spirituality, and (5) approaching collectivism through inclusive communication practices” (Khalifa et al., 2019, p. 573).

The first IDSL strand, prioritization of self-knowledge and self-reflection, seeks to understand the contexts of the acquisition of knowledge and the embedded purposes and motivations for the distribution of knowledge (Khalifa et al., 2019). The IDSL will seek out Indigenous experiential knowledge to reduce misunderstandings and misrepresentations (Khalifa et al., 2019). A continuous dialogue is maintained within the IDSL to determine the original contexts of what is known.

The second strand, the empowerment of the community through self-determination, seeks out leaders who are aware of the histories of Indigenous people within a colonized context and can include students and communities by involving them in decision-making. Elders, parents, and community voices are sought out to

involve them in school decisions and provide opportunities for leaders to learn from perspectives that are not connected to colonized practices.

The third strand discussed by Khalifa et al. (2019) reflects on the centring of community voices and values. This strand highlights the importance of the relationship between school and community. This involves school leaders embracing practices that support and enhance cultural traditions and allow families to interact seamlessly with the school. Using practices that support culture can allow for meaningful relationships between school and community. Failure to use practices to enhance community could result in further marginalization or superficial relationships (Khalifa et al., 2019).

The fourth strand, service based on altruism and spirituality, reflects on the spirituality of Indigenous cultures. This strand reflects on the interconnectedness of all living things. The IDSL recognizes the importance of spirituality to Indigenous students and seeks out altruistic ways to approach education and discipline (Khalifa et al., 2019). This strand also relates to social justice practices that focus more on rehabilitation than punishment.

The fifth strand, approaching collectivism through inclusive communication practices, can directly impact student learning. Providing opportunities for students to use practices such as storytelling can support Indigenous cultural perspectives. Providing this opportunity for the promotion of cultural identity can propel educational growth and cultural confidence (Khalifa et al., 2019). School leaders who “embrace and affirm Indigenous ways of knowing resist the persistence and ubiquitousness of colonial oppression” (Khalifa et al., 2019, p. 599).

Khalifa et al. (2019) suggested that the colonization of educational practices is so embedded into our system that leaders who do not intentionally seek out nonoppressive practices will inadvertently use colonialist structures.

### **Role of Parents in Learning**

The importance of the parental role in supporting a child's development has been documented for many years (T. E. Smith et al., 2020). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention defined parent engagement in schools as “parents and school staff working together to support and improve the learning, development, and health of children and adolescents” (2018, p. 1). Finding ways to engage parents authentically can greatly benefit student success (OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, 2017). Parents have a substantial impact on the way a child develops and responds to education.

The language for parent involvement has changed over time. Initially, parent involvement was defined as families taking an active role in the education of their children (Epstein, 1995/2010). Ferlazzo (2011) suggested parent involvement is considered a doing to approach, which is more demand-based than family engagement. He stated that parent involvement involved schools presenting needs to families and then dictating ways for families to fulfill these needs. In contrast to this parent-involvement approach, family engagement tends to be a broader, more inclusive term and relates more to partnerships than fulfilling demands (Ferlazzo, 2011; Stefanski et al., 2016). The pinnacle of families and schools working together is recognized in the newer term family partnerships. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, 2019) explained, “partnerships involve families and educators

working together as active, equal partners who share responsibility for the learning and success of all students” (p. 1).

Differentiating between parent involvement and parent engagement can be confusing because the terms are often used interchangeably (Stefanski et al., 2016). Despite the complexity of these terms, Ferlazzo (2011) stated that family–school connections that are based on caring, welcoming relationships offer many positive benefits to students, including improved student learning.

Parent engagement, however, can be complex and not easily categorized. Goodall and Montgomery (2014) recognized that ethnic minorities often have difficulties engaging with their school. They conceptualized a continuum that suggests a shift in emphasis away from the relationship between parents and schools to an emphasis between parents and their children’s learning. The three tiers of this continuum are parent involvement with schools, parent involvement with schooling, and parent engagement with children’s learning. It is this last level that is most aligned with parental agency and least involved with school agency. Goodall and Montgomery suggested that activities with the highest level of parental agency are often the least easy to see at the school level, and yet they are the most effective. Parental agency activities include providing opportunities to learn through tutoring or enhancing education with extracurricular activities. They go beyond transactional activities and refer more to the parent’s understanding of their important role in education and their understanding of their potential influence on student outcomes. Goodall and Montgomery suggested that this type of parent involvement continuum is a better lens through which to view parent involvement with minoritized cultures.

Recognition of the importance of families within the educational context has been echoed in legislation throughout North America. The No Child Left Behind Act, 2002; the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1965; and the Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015, in the United States contain purposeful phrasing that urges schools to adopt policies to engage families and promote family–school partnerships. This legislation was also formalized in Canada in the late 1990s when Ontario passed Bill 160 (Education Quality Improvement Act, 1997) to establish school councils within schools. In 2010 the Province of Ontario legislated a parent engagement policy, the first and most comprehensive policy of its kind in Canada (Antony-Newman, 2019). Not only did this legislation recognize the importance of parent councils in establishing school operations, but it also referred to parents and highlighted the importance of welcoming, respecting, and engaging with them as partners.

As of 2020, in Alberta the involvement of parents is indicated in legislation; the Alberta Education Act states, “Education is a shared responsibility and requires collaboration, engagement and empowerment of all partners in the education system to ensure that all students achieve their potential” (Education Act, 2012, Preamble, para. 6). The Education Act further outlines the specific responsibilities of parents in supporting their child’s education (Education Act, 2012). The Alberta government announced a \$1 million grant to parent councils in 2021 to strengthen the voice of parents, encourage parent engagement, and build capacity in Alberta Schools (Alberta Government, 2021a). The legislative focus on parent–school relationships indicates a shift in social values for these partnerships.

## **Benefits of Parent Engagement**

There are many benefits of parent engagement, to students, to families, and to educators or schools. Student benefits can include improved academic achievement and social well-being. Benefits of parent engagement can also include the prevention of negative behaviours, such as emotional dysregulation and higher risk behaviours (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018). Many studies have shown a positive relationship between parent engagement and student attendance. Future educational attainment, such as university, has also been shown to have a positive correlation with parent engagement. Families benefit from parent engagement opportunities as they provide parents with a greater appreciation of the role they play in their children's education. Benefits to educators and schools include better climate, improved morale, and increased job satisfaction.

### ***Benefits to Students***

Purposeful connections between schools and families can have a direct impact on students' learning outcomes in school. Hill and Tyson (2009) examined 50 studies on parent engagement using a meta-analytical approach and found a direct relationship between family involvement in children's learning and academic achievement. The authors noted that the sooner parent engagement was facilitated in a child's learning process, the greater the effect on student outcomes. A literature review of 75 studies published between 2003 and 2017 examined the relationships between parent engagement strategies and student learning outcomes (Boonk et al., 2018). The results revealed that the following parent engagement practices offered the most promising results to student academic outcomes: reading at home,



communicating with the school, and encouraging learning. The most promising relationship was between parent expectations or aspirations and student achievement. A meta-analysis of 77 family–school partnership studies examined the impacts of these partnerships on students’ academic and social-emotional functioning (T. E. Smith et al., 2019). The results of that study indicated that parent engagement could have a significantly positive impact on academic outcomes.

The implications of purposeful family-engagement strategies can be quite powerful and can yield high returns for students. Ferlazzo (2011) advocated for school districts to go into families’ homes and meet with them there. In a California high school of 2,000 students, teachers, counsellors, and staff made hundreds of visits to students’ homes to listen to the needs of families. This, in turn, allowed for a deeper understanding of the families’ information that was not likely to show up on a school survey or questionnaire and gave better opportunities for connection. Families who were a part of this initiative reported a 400% increase in English assessment scores. Purposeful parent engagement can improve student learning outcomes significantly.

Parent engagement can also improve student diagnoses and more accurate identification of learning needs. Benefits of parent engagement include less need for school accommodations and better diagnoses of learning disabilities. Grant and Ray (2019) suggested one of the benefits for students whose families are more engaged was having an accurate diagnosis for classroom learning needs, which could improve learning outcomes. It has also been noted that increased family–school partnerships can result in less need for academic interventions such as special education programs (NASP, 2019). Collaborative communication with parents to determine student

learning needs can also benefit student learning.

Not only does parent engagement benefit student academic outcomes, but parent engagement can also impact social-behavioural competence (T. E. Smith et al., 2019). T. E. Smith et al.'s (2019) study also reported that social-behavioural competencies such as mental health, peer relations, and self-esteem were also positively affected by parent engagement practices. Parent engagement can also support the positive mindset of students, thereby improving academic outcomes (Grant & Ray, 2019; NASP, 2019). The NASP suggested that family engagement could also promote positive student attitudes toward both school and learning, which contributed to higher test scores, improved behaviour, and more consistent homework completion. Grant and Ray (2019) also suggested that students whose parents are engaged in their education tend to like school more.

Family engagement can also offer a number of positive psychological benefits for students. T. E. Smith et al. (2020) conducted a meta-analysis examining the effect factors associated with 77 family–school partnership studies. Rather than examining academic outcomes and behaviours, T. E. Smith et al. focused on psychological factors associated with family–school partnerships. The results indicated that the benefits of family–school partnerships included increased academic achievement, positive student behaviours, social-behavioural competence, and improved student mental health (T. E. Smith et al., 2020). These benefits not only enhance the lives of students but educators and families as well.

Research also indicated that extending student partnerships to include families not only helped to create a caring and supportive community around children to

support the role of learning, but the inclusion of families also increased social development and created an overall sense of well-being (Epstein, 1995/2010; Grant & Ray, 2019; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Willemse et al., 2018). Barger et al. (2019) completed a meta-analysis that quantified 448 independent studies on parent involvement in education and revealed a positive correlation between parent involvement and children's social-emotional adjustment.

Family engagement is also correlated with the prevention of negative behaviours (Grant & Ray, 2019). A study of 3,174 students and 207 teachers across 21 elementary and middle schools in the United States suggested that not only did family-school engagement practices predict positive behaviours, such as better social skills, they also had a relationship with the absence of negative behaviours such as lack of concentration problems, disruptive behaviour, and emotional dysregulation. (T. E. Smith et al., 2019). Other studies suggested that adolescents whose parents were involved in their school life were less likely to partake in risky behaviours such as high-risk sexual behaviours or substance abuse (American Psychological Association, 2014; Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018).

Research also indicated many connections between parent engagement and positive school attendance (Grant & Ray, 2019; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). According to Grant and Ray (2019), students whose families were actively engaged were more likely to attend school regularly. Another small-scale study in the United Kingdom in which researchers interviewed 11 headmasters of primary schools supported the importance of the family-school relationship with better school attendance (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018). One headmaster was quoted as saying “the

parent is the key determinant of attendance” (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018, p. 115).

Parent engagement can also impact future educational outcomes such as educational attainment. A longitudinal educational survey examined the parent involvement of 15,240 Grade 10 students (Benner et al., 2016). The researchers looked at the relationships between educational involvement at home, involvement at school, educational expectations, proximal outcomes (grades), and distal outcomes (educational attainment). Significant links were noted between at-school parent involvement, parental educational grade expectations, current grades and future academic attainment. It was also noted that school-based involvement was particularly effective for those from lower socioeconomic environments. Grant and Ray (2019) also noted that students whose parents were more involved in their children’s education were more likely to graduate and go on to postsecondary education. There are many positive student benefits associated with parent involvement in school.

### ***Benefits to Families***

Families also attain positive benefits from these partnerships by recognizing a greater appreciation for the role they play in their children’s education (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017; Grant & Ray, 2019; Romsaitong & Brown, 2020). Family engagement can also increase families’ confidence in their own efficacy to help their children and provides them with a better understanding of their children’s academic skills and abilities (Grant & Ray, 2019).

### ***Benefits to Educators and Schools***

Improved teacher morale and school climate are also considered benefits of effective family–school partnerships (Epstein, 1995/2010, Epstein et al., 2019,

Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; NASP, 2019). The American Psychological Association (2014) reported that teachers benefit from parent engagement when parents report improved perceptions of teachers, improving overall teacher morale. Another benefit of engaging with families is the reduction of behavioural problems at school, which can reduce teacher stress and promote a better learning environment. (Domina, 2005).

Educators also claim to see the benefits of family–school partnerships, including increased job satisfaction and closer connections with families. These benefits are addressed in a position statement by the NASP (2019) and highlighted in Đurišić and Bunijevac’s review (2017). Close connections benefit teachers by producing a better understanding of students’ home lives and allowing for better communication between home and school (Epstein, 1995/2010). In addition, teachers reported improved knowledge about students’ home and family lives, which promotes more targeted teaching plans to better match student needs and abilities so that overall class performance is improved (American Psychological Association, 2014). Teachers also benefit from the extra support and individualized attention that engaged families provide to support student learning (Grant & Ray, 2019).

When teachers and parents engage, teachers learn to be more empathetic to students’ families. Interviews with two Grade 5 teachers, three Grade 5 students, and three Grade 5 parents in Fulton County, Georgia, revealed that teachers who knew families well were also respectful of how busy families can be and the challenges that parents may have, especially low-income and single-parent families (Newchurch, 2017). Sensitivity to families’ challenges can also decrease the feeling of pressure some families perceive.

## **Barriers to Indigenous Parent Engagement**

There are many barriers that make it more difficult for schools to engage parents of Indigenous students (Kim-Meneen, 2018; Milne, 2016). Psychological barriers can include negative past experiences, such as IRS, which can have a negative effect on parent engagement (Grant & Ray, 2019). Psychological barriers can also include intergenerational factors and a lack of perceived efficacy in parenting skills (Grant & Ray, 2019; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Practical barriers such as lack of money, time, or transportation can also impact parent engagement (Grant & Ray, 2019; Povey et al., 2016). Other barriers can include lack of positive communication between Indigenous families and schools, and because many parents of Indigenous students did not go through the school system themselves in a linear way, a lack of transition supports (Milne, 2016). Cultural barriers, such as differences in family structures are also significant barriers to engaging parents of Indigenous students (Kiyama & Harper, 2018). Finally, barriers can exist within the school itself. Unwelcoming environments and lack of cultural awareness can also make it difficult for parents of Indigenous students to engage with schools (Grant & Ray, 2019). I explore each of these types of barriers in the subsections below.

### ***Psychological Barriers***

Parent engagement can be challenging at times, but some research indicates that it can be more difficult for Indigenous parents (Kim-Meneen, 2018; Milne, 2016). The history of IRS is a legacy that will continue for many generations. An interview with 50 Indigenous and non-Indigenous parents and educators in Ontario examined the ways in which race and class affect interactions between teachers and Indigenous

parents (Milne, 2016). One of the themes that emerged from these interviews was the inherent distrust between Indigenous parents and the education system. Milne's (2016) study also discussed some Indigenous parents' fear and lack of confidence when dealing with teachers, stemming from systemic mistrust.

An Australian study examined the collaboration of Indigenous students, families, and their communities across 32 studies (Lowe et al., 2019). One of the themes that emerged from the study was how the legacy of Indigenous schooling impeded students', families', and elders' trust in their schools, particularly when schools failed to recognize the impact that the Indigenous schools had had on parents.

Moses's (2013) study also reflected on how IRSs contributed to the lack of trust that Indigenous people feel towards colonial educational institutions. He explained that many of the parents he interviewed did not attend residential schools themselves but spoke of their parents' personal stories of the "atrocities they endured" (Moses, 2013, p. 66). These stories contributed to the Indigenous community's inhibitions with the educational system, even for those parents who did not attend residential schools.

For many Indigenous parents, the history of IRS in Canada poses one of the greatest barriers to parent involvement (Milne, 2020; OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, 2017). In a 2002 discussion paper, R. A. Malatest and Associates claimed that fear and mistrust offered significant barriers to Indigenous parent engagement. Although R. A. Malatest and Associates's study is dated, Indigenous parents' fear and mistrust continue to inhibit parent relationships with school (Milne, 2016).

Soujah (2020) suggested that most schools in Canada practice "tokenism" (p.

138) in relation to Indigenous practices. He pointed out that schools in the Yukon have moved forward to seamlessly promote culturally sensitive practices in a way that is no longer deliberate but authentically embedded. He noted that it is not grandiose events that bridge the gaps between parents of Indigenous students and schools, but “small, incremental steps” (Soujah, 2020; p. 139) carried out by teaching staff and administration that have made the biggest difference.

### ***Practical Barriers***

There are many practical barriers to parent engagement, such as lack of money or transportation or time demands that prevent parents from attending school meetings or functions. In some cases, lack of interest was also reported as a barrier to parent engagement (Povey et al., 2016). One of the most significant barriers to parent engagement is time pressures (Grant & Ray, 2019; Povey et al., 2016). Time commitments can stem from work, family, and caring demands. Teachers’ limited availability can also have a direct impact on family-engagement opportunities (Grant & Ray, 2019). Parents from disadvantaged schools may not have time barriers, but instead could have transportation problems or lack of childcare (Povey et al., 2016). Povey et al.’s (2016) study cited that according to 56% of principals and 63% of parent council presidents, another barrier to parent involvement is a lack of parent interest. However, sometimes this lack of interest can be related to varying perceptions. Teachers can perceive the level of families’ involvement in their children’s education as disinterest, according to Grant and Ray (2019), when it actually reflects cultural differences in beliefs about school involvement.



### ***Communication Barriers***

Lack of positive communication between Indigenous parents and school personnel is problematic and acts as a barrier to engaging with parents of Indigenous students (R. A. Malatest and Associates, 2002). Many Indigenous parents noted that they were usually contacted to discuss problems rather than positive news. This was echoed in Milne's (2020) study. The parents in Milne's study discussed how exciting a positive phone call home would be and how important it was to seek opportunities to welcome parents. One parent in Milne's study discussed getting "shot down" (p. 3) when approaching a teacher with concerns about his daughter who had previously experienced trauma. This led to frustration for the Indigenous parent, and the situation became escalated with the parent feeling helpless in terms of being able to help his child. R. A. Malatest and Associates's (2002) study stressed that communication norms for Indigenous parents prioritized face-to-face conversations, whereas the normal communication used for schools is written material. Milne (2020) suggested that schools survey parents to find out which means of communication works best for them.

### ***Transition Barriers***

Another barrier for Indigenous parents was knowing how to navigate their child's educational journey. Milne's (2020) report highlighted Indigenous parents' need for guidance, especially when their children were transitioning from high school to postsecondary institutions. Many Indigenous parents did not transition from high school to postsecondary learning, so they did not have the skills to help their children. Providing parents with the resources to successfully help their children is relevant to

Indigenous parents.

### ***Cultural Barriers***

Sometimes cultural differences can cause barriers to parent engagement. Another significant barrier for Indigenous parents can be in the classification of the term *parent*. The concept of family can be significantly different for many Indigenous families than for Western families, which can be problematic in terms of school involvement. The term parent has been commonly used in Western society but is not necessarily a term that resonates with some Indigenous families (Lafrance & Collins, 2003). Western society often uses a nuclear family definition in which the norm is considered to be two parents and their biological children, although that stereotype is changing (Tam et al., 2017).

The Western definition of parent may be too narrow and heteronormative for Indigenous peoples (Kiyama & Harper, 2018). Little Bear (2000) described the philosophy of Indigenous cultures as collective in nature: “the forest as opposed to the individual trees” (p. 79). In some Indigenous families, several family and community members are involved in the rearing of a child (Lafrance & Collins, 2003). Kinship refers to the collective, community care of children and has been described as a “spider-web of relations” (Little Bear, 2000, p. 79) designed to create balance and interconnectedness. Indigenous families are often complex in nature and cannot easily be bound by the roles and boundaries of Western families (Tam et al., 2017). Factors influencing the definition of Indigenous households include the complexity of household members, multiple caregivers, and different naming conventions for relatives. This, combined with higher mobility of children’s residences and complex

familial structures and kinship systems, often make it difficult to define family in a way Westerners might understand. This can be problematic within the education system for paperwork (including registrations), responsibility, and permissions.

Registrations in schools in Alberta require the one applying for the registration of the child to state whether they are mother, father, parent, or legal guardian (Edmonton Public Schools, 2022). Legal documentation is required to verify their relationship as either a parent or a guardian. Guardian is defined under Section 20 of the Family Law Act, 2003, and can include a number of circumstances primarily related to parental responsibilities, marriage or cohabitation, death, divorce, or complications due to sexual assault. As that definition may not apply to most Indigenous kinship care systems, families need to apply for guardianship orders under Section 23 of the Family Law Act, 2003.

Guardianship can only be applied for if the child has been under the care of the adult applying for a period of more than six months (Family Law Act, 2003). The application for guardianship itself is based on deficit thinking; assuming that the primary parent or guardian is not “able or willing to exercise the powers, responsibilities and entitlements of guardianship in respect to the child” (Family Law Act, 2003, p. 2). Systemic racism, according to Loppie et al. (2020), refers to systemic discriminatory practices used in social, economic, and political systems that can create and reinforce discrimination. Deficit policies do not recognize the collective kinship that exists within Indigenous cultures. Conversations with C. Martineau (personal communication, July 12, 2022), an Indigenous grandmother who opens her home regularly to her grandchildren, highlight the challenge of school registration as well as

the humiliation of the government's interpretation of the term kinship care and the deficit thinking that accompanies it. Unyielding systems that do not recognize cultural differences can be prohibitive to creating family–school partnerships. The limited understanding of the term parent and the lack of Indigenous cultural understanding have serious implications for the education system.

### ***School Barriers***

School barriers can include parents perceiving the school or classroom environment as unwelcoming (Grant & Ray, 2019). This can also include inhibited relationships with teachers whose previous comments or marking sustains an unwelcoming or unpleasant environment. These factors can offer a significant impact to parent engagement. (Povey et al., 2016).

Lack of cultural awareness can also inhibit Indigenous parent engagement (R. A. Malatest and Associates, 2002). Milne's (2020) report indicated that some parents of Indigenous students thought that teachers did not value Indigenous culture. One Indigenous woman from a focus group study discussed giving a dreamcatcher to her child's teacher as a gift (Milne et al., 2019). When the woman returned later, she discovered that it was not being honoured (hung up in the classroom); rather it was left in a box on the floor. Cultural misunderstandings like this can create significant barriers to parent engagement. Milne's (2020) report also pointed out the importance of recognizing and validating the perspectives and knowledge of parents of Indigenous students to help break down systemic barriers.

### **Factors Affecting Parent Engagement**

As well as the barriers described above that continue to impact the engagement

of Indigenous parents, there are many other factors that can influence parent engagement both positively and negatively. Educational attainment and socioeconomic status can have implications for parent involvement, as can ethnic or cultural backgrounds (Baxter & Kilderry, 2022; Berthelsen & Walker, 2008). Parents who have had negative school experiences in the past continue to have impacts on engagement in the future (Berthelsen & Walker, 2008). Differing expectations and understandings of the idea of their influence on children's learning can also influence parent-teacher partnerships.

Teacher behaviour can be a strong factor in engaging parents. Teachers can often view parent engagement through a school-based lens, which can limit their ability to see cultural and linguistic aspects of families (Baxter & Kilderry, 2022). A small-scale study of four primary school teachers working in culturally and linguistically diverse low socioeconomic schools examined the ways in which teachers can adversely impact parent engagement practices in schools (Baxter & Kilderry, 2022). The study, which was conducted using semistructured interviews, reflective journals, and other reflective tools, found that the teachers often engaged in family-engagement strategies from the point of view of the school, and the focus was often on what parents were not doing, rather than on the activities they did with their children (Baxter & Kilderry, 2022). When the teachers began to differentiate between parent involvement in school and parent engagement in the children's learning, they began to change homework practices from isolated homework to home experiences. The study also debunked the idea that teachers can solve low parent involvement by demanding parents be involved, because for many families, homework was

inaccessible due to their lack of formal education (Baxter & Kilderry, 2022). As a result, the teacher participants in the study needed to reassess their understanding of family involvement and engagement.

### **Effective Methods for Engaging Parents**

There are many ways to engage parents in schools. The most effective way to engage parents was to create a respectful and welcoming environment, according to 93% of principals surveyed and 67% of parents and citizens associations (P & C) presidents (Povey et al., 2016). Other factors that affect parent engagement are principal visibility and availability, flexibility in accommodating parent and family needs, and acting on parents' suggestions and feedback, as well as recognition of volunteers. Rural principals suggested that collaborating with the community was an effective method of parent engagement.

There were differences between effective engagement techniques cited by school principals for nondisadvantaged and for disadvantaged schools (Povey et al., 2016). Principals at disadvantaged schools were less likely to report offering workshops or programs to support parent learning, supporting parents to help with children's learning, and providing ample volunteer roles. They were also less likely to cite encouraging parents to be a part of the decision-making process and communicating high expectations for parent involvement as effective techniques for parent engagement (Povey et al., 2016).

P & C presidents at disadvantaged schools reported some methods of parent engagement techniques as being less effective than those at nondisadvantaged schools (Povey et al., 2016). P & C presidents were less likely to include creating a caring and

respectful environment as an effective parent engagement technique for disadvantaged schools (Povey et al., 2016). They were also less likely to include communicating high expectations about school involvement and the benefits of parent engagement as effective tools. There was no singular method cited from disadvantaged schools, according to P & C presidents, that stood out as being effective.

One school that has stood out as being particularly effective in Indigenous parent engagement is an elementary school in New Brunswick, Canada (OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, 2017). This school has a significant Indigenous student population and is located in a low socioeconomic area. The school's purposeful engagement with parents and the community has resulted in a near elimination of academic and behavioural gaps for Indigenous students. The school attributed its success to an agreement between the local First Nation's Chief and the school that set out joint educational objectives and responsibilities of each party. The relationship between the First Nations' reserve and the school members is open, with many staff regularly visiting the reserve, and parent-teacher discussions being held in the First Nations community.

One of the great successes of the New Brunswick school program is attributed to the early education of Indigenous children, which takes place on the reserve; most Indigenous children attend this program (OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, 2017). Purposeful transitions between parents and staff are planned before the program starts. Another success of the school is attributed to the presence of an Indigenous support worker who checks Indigenous student attendance, strategizes for students who have difficulties, and works with outside agencies to help the student.

The school also draws in Indigenous entrepreneurs who involve students in projects involving innovation.

### **Practices for Engaging Parents of Indigenous Students**

Parents of Indigenous students want to have a voice and feel like they are being heard when it comes to their children's education (Milne, 2020). This sentiment was reinforced by members of an Indigenous parent council and advisory board (Milne et al., 2019). The parents said they wanted to have a relationship with their children's schools that was different from their parents' relationship with the education system. Parents recommend that schools seek out opportunities to engage Indigenous parents (Milne, 2020). Although it is important to proactively reach out to all families, it is particularly important to do so with Indigenous parents. Based on the traumatic past with Indigenous education, it is critical for school leaders and teachers to take the initiative to foster these relationships and seek ways to promote positive experiences that incorporate family-school engagement.

### ***Indigenous Liaisons***

Milne's (2016) study examined the role of the Indigenous liaison as this was a unique school-based role that was exclusively designed to engage parents of Indigenous students. Milne recognized that no other racial group had such a role, and the need for this position reflected the "dynamics of educational inequity" (p. 282) specific to parents of Indigenous students. The study examined the historical context of IRS and the power struggles that endured in parent-school communications.

Parents in Milne's (2020) focus group study indicated that the best practice for promoting parent engagement was having a full-time Indigenous person employed at



individual school sites. This person could be an Indigenous liaison, an advisor, an Elder, or a knowledge keeper. This role would aid in fostering relationships between Indigenous families and the schools (Milne, 2020). One of the parents in this study pointed out that the Indigenous liaison allowed for a genuine relationship with the school. This study also reported that Indigenous liaisons could act as mediators between families and schools, further enhancing conversations with teachers and administrators.

### ***Indigenous Languages***

The importance of language to a person's identity was written in a policy paper by the National Indian Brotherhood/Assembly of First Nations leaders (1972) presented to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. The paper described language as

The outward expression of an accumulations of learning and experience shared by a group of people over centuries of development. [Language] is not simply a vocal symbol; it is a dynamic force which shapes the way a man looks at the word, his thinking about the world and his philosophy of life. Knowing his maternal language helps a man to know himself; being proud of his language helps a man to be proud of himself. (National Indian Brotherhood/Assembly of First Nations, 1972, pp. 14–15)

One of the greatest losses that occurred through IRS was the loss of culture and language for Indigenous peoples (TRC, 2015a). Parents in Milne's 2020 study suggested schools find ways to establish language programs for Indigenous families. These programs could include courses to rebuild lost languages like Cree or Dene or

even activities like beading.

### ***Communication***

Sianturi et al. (2022) completed a narrative review examining the function of technology as a means of communication between parents and schools. They examined 34 articles, and the results were organized into themes: functions of technology, barriers and concerns, and enablers of parent engagement (Sianturi et al., 2022). The study reported that technology could be a means to facilitate communication between parents and schools to report activities and learning, to support families, and to connect with families. Sianturi et al. also cautioned that technology could cause further division and raise cultural tensions if forced on parents because there could be ability barriers as well as language and cultural barriers. The report suggested seeking out culturally responsive approaches to support technology would be appropriate and that it could be beneficial to increasing communication.

Another aspect of communication can be the timeliness of responses. Grant and Ray (2019) stated that the concept of lateness is culturally relative and may not represent all cultures. Western culture is considered monochronic which means that one event takes place at a time. Other cultures are polychronic, meaning that more than one thing can occur at one time. According to Duranti and Di Prata (2009), North American Indigenous cultures are considered polychronic, where there is an emphasis on people and relationships, while monochronic cultures emphasize promptness, deadlines, and adherence to plans. Recognizing these as distinct cultural differences is important.

In a conference paper on project management, Duranti and Di Prata (2009)

pointed out practices to keep in mind when dealing with conflicting cultural timeline differences. They suggested avoiding making judgements or assumptions when working with people from different cultures. Duranti and Di Prata also stressed the importance of communication and relationship building. They recommended taking time to ensure the mode of communication will not likely be misunderstood.

Soujah (2020) reported on means of communication for parents of Indigenous students. Although many parents used all modes of communication to engage with schools, modes that were more personal and intuitive in nature were preferred. Soujah stated that personal contact was ranked first by parents of Indigenous students. Technologies like texting were considered more intimate in nature as many of the principals in the study shared their personal cell phone numbers with the parents, showing trust and reciprocity.

Milne's (2016) study examined communication barriers between parents of Indigenous students and schools. The study highlighted the idea that some educators believed that lack of communication from parents of Indigenous students contributed to perseverating problems in Indigenous education, rather than recognizing the impact of cultural or power dynamics between parents of Indigenous students and school. The study also explored the discomfort that many parents of Indigenous students felt when engaging with educators and the parents' unwillingness to challenge or question schools (Milne, 2016).

Milne's (2020) focus group study also suggested that schools find means to communicate with Indigenous parents through culturally relevant practices. The study indicated that recognizing parents of Indigenous students' availability for phone calls

at times convenient to them, such as weekends or evenings, represented culturally responsive practice.

### ***Parent Councils***

Indigenous parents also expressed appreciation when their lives and experiences were valued and appreciated by teachers and staff in the school (Milne et al., 2019). In 2018, an Indigenous parent and caregiver advisory council formed as a means of offering advice and input to schools and educators (Milne et al., 2019). Major themes that emerged from this study were the appreciation of being heard, respected, and valued; belonging, pride, and identity; and creating understanding and awareness (Milne et al., 2019, p. 1). Many parents on the advisory council expressed appreciation for being involved and engaged and having their voices heard. The council also talked about supporting teachers through their journeys in applying knowledge about Indigenous practices as mandated in the Teaching Quality Standards (TQS; Alberta Education, 2018b). Many Indigenous parents expressed a willingness to contribute to education by sharing different perspectives as well as teaching information about their culture, language, and history (Milne, 2020).

Parents of Indigenous students have historically had their voices disregarded in education (TRC, 2015a). Barr and Saltmarsh (2014) explained how it was particularly important for marginalized populations to have an opportunity to have their voices heard and they suggested that it was the responsibility of school leaders to foster communication in school.

**Summary**

In conclusion, this literature review reinforced the importance of engaging parents of Indigenous students in their children's educational journeys. There are a variety of lenses through which to view the role of parents within the educational system. This literature review examined factors relevant to engaging parents of Indigenous students, barriers to engagement, and historical changes that advanced Indigenous policies. This chapter concluded with promising practices to engage parents of Indigenous students and create a welcoming environment for them.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter begins by restating the purpose and research questions of the study followed by a description of ethical considerations. In this chapter details and rationale for the quantitative descriptive analysis methodology are discussed as well as the instruments used to collect data. The chapter includes specifics about the development of the EPIS-SSL, including piloting, distribution, validity, and reliability. The other two instruments – ADA and exam results from AEAM-FNMI reports – are also described in Chapter 3. The chapter describes procedures used to analyze the data aggregated by district, data analysis techniques, and delimitations. A timeline is also included as a reference for future researchers.

#### **Purpose Statement**

Significant achievement and attainment gaps still exist between students who are registered at their schools as Indigenous (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) and students who are not registered as Indigenous (Alberta Education, 2022a, 2022b). Finding ways to reduce these gaps is an important step in reconciliation. Research indicates that engaging parents of Indigenous students at the school level can offer the highest impact on student achievement outcomes (OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, 2017, p. 20). Describing and measuring practices schools use to engage parents of Indigenous students can be a helpful step in attempting to reduce achievement and attainment gaps for Indigenous students.

The purpose of this quantitative descriptive analysis was to describe practices schools use to engage parents of Indigenous students, principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of parent engagement practices as measured by the Engaging Parents of

Indigenous Students Survey for School Leaders (EPIS-SSL), and whether these engagement practices have a relationship with previously collected Indigenous student attendance and achievement data. Parents in this study refer to parents, guardians, or kinship caregivers of Indigenous students. Engagement was defined as “parents and school staff working together to support and improve the learning, development, and health of children and adolescents” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018). This study was guided by the following research questions:

### **Research Questions**

1. What practices do schools use to engage parents of Indigenous students?
2. What barriers exist to prevent schools from engaging with parents of Indigenous students?
3. What are principals’ perceptions of the effectiveness of practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students?
4. What is the relationship between practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students and Indigenous student attendance?
5. What is the relationship between practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students and the level of acceptable PAT and diploma exam results from the AEAM-FNMI report?

### **Ethical Considerations**

The Institutional Review Board granted permission to conduct this research study on July 28, 2022. The school divisions granted secondary approval between August 29 and October 12, 2022.

The Panel on Research Ethics (Government of Canada, 2018) highlighted

three principles that express the core ethical values of respect for human dignity in research: respect, beneficence, and justice. Beneficence refers to ethical moral obligations to protect the welfare of the participants in the study and secure their well-being. As this was not a clinical study, beneficence was not directly addressed in the design, but great care was taken to ensure that the core principals of respect and justice were embedded throughout the study.

Respect refers to the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that all participants are informed and voluntary. The purpose and procedures for this study were clearly outlined and communicated to the participants in a manner that ensured all participants were aware that their participation in the study was voluntary. Participants were informed that they had the right to withdraw at any time; they were instructed that they could close the survey and not complete it without penalty to their employment. As I was not employed by any of the districts in the study and did not have prior relationships with any of the participants, there was an inherent arm's length relationship with these districts. The letter of consent, which was embedded in the survey, acknowledged the confidentiality of the responses as well as protocols for managing and protecting data.

The principle of justice was used throughout the study to ensure that no person or groups were exploited throughout the study. Appropriate ethical conduct for research involving humans is essential for any researcher; however, the ethical framework for research involving the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis populations requires even more diligence (Government of Canada, 2018). As such, I successfully completed the Course on Research Ethics based on the *Tri-Council Policy Statement*:



*Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS2: CORE 2022; Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, 2018), which included a chapter on research specific to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples of Canada. Decisions throughout this quantitative descriptive analysis were enlightened by the Panel on Research Ethics' framework (Government of Canada, 2018).

### **Research Design and Rationale**

This study used a quantitative descriptive analysis design (Loeb et al, 2017). This type of methodology is particularly useful to education research as it can contribute to the body of knowledge through rich descriptions and clear communication. A quantitative descriptive analysis contains research questions that will inform on current issues that are socially relevant and can inform decision-making policies. This research design allowed for a better understanding of the phenomenon of practices schools use to engage parents of Indigenous students.

The design of this quantitative descriptive analysis comprised three instruments to examine practices schools use to engage parents of Indigenous students: the EPIS-SSL, ADA reports, and the AEAM-FNMI reports. The EPIS-SSL survey contained both quantitative and qualitative responses designed to understand the phenomenon of practices schools use for engaging parents of Indigenous students. The study also contained qualitative interviews when I noticed particular data or practices that required further explanations. At a few points in the study, I reached out to district analysts, principals, or superintendents for clarification, and their responses are noted as personal communications.

With this type of quantitative descriptive analysis, it is important to identify constructs and describe issues with clarity (Loeb et al., 2017). Within this context, the broader topic of practices used to engage parents of Indigenous students was identified; other constructs, such as principals' perceptions of effectiveness of these practices, their relationship with student attendance, and student achievement were also addressed. Finding different ways to measure these constructs can be relevant to the description (Loeb et al., 2017). According to Loeb et al. (2017), some datasets may not be ideal on their own, but indirect measures can be used to inform a construct.

This study was unique from other studies of practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students, as it sought to use quantitative measures to examine the effectiveness of practices. Many previous studies used primarily qualitative approaches to examine engagement of Indigenous students (Milne, 2016, 2020; Milne & Wotherspoon, 2019, 2020a, 2020b, 2022a, 2022b, 2023; Moses, 2013). This study sought to measure the effectiveness of practices used to engage parents of Indigenous students through attendance and achievement data. Having a quantitative element in this study was important as quantitative studies have been underutilized in Indigenous research studies. Leithwood's (2021) meta-analysis of equitable school leadership suggested a significant gap in quantitative research when testing the effects of promising equitable school conditions, as most equitable studies are almost entirely qualitative in nature. Skrla et al. (2004) suggested that using school data, such as attendance or achievement, is important when measuring equity within schools. Education Connections (2017) pointed out that one of the barriers to success of

Indigenous students is the lack of collection of data such as absenteeism and educational transitions data. In a key policy report (Friesen & Krauth, 2012), the Council of Ministers of Education pointed out that increasing Indigenous parent involvement and community engagement in education was one of the key priorities in improving outcomes for Indigenous students. Friesen and Krauth's report also pointed out that many proposed interventions for increasing engagement for parents of Indigenous students lack the quantitative evidence necessary to evaluate their effectiveness properly. This type of evidence is needed to inform strategic decision-making.

Friesen and Krauth (2012) noted that there is a large gap in Canadian quantitative data assessing issues regarding education policies that identify barriers to school success of Indigenous students. Their report also stated that although there have been many educational interventions to actively engage parents of Indigenous students, very few of these interventions include quantitative analysis. Walter and Andersen (2013) pointed out that there is a significant concentration of qualitative methodologies associated with the Indigenous peoples; they also refer to the "near absence" of quantitative discussion (p. 66). Walter and Andersen also stated that using only qualitative methodologies limits Indigenous communities in challenging institutions when change needs to occur as many of the qualitative studies examining Indigenous engagement in Canada have not measured variables in the way quantitative analysis can.

### **Instrumentation**

This study used three different instruments to describe and measure practices

schools use to engage parents of Indigenous students. The first instrument was a mixed-mode survey. Responses to this survey provided a foundation for both quantitative and qualitative analysis of practices schools use to engage parents of Indigenous students. This section contains descriptions of the contents of the survey, piloting the survey, and sampling techniques used for survey distribution. An examination of the validity and reliability of the survey is described. This section also describes the second instrument, ADA reports and the third instrument, the AEAM report.

### ***EPIS-SSL***

This quantitative descriptive analysis used a mixed-mode survey design to gain a better understanding of the practices schools use to engage parents of Indigenous students (Dillman et al., 2014). The EPIS-SSL contains both open- and closed-ended questions to create a better understanding of these practices. Open-ended response questions allowed for qualitative analysis of the phenomenon being studied and provided more meaningful analysis than quantitative data alone (Loeb et al., 2017). A mixed-mode survey design can reduce the four major sources of data collection errors common to survey responses: coverage error, sampling error, nonresponse error, and measurement error (Dillman et al., 2014). Coverage errors refers to generalizations made of study results as though the full population was sampled even though certain members within the population were not represented within the survey results (Dillman et al., 2014). Sampling error questions the precision of a survey because only a certain group is selected to complete the survey (Dillman et al., 2014). Others who might have answered the survey are not included, but their

perceptions could be valuable to the study. Nonresponse error refers to the common characteristics of those who choose to not respond to a survey, which could skew interpretation of the responses if the remaining respondents are either positively or negatively biased (Dillman et al., 2014). Measurement error refers to a lack of precision of the questions in gathering responses that accurately measure the objective of the question (Dillman et al., 2014).

A survey containing both open- and closed-ended questions is useful when either method alone is inadequate to understand the problem fully (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A mixed-mode survey design can yield further insight than open- or closed-ended questions could produce separately. This survey construct allowed for functionality through the form of a survey with opportunities for explanatory responses to expand on topics. By combining quantitative and qualitative data, insights into a particular phenomenon, practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students, could be examined more thoroughly to discover new meanings, identify relationships, and describe what problems could exist between variables (Mills & Gay, 2019; Siedlecki, 2020).

This survey was designed using existing data based on information and recommendations attained through literature reviews for promoting the engagement of parents of Indigenous students in schools (Alberta Government, 2013; Milne, 2020; Milne & Wotherspoon, 2020b; OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, 2017). The survey's open-ended question design allowed for insight into practices that might not have been previously documented. To control for the quality of the instrument, a national content expert was consulted in the design of the questions (Dillman et al.,

2014). A psychometrician was also consulted throughout the design of the survey to ensure content validity and to complete a review of the survey's scaled contents.

The survey contained 37 questions, although many of the questions were displayed through a logic sequence and may not have occurred in all surveys. There were nine closed-ended questions and 14 open-ended questions. There was also a question asking the principals to rate their own school's engagement practices. The survey also contained 11 demographic questions and two qualifying questions.

The survey's two qualifying questions delimited the responses. The first question asked if the Indigenous population at the respondent's school was 5% or more. If the respondents answered no, then they would skip to the end of the survey. A qualifying level of a 5% Indigenous population was chosen as I was most interested in getting information from schools who already had practices in place for engaging parents of Indigenous students. I recognize that many schools whose Indigenous student populations are below 5% have existing practices for engaging with parents of Indigenous students, but for survey efficiency, I chose 5% to focus more on schools I hypothesized could have more developed practices in place. The next qualifying question asked if the principal was posted at their school during the previous school year. Again, if they responded no, they were skipped to the end of the survey. This question was a practical one. My hypothesis around this limitation was that a principal who was new to their position at the time the survey was distributed might not yet have a sound understanding of the practices their school used to engage parents of Indigenous student in the previous school year.

The survey contained nine closed-response questions that sought to answer

basic questions such as whether schools offer alternate forms of academic reporting for parents of Indigenous students. Closed-response questions were used to ensure that respondents were considering issues relevant to the study (Johnson & Morgan, 2016).

There were 14 open-response questions that were primarily designed to gather more information on the closed-response questions. For example, a closed-response question might ask if the school employed a liaison to work with Indigenous families. This closed-response question was then followed with an open-ended response asking for a description of the liaison's role in the school. Open-response questions offer the possibility of receiving unanticipated answers from respondents and they can supply content for future studies (Johnson & Morgan, 2016). However, completion of open-response questions can often be disappointing, as respondents may skip these questions or answer them incompletely because they take a lot of mental energy (Dillman et al., 2014; Johnson & Morgan, 2016). Dillman et al. (2014) suggested limiting the use of open-response items to only the most important data requests. They also suggested that including motivating comments or adding explanations before items could increase response elaboration. Having a mix of item types in a survey can offer the benefits of both methods (Johnson & Morgan, 2016). In order to encourage open responses, reminders were included in the survey to provide extra motivation to respond (Dillman et al., 2014). An example of this type of motivation used in the EPIS-SSL survey was "What practices does your school specifically use to foster Indigenous parent engagement? Please list as many as you can as this will add to the body of knowledge surrounding Indigenous parent engagement and can be used by other schools as a reference."

The survey also contained one rating scale in which principals were asked to rate their own school's practices for engaging with the parents of Indigenous students. The principals could select on a 6-point scale from *very poor* to *excellent*. I chose six responses to reduce survey centrality where a respondent is drawn to the middle ground in a survey, as this can contribute to systematic survey error (Van Vaerenbergh & Thomas, 2013).

The survey also asked 11 demographic questions to get a better understanding of the principals and their schools. The survey was confidential but did ask for respondents to report their district and school name to link the schools with their attendance and achievement data later. Demographic questions included asking for job titles and Indigenous status. The survey also sought out information on the grade levels taught at the school and contained open-ended numerical questions, such as school populations as well as an aggregate amount of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students to get a better understanding of the composition of the schools that responded. The survey included instructions about how to pull this information from PowerSchool, a software program that many schools in Alberta use to access and report student data.

**Piloting the Survey.** This survey was piloted through an expert review panel using an iterative process. This process was completed two times during the production of the survey. It was first piloted on June 18, 2022, to narrow questions and draw out understandings. A psychometrician oversaw changes as a result of the initial piloting and made suggestions throughout the survey development. An Indigenous expert was also consulted through the development of the survey to offer



suggestions and increase my comprehension of its cultural implications. A final piloting was completed in September 2022, before the survey was administered. This piloting focused on cognitive interviewing and think-aloud techniques to develop a better understanding of potential respondents thought processes (Padilla & Leighton, 2017). Comments and recommendations were received and changes were made throughout the process.

**Survey Distribution.** Purposive and criterion-based sampling were used to distribute this survey to potential respondents. These sampling strategies were used concurrently to obtain a rich sample of schools with high Indigenous student populations.

**Purposive Sampling.** Purposive sampling is the process of intentionally choosing a sample to “inform an understanding of [a] research problem and central phenomenon in [a] study” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 158). School districts that had substantial exposure to Indigenous students were chosen to get a broader understanding of parent engagement practices. Schools were chosen from both rural and urban areas to contribute to this understanding.

**Criterion-Based Sampling.** Criterion sampling involves seeking out participants who meet certain criteria to describe certain phenomenon in depth (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The overall goal of this sampling technique was to select participants who could best contribute to the understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Mills & Gay, 2019). The criteria for this study included being a principal in the province of Alberta, Canada, at schools with at least 5% of the student population identify as Indigenous, and in their current school for the previous school year.

**Validity and Reliability.** Validity refers to whether one is measuring what they intend to measure (Muijs, 2011), making it the single most important aspect of survey research design. Content validity is the degree to which an instrument measures the intended content area (Mills & Gay, 2019). To ensure content validity in the quantitative portion of this research, the survey was briefed by four university faculty experts who have experience with both quantitative and qualitative designs. Obtaining reviews from content experts can strengthen the design of an instrument (Dillman et al., 2014; Mills & Gay, 2019).

Guba (1981) suggested four criteria to ensure the validity of qualitative data: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was established by doing peer debriefing to gain insight from other professionals (Mills & Gay, 2019). Transferability was established by including detailed descriptions of the context of the participants to provide better context. Dependability was established by maintaining an audit trail that included written descriptions of each process and decision. To maintain confirmability, a journal was maintained to reflect on underlying assumptions or biases and to purposely reflect on findings and questions (Mills & Gay, 2019).

#### ***Average Daily Attendance Report***

The second instrument used for the research study was an ADA report. These data were provided by district staff on behalf of individual schools for the 2021–2022 school year and measured ADA for Indigenous students attending each school.

The attendance report included membership, reflecting the number of days a student was enrolled at the school. It also included attendance as the average number

of days a student was recorded as present. The total days of attendance were divided into the total days of membership. All student totals were averaged out to provide an ADA per school. These reports were further aggregated by self-reported Indigenous status – First Nations–Status, First Nations–Non-Status, Métis, or Inuit – based on school registrations. As mentioned in Chapter 1, it is believed that Indigenous’ self-identification may be underreported due to ongoing trust issues between the Indigenous peoples and government institutions (Friesen & Krauth, 2012).

D. Smith et al. (2017) defined chronic absenteeism as “missing at least 10 percent of the school year” (p. 48). They argued that it was at that point that attendance began to affect student achievement. They stated that attendance rates could show students’ connection with the school and the people who worked there, which again supports the idea mentioned in Chapter 1 that students “vote with their feet” (D. Smith et al., 2017; OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, 2017, p. 13). D. Smith et al. (2017) suggested attendance could be directly linked to the relationship educators maintained with students and their families. The ADA report was analyzed to look for potential relationships between practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students and Indigenous student attendance data.

### ***AEAM-FNMI Report***

The third instrument used in this study was the AEAM-FNMI report, reflecting PAT and diploma exam results for FNMI students in Grades 6, 9, and 12 in June 2022. These results reported the percentage of students achieving excellent or acceptable results on these exams. Alberta Education typically considers a score of 50% or higher as an acceptable standard and a score of 80% or higher as a standard of

excellence on Grade 12 diploma exam results (Alberta Education, 2023). PATs for students in Grades 6 and 9 are criterion-referenced and have a cutoff score that is adjusted slightly year-by-year based on test difficulty, but it is usually around 50% for acceptable standard and around 80% for standard of excellence (Alberta Education, 2023). This study used an aggregated version of the AEAM report that compared school-based Indigenous student achievement results to other Indigenous students within the province (Alberta Education, 2022b). Using an Indigenous student to Indigenous student comparison allowed me to only examine relationships to the Indigenous populations and not be affected by other populations. Only acceptable result percentages for Indigenous students were analyzed for this study.

AEAM reports are distributed by Alberta Education to school districts who then forward the results to the individual schools. These reports were shared with me by individual schools or through the school divisions. These reports are school specific, but they also include provincial averages for Indigenous students. This information was analyzed to look for potential relationships between practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students and achievement data.

This study used three instruments to examine practices schools use to engage parents of Indigenous students: the EPIS-SSL, ADA reports, and the AEAM-FNMI reports. The study also contained qualitative interviews that occurred when the researcher noticed particular data or practices requiring further explanations. At a few points in the study, I reached out to districts or principals for clarification, and their responses are noted in Chapter 4 as personal communications.

## **Procedures**

The following procedures were used to guide this research study. Upon approval from the districts, I sent an introductory email to superintendents to forward to their principals (see Appendix C). The email contained an introductory note as well as a 3 min 40 s video describing the study and addressing the questions that would be asked in the survey. A link to the Qualtrics survey was also included in the email. Participants were given 2 weeks to complete the survey. Respondents were given my personal email and phone number in case they had any questions or concerns.

Data collection involved surveying principals of schools across five school districts. The survey was distributed electronically using a Qualtrics link to these principals. Qualtrics is an online survey software that allows researchers to collect and organize survey data in real time. The survey was designed to take less than 15 min to complete as I understood the busy role of principals.

## **Participants and Settings**

This study took place in the province of Alberta in the fall of 2022. Eight school districts were contacted to see if they were interested in participating in the study. Appendix B contains a sample of one of the research proposals sent to the districts. Five districts responded positively when they were asked to be a part of the study and are referred to as districts A to E below. Two districts did not wish to participate in the study, and one district did not respond.

Districts were selected based on their willingness to have principals participate in the survey and their willingness to provide attendance and achievement data and work within the timeframe of October to December 2022. Districts were asked to

share the survey with school principals within their district through their superintendent and one district allowed me to contact the principals directly. Three divisions chose to distribute their survey only to those schools who were more likely to have an Indigenous population over 5%, while two districts shared the survey directly with all their principals.

The five districts that were chosen to participate in the study were serving Indigenous students in Treaty 6 and/or Treaty 8 territories. There are three main territories represented in Alberta: Treaties 6, 7, and 8. I chose Treaty 6 and 8 as they were nearer to my residence, and I wanted to be available if any districts wanted me to come out to present in person before the study.

There were 72 surveys shared amongst the principals in these districts. Of these 72 surveys, 57 participants responded, representing a 79% response rate. Of the 57 respondents, nine were removed from the study because the Indigenous population at their school was less than 5% of the total population. Another nine respondents were removed because they were not posted at their school for the 2021–2022 school year. I chose to eliminate these principals from the survey as I hypothesized that they might not have a strong understanding of what practices the school had used for engaging parents of Indigenous students in the previous year, as these principals had only been at their new school for a few months prior to the survey distribution.

Another seven survey responses were removed because they contained no data. It appears the surveys were opened but not completed; thereby providing no value to the study. Three duplicate responses were also removed from the study. Thus, there was a total of 30 responses that were considered useable data included in the

study.

Useable data responses of 30 out of 72 represented a 42% response rate. According to Mills and Gay (2019), a general rule of thumb for survey generalizability is a response rate of 50% or greater depending on the population in which the data was sampled, so generalizability should be cautioned in this study. Of these, two schools did not indicate their school's name, so they were not able to be included in the attendance and achievement analysis; however, their survey responses were included in the descriptive data for the valuable information they contained. One school did not supply attendance data because they are an outreach school that does not take regular attendance. Four schools did not supply AEAM-FNMI reports, so they were not included in the comparisons of achievement data; although they were included in the survey portion of the study because their responses contained useable descriptive data. An additional six schools did not receive AEAM reports as they did not contain grades that administered provincial exams as these reports are only distributed to schools that teach students in Grades 6, 9, and 12. A summary of each district's demographic data follows, with only limited details to preserve anonymity.

### ***District A***

This district is considered a public school district in Treaty 6 and Treaty 8 territory that serves approximately 5,000 students. It is considered primarily a rural district. They employ approximately 300 teachers and 250 support staff. The district considers itself a primarily rural school division. Their educational goals and commitment to Indigenous research reflect their commitment to supporting First Nations, Métis, and Inuit learners.

The Indigenous population at this school district represents approximately 20% of the total population served by this district according to their 2022–2025 plan. This district works directly with two Indigenous Nations and is committed to further developing long-standing relationships with these Nations. The district’s 3-year education plan also reflects their strong commitment to parent involvement as well as their commitment to increasing higher standards in achievement outcomes for their First Nations, Métis, and Inuit learners.

Table 2 includes demographic data that shows the overall population served by the schools as well as the grades taught within the schools. These data were aggregated by categories common to those in Alberta. Division 1 refers to schools that teach Grades 1 to 3; Division 2 refers to schools that teach students in Grades 4 to 6. Division 3 refers to schools that teach students in Grades 7 to 9, and Division 4 refers to schools that teach students in Grades 10 to 12. Schools responding to these demographic questions may not teach all the grades in that division, but these categories were used to get a general breakdown of the student population. Table 2 also outlines how many students in the school self-identified as Indigenous and the percentage of Indigenous students in the school according to the school’s 2021–2022 school registration data.



**Table 2***District A: School Demographics for Indigenous Students*

School	School population <i>N</i>	Divisions	Indigenous students <i>n</i>	Proportion of Indigenous students (% of population)
A	580	3, 4	59	10
B	357	2, 3	51	14
C	355	1, 2	23	6
D	507	3, 4	62	12
E	120	1, 2	15	13
F	440	1, 2, 3	37	8
G	300	1, 2	62	21
H	139	1	42	30

*Note.* Division 1 includes Grades 1 to 3; Division 2 is Grades 4 to 6; Division 3 is Grades 7 to 9; Division 4 is Grades 10 to 12.

Table 3 describes the distribution of self-reported Indigenous populations at District A's schools based on district-reported data. When registering, parents of Indigenous students can report their child as First Nations–Status, First Nations–Non-Status, Métis, or Inuit (see Chapter 2: Indigenous Self-Identification).

**Table 3***District A: Self-Identification of Indigenous Student Population*

School	FN–Status <i>n</i> (%)	FN–Non-Status <i>n</i> (%)	Métis <i>n</i> (%)	Inuit <i>n</i> (%)
A	18 (3)	11 (2)	30 (5)	0 (0)
B	10 (3)	20 (6)	21 (6)	0 (0)
C	7 (2)	8 (2)	8 (2)	0 (0)
D	20 (4)	9 (2)	30 (6)	3 (< 1)
E	5 (4)	3 (3)	7 (6)	0 (0)
F	14 (3)	2 (< 1)	21 (5)	0 (0)
G	10 (3)	16 (5)	36 (12)	0 (0)
H	29 (21)	5 (4)	8 (6)	0 (0)

*Note.* FN = First Nation; Percentages represent the proportion of Indigenous students in the total school population. Parents select the category of Indigenous identification when completing school registrations.

***District B***

District B is considered both a rural and an urban school district that covers a large geographic area in Treaty 6 territory in northern Alberta. They serve approximately 4,000 students and have approximately 250 full-time equivalent teaching staff and 350 support staff. Their educational goals reflect their commitment to improving Indigenous student outcomes. The division's 3-year education plan demonstrates an ongoing commitment to partnerships that support ongoing student achievement. They serve students from four Indigenous Nations and work hard to

maintain relationships with those Nations. Their 3-year plan indicates their commitment to purposely work towards reducing the systemic gap between First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students and division-wide results. They also state their commitment to continual improvement in relationships with the Indigenous Nations while building staff knowledge to further support truth and reconciliation.

Table 4 includes demographic data that shows the overall population served by the schools as well as the grades taught within the schools. These data were aggregated by categories common to those in Alberta as described above. Table 4 also outlines how many students in the school self-identify as Indigenous and the percentage of Indigenous students in the school according to the school's 2021–2022 school registration data.

**Table 4**

*District B: School Demographics for Indigenous Students*

School	School population <i>N</i>	Divisions	Indigenous students <i>n</i>	Proportion of Indigenous students (% of population)
A	230	3, 4	34	15
B	485	1, 2, 3	183	38
C	200	1, 2	36	18
D	360	4	37	10
E	132	1, 2, 3, 4	83	63
F	100	4	23	23
G	575	1, 2, 3, 4	381	66
H	-	-	-	-

*Note.* Division 1 includes Grades 1 to 3; Division 2 is Grades 4 to 6; Division 3 is Grades 7 to 9; Division 4 is Grades 10 to 12. School H did not provide demographic information.

**Table 5***District B: Self-Identification of Indigenous Student Population*

School	FN–Status <i>n</i> (%)	FN–Non-Status <i>n</i> (%)	Métis <i>n</i> (%)	Inuit <i>n</i> (%)
School A	14 (6)	1 (< 1)	18 (8)	1 (< 1)
School B	146 (30)	6 (1)	31 (6)	0 (0)
School C	24 (12)	0 (0)	12 (6)	1 (1)
School D	25 (7)	3 (1)	9 (3)	0 (0)
School E	77 (58)	1 (1)	2 (2)	0 (0)
School F	20 (20)	0 (0)	3 (3)	0 (0)
School G	374 (65)	4 (1)	3 (1)	0 (0)
School H	-	-	-	-

*Note.* FN = First Nation; Percentages represent the proportion of Indigenous students in the total school population. Parents select the category of Indigenous identification when completing school registrations. School H did not report demographic data.

Table 5 describes the distribution of self-reported Indigenous populations at District B's schools based on district-reported data.

***District C***

District C is considered primarily a rural school district located in Treaty 6 territory in northern Alberta. They serve approximately 3,000 students and have approximately 400 staff (about 200 of those are full-time teachers or administrators). Their educational goals reflect their commitment to improving Indigenous foundational knowledge as well as decreasing Indigenous dropout rates. The district's 3-year education plan highlights its commitment to increase the district's focus on

First Nations, Métis, and Inuit success.

Table 6 includes demographic data that shows the overall population served by the schools as well as the grades taught within the schools. Table 6 also outlines how many students in the school self-identify as Indigenous and the percentage of Indigenous students in the school according to the school's 2021–2022 school registration data.

Table 7 describes the distribution of self-reported Indigenous populations at District C's schools based on district-reported data.

**Table 6**

*District C: School Demographics for Indigenous Students*

School	School population <i>N</i>	Divisions	Indigenous students <i>n</i>	Proportion of Indigenous students (% of population)
A	680	3, 4	110	16
B <sup>a</sup>	60	4	a	
C	46	1, 2, 3	3	8
D	311	1	48	15

*Note.* Division 1 includes Grades 1 to 3; Division 2 is Grades 4 to 6; Division 3 is Grades 7 to 9; Division 4 is Grades 10 to 12.

<sup>a</sup> School B offers outreach and virtual supports for students; the district did not provide demographic information for this school. The school population number listed represents only outreach students.

**Table 7***District C: Self-Identification of Indigenous Student Population*

School	FN–Status <i>n</i> (%)	FN–Non-Status <i>n</i> (%)	Métis <i>n</i> (%)	Inuit <i>n</i> (%)
School A	32 (5)	20 (3)	57 (8)	1 (0)
School B	-	-	-	-
School C	2 (4)	1 (2)	0 (0)	0 (0)
School D	12 (4)	12 (4)	22 (7)	2 (0)

*Note.* FN = First Nation; Percentages represent the proportion of Indigenous students in the total school population. Parents select the category of Indigenous identification when completing school registrations. School B did not report demographic data.

***District D***

District D is considered primarily a rural school district located in both Treaty 6 and Treaty 8 territory. They serve approximately 10,000 students and have approximately 700 certificated teaching staff with approximately 400 support staff. The division’s educational goals reflect their commitment to improving Indigenous academic outcomes and building collaborative relationships with the Indigenous community. The district’s 3-year education plan highlights their commitment increase the district’s focus on First Nations, Métis, and Inuit student success.

Table 8 includes demographic data that shows the overall population served by the schools as well as the grades taught within the schools. Table 8 also outlines how many students in the school self-identify as Indigenous and the percentage of Indigenous students in the school according to the school’s 2021–2022 school registration data.

Table 9 describes the distribution of self-reported Indigenous populations at District D's schools based on district-reported data.

**Table 8**

*District D: School Demographics for Indigenous Students*

School	School population		Indigenous students	Proportion of Indigenous students
	<i>N</i>	Divisions	<i>n</i>	(% of population)
A	525	1, 2, 3	32	6
B	1117	3, 4	150	13

*Note.* Division 1 includes Grades 1 to 3; Division 2 is Grades 4 to 6; Division 3 is Grades 7 to 9; Division 4 is Grades 10 to 12.

**Table 9**

*District D: Self-Identification of Indigenous Student Population*

School	FN–Status	FN–Non-Status	Métis	Inuit
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
A	10 (2)	6 (1)	16 (3)	0 (0)
B	76 (7)	21 (2)	50 (4)	3 (< 1)

*Note.* FN = First Nation; Percentages represent the proportion of Indigenous students in the total school population. Parents select the category of Indigenous identification when completing school registrations.

***District E***

District E is considered an urban school district located in Treaty 6 territory. They serve approximately 50,000 students and have approximately 5,000 staff. The division's educational goals reflect their commitment to improving Indigenous academic outcomes and creating a space where Indigenous students can see their culture around them. The district offers specific programs to support Indigenous students academically and culturally. They also offer supports to Indigenous students to help them transition to postsecondary schools.

Table 10 includes demographic data that shows the overall population served by the schools and the grades taught within the schools. Table 10 also lists how many students in the school self-identify as Indigenous and the percentage of Indigenous students in the school according to the school's 2021–2022 school registration data.

**Table 10***District E: School Demographics for Indigenous Students*

School	School population <i>N</i>	Divisions	Indigenous students <i>n</i>	Proportion of Indigenous students (% of population)
A	1,507	4, Cont. Ed.	71	5
B	1,963	4	85	4
C	210	1, 2	62	30
D	466	3	42	9
E	385	1, 2, 3	27	7
F	1,174	4	58	5

*Note.* Cont. Ed. = continuing education. Division 1 includes Grades 1 to 3; Division 2 is Grades 4 to 6; Division 3 is Grades 7 to 9; Division 4 is Grades 10 to 12.



Table 11 describes the distribution of self-reported Indigenous populations at District E's schools based on district-reported data. One student was eliminated from School E under First Nations–Status as they were registered but never attended the school; another Métis student was eliminated as well, because they did not attend. Two students' data were eliminated from School E First Nations–Status as they were registered for only 3 days. Within the whole school district, 29 students self-identified as Inuit students. Of these, only one was in one of the target schools and attended the school for only a few days, so they were eliminated from the data.

**Table 11**

*District E: Self-Identification of Indigenous Student Population*

School	FN–Status <i>n</i> (%)	FN–Non-Status <i>n</i> (%)	Métis <i>n</i> (%)	Inuit <i>n</i> (%)
A	30 (2)	11 (1)	30 (2)	0 (0)
B	31 (2)	10	44 (2)	0 (0)
C	15 (7)	31 (5)	16 (8)	0 (0)
D	29 (6)	3 (1)	10 (2)	0 (0)
E	10 <sup>a</sup> (3)	7 (2)	10 <sup>b</sup> (3)	0 (0)
F	34 (3)	7 (1)	17 (1)	0 (0)

Note. FN = First Nation; Percentages represent the proportion of Indigenous students in the total school population. Parents select the category of Indigenous identification when completing school registrations.

<sup>a</sup> One student FN–Status student was eliminated from the data as they were registered but attended 0 days at School E. <sup>b</sup> One Métis student was eliminated from the data as they were registered but attended 0 days at School E.

## **Data Analysis**

The primary goal of this study was to describe practices that schools use to engage parents of Indigenous students and measure their effectiveness. To do so, a quantitative descriptive analysis was used to allow for analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data.

### ***Quantitative Survey Data***

The quantitative portion of this study included analyzing means, medians, modes, and standard deviations for continuous scaled variables as well as frequencies and percentages for categorical variables (Mills & Gay, 2019). Data were analyzed using the variables of reported practices and attendance and achievement outcomes through independent  $t$  tests and correlations to determine if there were statistically significant relationships between practices used to engage parents of Indigenous students and achievement and attendance data. An independent  $t$  test determined if the means of two samples were significantly different at a selected probability level. The probability level selected for this study included results less than .05.

Pearson's correlation tests were also performed to examine the relationship between ADA scores and students achieving acceptable results on diploma or PAT exams. This calculation also used a probability level of less than .05. Correlation tests examine the degree to which two variables are related (Mills & Gay, 2019). Pearson's correlation tests and ANOVA tests were also used to examine the relationship between the aggregates of Indigenous status (FN-Status, FN-Non-Status, Métis, and Inuit) and the variable of ADA. These tests were repeated with achievement data results.

The study also examined principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of the practices used to engage parents of Indigenous students. This question had a rating scale with responses of excellent, very good, good, fair, poor, and very poor. These responses were broken down into two categories: excellent, very good, and good as well as fair, poor, and very poor. An analysis of variance was used to determine if two or more groups were considered statistically different when grouped together (Mills & Gay, 2019). As there were only two categories being compared, these results yielded the same results as the independent  $t$  tests and confirmed earlier analyses (Mills & Gay, 2019). These two groups were then analyzed against ADA and AEAM-FNMI results using an ANOVA test to analyze differences between groups. The probability level used to determine statistical significance was again less than .05.

### ***Qualitative Survey Data***

The study used open-ended questions within the Qualtrics survey to gather responses from the participants in the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Open responses are ones in which possible answers are not provided and the respondent can use their own words to respond to the question stem (Popping, 2015). Many of these responses provided further information to closed-ended questions within the survey. Open-ended questions provide opportunities for respondents to provide additional knowledge to enhance understanding that might not otherwise be discovered (Popping, 2015). Codes were applied to these responses during the first-level coding cycle employing an In Vivo coding method (Saldaña, 2016).

The first iteration of code mapping created a simplified list of codes for each open-response question (Saldaña, 2016). The second iteration of code mapping

categorized these initial codes through a cut-and-paste method in Word to further draw out categories (Saldaña, 2016). This allowed for sorting, collecting, and further analysis of the responses (Saldaña, 2016). This process was also repeated in Excel to ensure codes and categorizations were consistent. The third iteration of code mapping condensed these categories even further. It was through these recategorizations that patterns emerged to inform and attribute meaning that developed into themes (Saldaña, 2016).

### ***AEAM-FNMI Reports***

Descriptive statistics including the mean, median, mode, standard deviation, and range were used to analyze data from the AEAM-FNMI reports. These statistics were calculated and compared to Indigenous parent engagement practices using independent sample *t* tests. Schools who did not administer PATs or diploma exams did not have AEAM-FNMI reports and were not included. Only schools who taught students in Grades 6, 9, or 12 were included in the achievement data analysis portion of the study.

### ***ADA Reports***

Schools reported individual attendance data. These totals were combined to measure descriptive statistics by schools aggregated by First Nations, Métis, and Inuit status. Descriptive statistics including the mean, median, mode, standard deviation, and range were used to analyze data from the ADA reports. These statistics were compared to Indigenous parent engagement practices using independent sample *t* tests.

**Delimitations**

The data for the study were collected from October to November 2022, and the full timeline is listed in Table 12. The data collection was limited to districts in the province of Alberta. The study used criterion-based sampling to provide a rich assortment of data. Two questions were asked in the survey to further delimit the responses. The first question asked if the Indigenous population was more than 5% of the overall student population. If respondents answered no, their survey was not included in the study. The second question asked if the principal was posted at their current position for the 2021–2022 school year. If they responded no, their responses were disqualified from the study.

**Summary**

This chapter defined the purpose and research questions of the study; the chapter explained ethical considerations, research design, and rationale; and provided details about the instruments used in the study. The chapter included a specific description of the EPIS-SSL as well as the two other instruments used in the study: ADA reports and AEAM-FNMI reports. Procedures, participants, and settings for the study were also discussed, as were data analysis techniques. An examination of the delimitations of the study were also included. The chapter concluded with a timeline of the study.

**Table 12***Timeline Used for This Study*

Date or date range	Event
July 27, 2022	IRB approval was granted
Aug 8, 2022	Research proposal presented to District A
August 17, 2022	Research proposal presented to District B
August 17, 2022	Research proposal presented to District E
August 29, 2022	District A approved the research proposal
September 12, 2022	District B approved the research proposal
September 14, 2022	Research proposal presented to District D
September 23, 2022	Research proposal presented to District C
October 3, 2022	District C approved the research proposal
October 5 to October 14, 2022	District A survey completed
October 5 to November 1, 2022	District B survey completed
October 8, 2022	District D approved the research proposal
October 10 to November 1, 2022	District C survey completed
October 12, 2022	District E approved the research proposal
October 16 to November 1, 2022	District E survey completed
October 18 to November 1, 2022	District D survey completed
October 15 to December 15, 2022	Gathering attendance and AEAM reports for schools with completed surveys
December 15, 2022, to March 1, 2023	Writing dissertation
March 1, 2023	Shared with committee for feedback
March 28, 2023	Dissertation defense
April 16, 2023	Submit revisions to dissertation

## Chapter 4: Results

This chapter summarizes the data collected during this quantitative descriptive analysis and specifically identifies and addresses the research questions guiding the study. Significant achievement and attainment gaps still exist between students who are registered at their schools as Indigenous (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) and students who are not registered as Indigenous (Alberta Education, 2022a/2022b). Finding ways to reduce these gaps is an important step in reconciliation. Research indicates that engaging parents of Indigenous students at the school level can offer the highest impact on student achievement outcomes (OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, 2017, p. 20). Describing and measuring practices schools use to engage parents of Indigenous students can be a helpful step in attempting to reduce achievement and attainment gaps for Indigenous students.

The purpose of this quantitative descriptive analysis was to describe practices schools use to engage parents of Indigenous students, principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of parent engagement practices as measured by the Engaging Parents of Indigenous Students Survey for School Leaders (EPIS-SSL), and whether these engagement practices have a relationship with previously collected Indigenous student attendance and achievement data. Parents in this study refer to parents, guardians, or kinship caregivers of Indigenous students. Engagement was defined as “parents and school staff working together to support and improve the learning, development, and health of children and adolescents” (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018, p. 1). This study is guided by the following research questions:

## Research Questions

1. What practices do schools use to engage parents of Indigenous students?
2. What barriers exist to prevent schools from engaging with parents of Indigenous students?
3. What are principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students?
4. What is the relationship between practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students and Indigenous student attendance?
5. What is the relationship between practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students and the level of acceptable PAT and diploma exam results from the AEAM-FNMI report?

Attendance data were measured through individual schools and were aggregated by the categories First Nations–Status, First Nations–Non-Status, Métis, and Inuit, which coincide with school registrations. As discussed in Chapter 1, it should be noted that the numbers for Indigenous students' self-identification are considered underreported due to ongoing trust issues between the Indigenous peoples and government institutions (Friesen & Krauth, 2012).

Achievement data for FNMI students were those reported by Alberta Education in the AEAM-FNMI report which reflected PAT or diploma exam results for FNMI students in Grades 6, 9, and 12 in June 2022. These results were reported as a percentage of students achieving excellent or acceptable results on these exams. The report also compared the achievement of students who identified as Indigenous to other students within the province who identified as Indigenous. School-specific



reports are distributed by Alberta Education to districts then forwarded to individual schools. Achievement data reports were shared with me by individual schools or through the school divisions.

The findings presented in this chapter are organized by the research questions guiding the study. To address Research Question 1 regarding practices that schools use to engage parents of Indigenous students, open and closed responses to the EPIS-SSL were examined. Question 2, which focuses on barriers to parent engagement was also analyzed through the EPIS-SSL responses. Question 3, exploring principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of their schools' practices was analyzed through the EPIS-SSL as well. Question 4, which looks at the relationship between school practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students and Indigenous student attendance was examined through comparisons of responses to the EPIS-SSL and ADA reports for FNMI students. Comparisons of EPIS-SSL results and AEAM-FNMI reports were examined to explore Research Question 5 regarding the relationship between practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students and Indigenous PAT and diploma exam results.

As reported in Chapter 3, there was a 42% useable response rate to the EPIS-SSL. Of those responses, 33% were from District A, 27% from District B, 13% from District C, 6% from District D, and 20% from District E. Table 13 provides geographic descriptions of the school districts that participated in the study and the Treaty lands in each school district.

**Table 13***School District Geography*

District	Geographic description	Territory
A	Rural	Treaty 6 and Treaty 8
B	Rural and urban	Treaty 6
C	Rural	Treaty 6
D	Rural	Treaty 6
E	Urban	Treaty 6 and Treaty 8

**Research Question 1: Practices to Engage Parents of Indigenous Students**

To respond to the first research question, participants were guided through a variety of survey questions to describe practices their school uses for engaging parents of Indigenous students. These questions included both open- and closed-ended response items outlining school practices to engage parents of Indigenous students. This section describes practices schools used to engage parents of Indigenous students, which included having an Indigenous liaison, facilitating cultural celebrations, intentional communication, and supporting educational transitions. Other practices described include inviting parents of Indigenous students to present their voices at parent council, purposeful relationship building, and offering Indigenous language programs. These practices are described in greater detail in the next section.

***Liaison Support***

To engage parents of Indigenous students, some schools have a liaison on staff. According to an Alberta occupational website, an Indigenous liaison is a person hired to “help build and maintain positive and effective relationships between people

of Indigenous (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) cultures” and organizations (Alis Alberta, 2022). Despite this general understanding that liaisons are Indigenous, some schools hire liaisons who do not self-identify as Indigenous. A Cree educational leader stressed that individuals who are not Indigenous should not hold role titles containing the terms “Indigenous” or “First Nations, Métis, or Inuit,” as terminology is very important for these roles (C. Y. Martineau, personal communication, July 12, 2022). For this reason, I use only the title “liaison ”in this section rather than “Indigenous liaison.”

Table 14 summarizes the demographics of the liaison role according to Survey Respondent (SRs). Thirty-one principals responded to a survey item about offering this role at their school. Of the 56% of schools that did have a liaison whose role was intended to liaise with Indigenous families, 12% were not Indigenous; 43% responded that they did not have a person acting as a liaison between the school, their Indigenous students, and families. Of the 17 schools who employed a liaison, 15 (88%) had employed that position in their school for 5 or more years. One school with a part-time position had the liaison position for 1 or 2 years, while another part-time position had been implemented at a different school for 3 to 4 years.

School liaisons who engage with parents of Indigenous students go by several job titles. Sixteen principals provided the job title for their liaison role. Table 15 contains descriptions of the titles of the liaison positions, the number of schools who used that title, and which school districts they were a part of.

**Table 14***Demographics of School Liaisons*

Liaison time	Number and percentage of schools		Does that person self-identify as Indigenous?	
	<i>n</i>	%	Yes	No
Full-time	9	30	7	2
Part-time	8	26	8	0
No liaison	13	43		

**Table 15***Title and Number of Liaison Roles for Schools and Districts*

Title of liaison position	Number of schools	District
First Nations, Métis Inuit coordinator	1	C
Indigenous high school graduation facilitator	1	E
Indigenous coach or Indigenous graduation coach <sup>a</sup>	4	E
Division cultural representative	1	B
Indigenous liaison <sup>b</sup> or FNMI family liaison	2	A, C
Indigenous coordinator <sup>a</sup>	1	E
Education for reconciliation liaison	1	C
School community liaison worker	1	C
Indigenous instructor	2	E
Cree instructor/FNMI liaison	1	B
Cree language instructor <sup>c</sup>	1	B
Family liaison with First Nations parents	1	B

*Note.* Some names were changed slightly to protect the identity of the districts in the study. FNMI = First Nations, Métis, and Inuit.

<sup>a</sup> A school in District E had two liaison roles: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit graduation coach and Indigenous coordinator. <sup>b</sup> At a school in District A, the liaison also used the title Indigenous counselor. <sup>c</sup> A school in District B had two roles in the school: Cree instructor and family liaison with First Nations parents.

Some position titles were language-based, such as a District B's Cree language instructor. Some roles had broad titles, such as District B's division cultural representative. Depending on the size of the district, the cultural representative role could be part of a department focused solely on supporting Indigenous students within the district. Such departments are often referred to as Indigenous Learning Services or First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Education departments. Other roles were not necessarily exclusive to the Indigenous culture; instead, they were designed to support all learners, such as District C's school community liaison worker. Although the title of this role may sound more generalized, District C described the position as similar to other liaison roles with a focus on Indigenous culture. Despite variations of role names, the responsibilities of Indigenous liaisons all included school responsibilities, student responsibilities, and family and community responsibilities.

Liaisons had several responsibilities to the schools. Eleven principals described the duties of these liaisons in detail. Six principals from Districts B, C, D, and E agreed that an important part of school responsibilities was promoting Indigenous culture to staff and students. One principal from District E stated that one of the tasks of the liaison was to "provide opportunities for all students to learn about various aspects of Indigenous life and heritage by bringing in cultural consultants to teach the students" (SR 10).

Beyond promoting Indigenous culture to students, liaisons also had specific teaching responsibilities. One school from District D reported their liaisons taught core courses, such as career and life management or physical education. Two other schools from Districts D and E said their liaisons were responsible for teaching

cultural options classes like Indigenous wellness or Aboriginal studies, courses designed to teach students more about FNMI culture and healthy strategies (see more specific descriptions of these courses in the Indigenous Languages section). Principals of four schools from Districts B, D, and E spoke of using their liaisons to teach language programs such as Cree to their students. One principal from District B explained that through these programs, students not only learned about Indigenous languages, but they also learned about Cree cultural knowledge. The person in the liaison role was also responsible for selecting and screening culturally relevant materials for the whole school, according to a principal in District D.

Another school responsibility of the liaisons was supporting cultural programs and events. According to a principal from District B, the liaison was not only responsible for assisting with the planning of school-wide cultural events, but they were also responsible for liaising with the division's Indigenous Services department to help plan division cultural events. A principal in District D stated that their liaison was a committed member of the group planning Indigenous graduation ceremonies.

School liaisons also had a wide variety of responsibilities to the students, which could include academic, well-being, graduation, and postsecondary support. Four schools from Districts A, D, and E described the liaisons' role in supporting Indigenous student academics. The principal from a school in District A stated that their liaison provided access to tutoring. A different principal from District D said their liaison provided homework support. One principal from District E described their liaison providing both academic and literacy support to Indigenous students.

Liaisons provided students with academic supports to improve their chances of

successfully completing courses. Two schools from District E reported having physical spaces available for Indigenous students to learn or catch up on their schoolwork. These rooms were described by the principals as being run by school liaisons and providing quiet spaces for students to connect and receive academic support. Two principals from Districts D and E reported the school liaisons offered programs for homework support and tutoring for Indigenous students. These programs consisted of after-hours homework help on weekdays to support Indigenous student success. Liaisons also provided practical support to help students attain high school completion by ensuring students got to class on time and monitoring absences, according to two principals in District A. Similarly, a principal from District B reported that their liaison reached out to parents when students were struggling in school or if they had not attended for 3 or more days.

Liaisons also took on active roles in encouraging students to graduate. According to a principal in District D, the liaison did what they could to ensure students stayed in school (or returned to school). A different principal in District D stated their liaison “monitors progress of Indigenous students towards graduation and meets with students annually to review their progress” (SR 21).

Liaisons focused beyond high school to help students with postsecondary planning and career planning. Two principals from Districts D and E described how their liaisons not only provided opportunities for students to visit postsecondary sites, such as the University of Alberta, but these liaisons also provided students with support completing postsecondary applications.

Beyond achievement and attainment supports, the liaisons also supported

Indigenous students' well-being. Two principals from Districts A and E reported their liaisons were responsible for the physical needs of students, such as making sure they had something to eat and running food programs.

One of the principals in the study described the liaison's role as one that provides "direct social, emotional, mental, academic, spiritual, and psychological support for all Indigenous students" (SR 9). According to three principals from District E, liaisons connected students to well-being supports, such as counselling. One principal from District D reported that the liaison was expected to connect or check in regularly with students regarding personal issues.

According to a principal in District D, liaisons also coordinated specialized supports, such as psychologists, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists and other professionals, as needed. Beyond providing access to these supports, one principal from District A shared that liaisons were also responsible for obtaining consent forms for referrals for educational assessments, occupational therapists, speech-language pathologists, deaf and hard of hearing consultants, blind and low vision consultants, and mental health professionals as needed.

Beyond school and student responsibilities, liaisons also supported students by developing family and community partnerships. The liaison was often the first contact with the Nations, either through the Chief, according to one principal in District B, or the Elder. Elders are respected members of Indigenous communities. One school from District B described how their liaison did home visits with Indigenous families to help build relationships. Six schools in Districts A, B, C, D, and E, discussed the liaisons' role in encouraging family involvement in the education of their children. One school



in District D reported families texting directly with the liaisons. That school said that First Nations families living on the reserve needed more communication and relationship building from the liaison.

Liaisons often sought ways to welcome families into the school through personal invitations to upcoming events. Three schools from Districts A and B reported their liaisons reaching out to invite parents to informal evenings that were designed to build relationships with families of Indigenous students.

### ***Cultural Celebrations***

Celebrations offer an opportunity for schools to reach out and invite parents of Indigenous students into their buildings. Nine schools (38%) indicated that they purposefully invited parents of Indigenous students to take part in cultural celebrations, including Orange Shirt Day (now known as the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation), Bear Witness Day, National Indigenous Peoples Day, Pipe Ceremonies, Smudging, Round Dances, and other Indigenous cultural activities. (See Appendix F for a description of these activities). Other times, parents were invited to showcase traditional practices such as hoop dancing (see Appendix F).

One school reported transporting their students to other schools or divisions to take part in Powwows (see Appendix F). Of the 24 principals that answered the related survey question, 18 (75%) said their schools offered events to specifically invite parents of Indigenous students, such as parent engagement evenings or cultural events. Five of these schools reported offering foods—an important element in attracting families into the building—such as tea and bannock, feasts, stew and bannock, or traditional foods. One school also reported offering afternoon coffee (see

Appendix F).

One principal described a very successful event that started with a stew and bannock family night. The students gave their parents tours around the school. The students organized a bingo with prizes such as turkeys and hams donated by a local store. Staff members brought their own children; the principal described this event as a “terrific success.”

Another principal described a successful event involving a round dance celebration. In an attempt to get the whole family involved, the respondent said it was successful to “provide all students the experience of a round dance and the teachings about it. This is followed by an evening feast and community round dance” (SR 1). Although many schools reported that these festivities did not occur last year due to COVID-19, they anticipated the return of these events for the 2022–2023 school year. Community dinners, feasts, and family fun nights all offered opportunities for schools to merge with the community. One school reported offering parent awards during ceremonies where they offer particular parents appreciation through certificates and acknowledgement. Celebrations were a common activity that schools used to invite parents into the building.

### ***Communication***

Principals were asked what their primary method was for communicating with parents of Indigenous students at their schools and 28 participants responded. Table 16 outlines the primary methods schools used to communicate with parents of Indigenous students. After reporting their primary form of communication with parents of Indigenous students, principals were asked to provide more information on

their responses and 21 principals provided more information. Five principals from Districts A, C, and E reported that there was no one-size-fits-all solution to communication; rather, it was specific to the families, and one of the roles of the school was to determine which means of communication parents preferred. One principal from District E stated, “It is important to establish individual family preferences with respect to how [families] want to communicate with the school” (SR 7). Some of the responses appeared specific to parents of Indigenous students, whereas others related to all students. A different principal from District A reported “Our Indigenous families are treated like any other family until they reach out for support” (SR 14).

Communication with parents of Indigenous students can be complex. A principal from District A explained that parents of Indigenous students were very engaged in their children’s education and had a great relationship with the school, saying, “These families have chosen to leave the reserve for a reason and have not had issues with the school system” (SR 12). This principal stated that the school has an open-door policy and makes itself available to parents. The themes identified from the responses were phone calls, text messages, face-to-face communication, and technology-based communication.

**Table 16***Primary Form of Communication With Parents of Indigenous Students*

Type	Frequency	Percentage
Phone calls	11	39
Text messaging	9	32
Emails	3	11
Face-to-face	2	7
School website	1	4
Facebook <sup>a</sup>	1	4
Seesaw <sup>b</sup>	1	4

<sup>a</sup> Facebook is an online social networking site where parents can connect directly to the school's page to find information about the school and upcoming events. <sup>b</sup> Seesaw is a software program that can send emails and text messages to parents, and it also supports sharing of photos, videos, and links.

**Phone Calls.** When examining both primary and other methods of communication, phone calls were used most often to engage parents of Indigenous students. Eleven schools (39%) indicated they use phoning as the primary method of communicating with parents of Indigenous students. One principal reported that they were unsure which methods were best for communicating with parents of Indigenous students, but “at-risk kids need phone calls” (SR 9). Two different respondents from District B reported that phone calls were the best method when dealing with student concerns. Another principal reported that child-specific information should be communicated either by phone call or face-to-face. Two schools reported that they used phone calls to communicate attendance data with parents. Another principal

stated that their school reached out by phone to any students who were absent for 3 or more days. Another principal from District B responded that they use “phone calls as much as possible” (SR 22).

However, sometimes phoning was not a simple solution. One respondent in District E pointed out “We try through all possible means, but the most effective method seems to be calling and calling until someone finally picks up or by catching them in the parking lot when they are dropping their children off” (SR 8). One principal from District D said the challenge of phoning was lack of service or numbers no longer being in service. In those cases, the schools used other means to contact parents, such as calling them at work or contacting family members or neighbours.

Phone calls can also be used quite positively. Five principals from Districts A and B reported that they used phone calls to invite parents to events, such as open houses, parent–teacher interviews, or other school events. A different principal from District B reported using the phone to check in on families and show that they care.

**Text Messaging.** One method that came up consistently through this research was schools texting with Indigenous families. Nine schools (32%) indicated that they use texting as their primary form of communication with parents of Indigenous students. I reached out to one of the staff members of a school in District B to find out more about this practice. In a phone interview, the respondent, an Educational Assistant, spoke of her success texting Indigenous parents ([Name redacted for anonymity], personal communication, October 22, 2022). She noticed that many of the Indigenous parents in her school district would not answer their phones. She said that many of the parents did not have landlines, but they did have cell phones. As

many of these parents were from rural communities, there was often no phone service, so parents would not often receive calls. When the schools left messages, the parents often did not return the calls because they were either working during school hours, or they did not want to pay for the minutes. She also reported that many Indigenous parents did not like talking on the phone as it can be time-consuming.

The educational assistant from District B asked her district's permission to use her personal phone to contact Indigenous parents. She initially did so to reach out about upcoming parent-teacher interviews. She linked this practice with attaining an 85% attendance rate for these particular interviews. Although she experimented informally, she noticed that when she did not reach out by text, the parent participation rate dropped off significantly. She instilled texting into her regular practice and continued to be successful in reaching parents of Indigenous students this way. She also noted that parents can input text invitations directly into their calendars, to serve as reminders of upcoming events. The education assistant reported that parents reached out regularly through this medium. She has referred parents to counsellors or administration based on text messages she has received.

Sometimes texting is not about the technology but the person texting. One SR from District E put it this way, "We send out emails and newsletters and post information to the school website as well as create opportunities for face-to-face conversations, but a text from someone with whom they feel connected seems to be the best way to initiate or continue a conversation with our Indigenous parents" (SR 5). A different respondent from District A said "We use all methods but find the parents are more likely to get information and respond if they text with our Indigenous

Liaison specifically. She has worked in the school a long time; families know her and trust her” (SR 15). One school from District B reported using texting as their main method of communication regarding absences. Another school from District B reported using texting for attendance as well.

**Face-to-Face.** Two schools (7%), one from District C and one from District D, reported using face-to-face interactions as their primary means of communicating with parents of Indigenous students. Four schools, from Districts A, B, and C, reported using face-to-face methods regularly, although they did not consider face-to-face communication as their primary means of communicating with parents of Indigenous students. One principal from District A reported that it was beneficial to find parents in the parking lot at the end of the day to have an opportunity to talk with them.

**Technology.** As well as phone calls, texting, and face-to face communication, three schools (11%), one from District E and two from District A, reported using email as their primary method of communicating with parents of Indigenous students. One respondent in District C indicated they primarily communicated through their website, but they also used email, phone calls, and face-to-face communication. Seven other respondents (25%) from Districts A, C, and E reported using email to communicate regularly with parents, but they did not indicate this as their primary method of communication.

Other technologies used to communicate with parents of Indigenous students were apps like Seesaw or Facebook. The SR from District A who said Seesaw was the primary form of communication with parents reported that this was not specifically for parents of Indigenous students, but for all parents. They also mentioned that apps

like Seesaw have the ability to send emails and text style messages to phones. This was also reported by a different SR from District A who reported Facebook as their primary form of engaging parents of Indigenous students. Two schools, from Districts C and E, responded that they communicated through monthly newsletters with families, and one principal from District A reported communicating through weekly updates and sending out quarterly newsletters. A SR from District C pointed out the complexities of communicating through technology with parents of Indigenous students: “This is probably the biggest struggle. Most of our communication is using technology. For some Indigenous families, this causes a challenge. Teachers are strongly encouraged to reach out to families or reach out to our liaison to share information” (SR 4).

### ***Educational Transitions***

Educational transitions occur when a student moves from one stage to another in their educational journey (Transitions, 2016). These stages depend on the grades taught in the particular school that the student is attending. Transitions include before starting school, from pre-kindergarten to kindergarten, kindergarten to Division 1 (Grades 1–3), Division 2 (Grades 4–6), Division 3 (Grades 7–12), Division 4 (Grades 10–12), and transitions into university or postsecondary programs. Students or parents of students in a Grade 1 to 4 school might consider a move to Grade 5 as a big transition. Within this section the *next school* refers to the school or grade the students were transitioning into and *previous school* refers to the school or grade the students were transitioning out of. Educational transitions provide another opportunity to reach out to parents of Indigenous students. Although some schools used similar transition



processes for all students, some schools specifically addressed the needs of Indigenous students and their families.

Respondents were asked in which grades they offered practices to specifically assist Indigenous families to navigate educational transitions. Principals could select more than one response. There were 51 responses representing 29 schools. Ten schools (34%) indicated they did not do anything to specifically assist Indigenous families to navigate educational transitions at the time of the survey. Frequencies and percentages of transitional supports are highlighted in Table 17.

**Table 17**

*Transition Support by Category*

Transition category	<i>N</i>	%
ECS (pre-K and kindergarten)	3	6
Division 1 (Grades 1–3)	1	2
Division 2 (Grades 4–6)	2	4
Division 3 (Grade 7–9)	11	22
Division 4 (Grades 10–12)	13	25
University	9	18
Other	2	4
Not supporting transitions	10	20
Total	51	101

*Note.* Pre-K = prekindergarten. Other responses consisted of one school stating that they support all grade transitions and another school stating that they support Grades 9 and 10 transitions. Due to rounding, the total equals more than 100%.

Principals were asked through an open-ended question what practices their school used to specifically assist Indigenous families in navigating educational transitions. Sixteen schools (55%) responded by describing the practices they used to ease the transition from the previous grade or school to next school or grade. Of the schools that responded, 12 schools (75%) described practices that supported all students and were not specific to Indigenous students or their parents.

According to the open-ended responses, it appeared that certain grades required a bit more support than others. Transitions from Grade 6 to Grade 7, Grade 9 to Grade 10, and Grade 12 to postsecondary or career were documented as requiring more specific interventions according to SRs. Specific support for students transitioning from Grade 9 to Grade 10, a transition from junior high to high school, was reported as requiring extra support as students quite often required extra help choosing courses. Six schools (38%) indicated they had specific supports in place for transitioning all students from Grades 9 to 10 through parent information sessions as well as school tours for the students. These supports were not specific to Indigenous students. Two of these schools from District E indicated they had special programs to help ease transition anxiety from junior high to high school. One school from District E reported offering a spring break camp at the next year's high school to build familiarity with the school. That school also offered multiple opportunities for its students to attend the Grade 10 school. Another school from District E reported offering a summer program in the next school, in this case a high school, that students were encouraged to attend. The summer program was designed to increase familiarity and prepare students for the responsibilities of high school.

According to principals, school visits were considered a good strategy for easing transition anxiety; these visits could be done as a group or individually, as required. Ten schools (63%) reported having a practice in place for all students with the next school or grade to help ease transition anxiety. These practices included building familiarity for all students through regular celebrations, tours, and open houses.

Practices specific to Indigenous students included purposeful supports to enhance future opportunities for success. One school in District A reported that they started connecting Grade 6 Indigenous students to programs and opportunities offered at the high school to start to build familiarity early on. Some schools offered extra supports when transitioning students from schools on the Nations to public schools. One school from District D reported bussing Grade 9 students from the Nations for up to three visits prior to enrollment to ensure that there was familiarity with the school before they arrived. The same school also reported sending their Grade 10 Indigenous counsellor and their graduation coach to the Nation to meet the Grade 9 students at the Nation school to help build familiarity and connection. Another strategy for easing transitions was to offer a course called “Indigenous Wellness 10” as a transition support for Indigenous students entering Grade 10, although the program was open to all students.

Program reviews and future graduation plans are also important aspects of transitioning for Indigenous students. One school from District D reported that they had annual meetings to check in on graduation progress for Indigenous students. A principal from District E reported their liaisons and other staff meet with Indigenous

students throughout their high school years to review courses and programming required for graduation. These liaisons or graduation coaches also met with the families to review student and family needs and ensure these needs were being met. According to one principal in District B, they met with Indigenous students regularly to have conversations to discuss behaviours that could potentially block graduation success. Topics like attendance were discussed at these meetings. A school from District E reported that they informed parents of Indigenous students of review opportunities, deadlines, and scholarships by newsletter.

Some schools offered Indigenous students significant support at the high school level when preparing for postsecondary education. All the responses specific to Grade 12 Indigenous students and their families included offering one-on-one coaching support with liaisons or Indigenous graduation coaches to assist with postsecondary and scholarship applications. One school from District D reported arranging virtual group information sessions with Indigenous student services representatives from postsecondary institutions. One school from District B reported having career counsellors available to help Indigenous students transition from high school to postsecondary school or the work force. One school from District E hosted lunch and learn opportunities where postsecondary institutions were invited in to present about their institution.

One school from District B reported a practice they use to connect Indigenous students with programs to ease their transition to postsecondary. They connected some of the Indigenous students to a program called Transition Year Program offered through the University of Alberta. The program was designed for Indigenous students

who might not yet be prepared to enter a faculty through the regular admissions route. This was a full-time university program designed to support Indigenous students and make it easier for them to be accepted into other programs.

### ***Parent Council***

Principals were asked if they had Indigenous representation on their parent council. Twenty-one principals responded to the survey question. Five schools (23%) indicated they have Indigenous representation on their parent council for the 2021–2022 school year. Table 18 highlights the responses.

Schools were also asked to describe the practices that they use to purposely welcome Indigenous parents or family members to parent council. Twenty-two principals responded to the open-ended question. A principal from District E reported that having parents of Indigenous students on parent councils allowed them to “provide voice and perspective on behalf of their child” (SR 6). Nine schools reported using technology, such as emails, newsletters, or social media posts to welcome parents of Indigenous students to parent council meetings in a nonintimidating way. Two schools from District B and C sent out links to allow parents to attend virtually from the comfort of their homes.

Two schools, one from District A and one from District C, stated they offered free childcare for those who attend as that has been a barrier for families being able to attend council meetings. The principal from District A also said they provided a meal for those who attend.

**Table 18***Schools With Indigenous Representation on Parent Council*

District	Yes	No	Unsure	Previously, but not in 2021–2022
A	3		3	2
B	1	4		2
C		2	1	
D		1	1	
E	1	1		
Total	5	8	5	4

Six schools from Districts A, B, and E, reported extending personal invitations to have parents of Indigenous students join the parent council. One principal from Division E explained “If you are passive about recruiting parents to roles such as parent council, then your chances of having an Indigenous parent participating coincides with the ethnic makeup of the building” (SR 6).

One school from District E reported having their staff attend feeder schools’ (a school in which students attend until they complete the grades offered at that school before attending the next school) parent council meetings to extend personal invitations to become involved when their child attended the next school the following year. This school, which had Indigenous representation on the parent council, extended invitations to parents of Indigenous students to attend school council meetings but assured them that there is no obligation to hold a position if parents do not want to.

One school ensured that parents of Indigenous students were invited both

electronically and in person to their meet the staff event in September. Many invitations described by respondents included some sort of written technology, either through newsletters, emails, or website information. Some schools used a Remind telephone app to send out text-like messages. One school from District A sent out summaries of information being discussed to allow parents to decide if they were interested in attending.

### ***Relationship Building***

Reconciliation was defined by the TRC (2015a) as “an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships” (p. 16). One principal described it this way: “I have found that engaging parents of Indigenous students is not something that can be done passively. If we are looking for Indigenous parent representation in the school, then personal relationships seem to be extremely important in engaging members of the community” (SR 6).

Finding unique opportunities to build positive relationships with parents of Indigenous students can contribute to creating a more welcoming environment. One school from District C reported doing this indirectly by having posters of Indigenous teachings, such as the seven sacred teachings (also known as the teachings of the seven grandfathers) visible in schools. These teachings reflect on conduct towards others, including elements of wisdom, love, respect, bravery, humility, and truth (Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortium, n.d.). A different principal from District A stated, “the incorporation of the seven sacred teachings is helpful in connecting the students more to the schooling, which in turn helps the parents” (SR 19).

Many schools offered family nights or parent evenings as an unstructured way to welcome parents of Indigenous students. One principal from District B claimed tours and informal meet-and-greets could “increase [parents’] comfort levels surrounding the school” (SR 28). One school from District A sought opportunities to bring parents or elders into the classrooms to share their stories and knowledge.

Showing care is another way to engage parents of Indigenous students and build relationships. One respondent from District B reported reaching out by phone to check in on Indigenous families who lived on the Nation when bad roads prevented water from being delivered. The school offered to wash clothing or provide showers for students if needed. These examples indicate there is not just one strategy needed to engage parents of Indigenous students; rather, it requires a long-term commitment to building better relationships.

### ***Indigenous Languages***

Four schools from Districts B, C, and E stated they offered language programs as a way to engage parents of Indigenous students. Of the 30 principals that responded to the survey, 26 said that they did not offer these types of programs. Two schools from Districts B and E (7%) offered Cree language programs for the 2021–2022 school year. These courses are designed to build an understanding of Cree language for students in Grades 10, 11, and 12. One of those schools also offered Indigenous Studies 10, 20, and 30. Both the Cree language program and Indigenous studies are credit courses for Grades 10, 11, and 12 and are designed to teach all students about Indigenous culture in Alberta, Canada, and around the world (Alberta Education, 2023). Cree language programs are often combined with Cree culture programs. These



were the programs discussed in the survey, but there are other programs available in the province.

Two schools (7%) from Districts C and E had offered family language programs in the past but were not able to in the 2021–2022 school year. The school from District E reported that they were not able to offer language programs for the 2021–2022 school year because of COVID-19 protocols limiting access to the building. The school from District C said they were not able to offer their language programs for the 2021–2022 school year because they were not able to hire staff qualified to teach these languages.

### **Research Question 2: Barriers to Engaging Parents of Indigenous Students**

To respond to this research question, participants were guided through survey questions to describe potential barriers to engaging with parents of Indigenous students. These questions required both open-ended and close-ended responses. The following barriers were identified from the data: communication and technological barriers, staff limitations, negative school experiences, practical barriers, and bureaucratic barriers.

#### ***Communication and Technological Barriers***

One of the most significant barriers to engaging with parents of Indigenous students reported by principals was communication and technological barriers. Twenty-two principals responded to this survey question. Eleven schools from Districts A, B, D, and E reported communication and technology as barriers to engaging parents of Indigenous students. Principals from five schools from Districts A, B, D, and E spoke of the lack of timely communication between schools and

families as a barrier to parent engagement. Reasons for this lack of timeliness were often due to elements beyond family or school control. Poor phone and internet service were contributing factors to this barrier. One principal from District B reported “For many of our families, their cell phones are only accessible when they have minutes” (SR 27). Beyond the barrier of poor phone and internet service and access to data minutes, one principal from District B reported “sometimes contact numbers do not work, and that makes it hard to engage and contact parents” (SR 23). Two principals, one from District B and another from District E, also pointed out that it was difficult to get documentation from parents of Indigenous students returned in a timely manner.

Technology also posed a major obstacle to engaging with parents of Indigenous students. One principal from District C described how technology impeded communication with some parents of Indigenous students: “Most of our communication is using technology. For some Indigenous families, this causes quite a challenge” (SR 5). A different principal from District E discussed how technologies such as student verification, attendance reporting, student reporting, and other programs that are not compatible with cell phone technology acted as barriers to engaging parents of Indigenous students. One respondent from District D pointed out that it was not only the lack of technology that acted as a barrier but technological knowledge as well. A principal from District C stated, “For some families, grandparents are raising their grandchildren, so enrolling is done online. This can be challenging due to the lack of understanding with technology” (SR 5). Another principal from District E confirmed that “documents for the Ministry of Education are

not easily accessible for Indigenous families” (SR 7). A different principal from District B stated that online registration is challenging for families because of inconsistent internet access. This was echoed by another participant from District B who pointed out that their district switched to online registrations this year, but many of their families could not access them.

Report cards also posed a barrier for communication if schools used only online reporting methods. Principals were asked if they offered other forms of academic student reporting (report cards) than online methods. Of the 28 responses received, 21 schools (75%) offered only online academic reporting. Six schools from Districts A, B, and E reported they offered paper report cards as well. Three of these schools sent out both paper and online report cards, while two schools from Districts A and E provided a paper copy if requested; however, the school in District A printed off all their end-of-year report cards and sent them to all parents. One other school in District E gave a monthly debrief to their families which “includes an update on academic progress and attendance concerns (if applicable)” (SR 7).

### ***Staff Limitations***

Some principals reported that staff could also be barriers to parent engagement. Two principals from District C reported that lack of knowledge and experience hindered staffs’ ability to engage parents of Indigenous students. One principal from District E stated traditional staff perspectives could pose a barrier to engaging parents of Indigenous families. This principal reported that some of their faculty felt that all children should be supported the same way, which the principal described as problematic as it is “impossible to have a black or white perspective on

how one should treat students” (SR 7).

Five SRs (20%), two from District A, two from District B, and one from District D indicated that their schools did not make any attempts to specifically engage with parents of Indigenous students. One principal from District B reported “We do not interact with Indigenous parents any differently than non-Indigenous parents” (SR 24). Another principal concurred: “[We use] the same practices to engage all parents. I wouldn’t say there’s a particular practice specifically to foster Indigenous parent engagement.”

Two principals from District A reported that the centralization of Indigenous services in their school division has hindered the schools’ opportunities to understand how to support students. One principal from District A explained “if attendance is poor, we communicate to parents, but if they can’t help their child improve, we report to our central office person... Schools are never privy to those conversations, so we do not know what happens” (SR 15).

### *Negative School Experiences*

Having prior negative school experiences impacted schools’ abilities to engage parents of Indigenous students. The legacy of residential schools continued to be a barrier between parents of Indigenous students and schools. Five principals (24%) from Districts A, C, D and E spoke to the theme of negative school experiences continuing to affect relationships with parents of Indigenous students. One principal from District C stated “The past continues to cause families to not want to be engaged. We continue to work towards reconciliation, so families can see, feel, and hear that we are wanting them to be part of our school” (SR 5). Mistrust continued to

be a by-product of negative school experiences. One principal from District A spoke about many parents of Indigenous students trusting only the liaison at schools. A different principal from District D stated if parents had negative school experiences as a student, it continued to “influence their views on their child’s education” (SR 21). One principal from District E spoke of the struggle that Indigenous families had to trust administration; this principal described the importance of hiring and training Indigenous staff to help build trust. Another principal from District A spoke of how many parents of Indigenous students trusted only the liaison at school.

### ***Practical Barriers***

Practical barriers impeded engagement with parents of Indigenous students. Four principals (19%) reported practical concerns as barriers to engaging with parents of Indigenous students. These included transportation and childcare barriers. One principal from District B stated that the distance between the school and the Nations was significant, so finding transportation to the school was a barrier to engagement. One principal from District A pointed out that transportation was a barrier when families were in a state of financial hardship. A different principal from District A reported “Often parents do not have a vehicle to come to town” (SR 19). Another respondent from District C reported that finding childcare was a barrier for parents of Indigenous students. To overcome this challenge, the school offered on-site childcare to encourage parents to attend events.

### ***Bureaucratic Barriers***

Bureaucratic barriers are “rigid bureaucratic structures that require the person to fit the structure rather than vice-versa” (Campbell & Lupton, 2000). Another

significant barrier to engaging parents of Indigenous students was schools' recognition of the legal parent or guardian status of the child.

Nonrecognition of the guardian status of students living with friends or family had significant impacts on the school-family relationships. The restrictions of the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (2000) limit what information can be shared with people who are not legal guardians of a child. One principal from District E stated, "the restrictions of FOIP [Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act] and communication, as well as guardian signing authority for activities such as field trips (which is often still done on paper), is an additional barrier if the student is not living with their guardian" (SR 6). In many cases, this not only restricted permissions for activities such as field trips, it also hindered school registration and access to specialized services.

Nine principals (41%) from Districts A, B, C, D, and E across all divisions spoke of the challenge of registering Indigenous students when the students were not living with their legal guardian. One principal from District B stated, "Often students live with a guardian that is not their biological parent. It might be a relative, and there are often no legal guardianship papers to provide" (SR 23). Another principal explained the "legal guardian is not always the one registering; we need official custody documents. If we need additional consent for counselling, etc., we need the legal guardian to sign even if the student lives with the *kohkom* etc." (SR 19). Another respondent from District E pointed out that even if a student is living with their *kohkom*, that adult was unable to sign consent forms as they needed to be signed by a legal guardian. This participant reported that sometimes the parents did not even live

in the city in which their children attended school.

One school in District C reported that many of “their children are in care so registration can be more difficult” (SR 4). Having a child *in care* refers to temporary living arrangements for a child through either foster care or kinship care (Alberta Government, 2023). Many Indigenous students live with unofficial guardians, such as aunts, *kohkoms* (associated with the Cree term for grandmother), grandparents, or friends. During the study, I contacted a Cree acquaintance to better understand some of the social implications of kinship care. In a conversation with C. Martineau (personal communication, July 12, 2022), an Indigenous grandmother who opens her home regularly to her grandchildren, Martineau discussed the challenge of school registration as well as the humiliation of the government’s interpretation of the term kinship care and the deficit thinking that accompanies it. She reported what was considered normal in her culture was not accepted by school districts and caused tremendous challenges when attempting to navigate the public education system.

One principal from District A explained “There seems to be a constant state of flux in many of our Indigenous households as to who is looking after [the students] at any given time and who is currently residing in the home” (SR 16). Another principal from District B stated when students move from school to school, it could limit the continuity of the child’s education.

### **Research Question 3: Principals’ Perceptions of Effectiveness of Practices**

Principals were asked to reflect on their perceptions of the effectiveness of the practices they use to engage parents of Indigenous students. Twenty-one principals (78%) described which practices they felt were most engaging. Six principals did not

comment on their practices. The most effective practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students included facilitating cultural celebrations and informal events, having school liaisons, incorporating cell phone communication, facilitating meetings with families, and offering registration support.

Facilitating cultural celebrations and informal events was deemed a very effective practice for engaging with parents of Indigenous students. This included events like parent engagement evenings, school activities, tours, and fun cultural celebrations. Eight principals (38%) from Districts, A, B, D, and E reported these events as being the most effective for engaging parents of Indigenous students. One principal from District E claimed that parent engagement evenings are “crucial to establishing working relationships with our Indigenous families” (SR 7). A participant from District B stated that their school hosted informal meet-and-greet events, school activities, and other school events. This principal pointed out “These have been very effective as the formal setting of a school can be intimidating for our Indigenous parents. Hosting informal events increases the comfort levels of the parents and allows them to feel more comfortable when a teacher reaches out to them regarding their child” (SR 28).

Another principal from District E claimed that events that pulled parents into the school, like parent engagement evenings and tours of the facilities, were very effective. This idea was echoed by a respondent from District E who suggested events like concerts or demonstrations of learning could help build relationships with parents of Indigenous students. A different principal from District E stated that parent engagement evenings could “help our Indigenous families feel welcome, respected,



and valued” (SR 9). Offering fun celebrations or cultural events was another effective way to welcome parents of Indigenous students into the schools. One administrator from District D suggested that the most effective strategy for engaging parents of Indigenous students was fun events that involved a meal. This principal described events like round dances, community dinners, feasts, and family fun nights as effective practice because they offered the best turnouts. A different administrator from District D described a stew and bannock night with bingo as a “Terrific success” (SR 21). However, one respondent from District C claimed that events like cultural days did not engage parents of Indigenous students very much.

Four principals (19%) from Districts A, B, D, and E considered having liaisons as an effective practice for engaging parents of Indigenous students. One principal from District D described having the liaison go into classrooms to teach. When asked about the effectiveness of this strategy, the principal reported “It works!” (SR 5). The principal went on to describe a child seeing the liaison in a grocery store and excitedly identifying the liaison as the one who taught about residential schools. Another principal from District E spoke of the liaison role and how the liaison was constantly in contact with parents of Indigenous students. The principal claimed that this role offered “excellent rapport and improved the connection between home and school” (SR 11). Another respondent from District B reported an effective strategy was to have liaisons accessible to parents and having them reach out to parents when students were struggling in school or absent for 3 or more days. The liaison at this school was also available for home visits. The principal claimed, “Our school liaisons have been a great asset in increasing our Indigenous parent engagement” (SR 28). One principal

from District A reported that “parents are more likely to get info and respond if they text with our Indigenous Liaison [as the families trust her]” (SR 15).

Another practices that was deemed as effective included allowing parents to communicate with their cell phones as “email and other school communication tools are largely ineffective for our families” according to SR 21 from District D. Four principals (19%) from Districts A, D, and E spoke of the effectiveness of texting with parents as a form of communication. One principal from District E reported that many parents preferred to text with the liaison at the school as they had a caring relationship with them. Another principal from District E stated that many of their students’ families text with the liaison regularly and this practice “Improve[s] the connection between home and school” (SR 11). Another principal from District A claimed that families of Indigenous students are more likely to respond by text.

Another practice deemed effective was having meetings at the beginning of the school year to meet with Indigenous students and their family members “to encourage their attendance and participation,” according to a principal in District B (SR 27). This principal reported, “these intake meetings are a must for us, and they work great!” (SR 27). One principal from District A suggested meetings with families offered opportunities to “review student and family needs and ensure these are met” (SR34).

Finally, offering one-to-one registration support for parents that need it was considered an extremely effective strategy according to a principal in District D. This principal reported that “families transitioning from small communities to large school settings ... require one-on-one supports to ease the transition” (SR 7). Another principal from District A reported that their secretaries offer one-on-one registration

support. This principal stated that registration support was “terrific support for those families who need it” (SR 21).

The above were the most effective practices according to principals. Other practices were reported as well, although their effectiveness was often conflicted. One participant from District A reported the teaching of the seven sacred teachings was effective because “it helps connect the students more to the schools, which in turn helps with the parents” (SR 19). However, another participant from District C commented that posters including the seven sacred teachings had not really engaged parents. One principal from District A reported that teachers reaching out to families through email and phone conversations was effective as some parents were open to this communication. However, a different principal from District D stated that emails other school communication tools were fairly ineffective with Indigenous families.

Principals were asked to rate their school at engaging parent of Indigenous students. They could select a rating between *very poor* and *excellent* and 27 principals responded. Table 19 shows the distribution of the responses.

**Table 19**

*Principals’ Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Engaging Parents of Indigenous Students*

	Very poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very good	Excellent
<i>n</i>	1	3	10	7	5	1
%	4	11	37	26	19	4

Of the responses, 14 principals (52%) perceived their school's effectiveness at engaging parents of Indigenous students as either very poor, poor, or fair. Thirteen principals rated their school's effectiveness at engaging parents of Indigenous students as either good, very good, or excellent.

These responses were analyzed to see if there was a relationship between principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of their engagement practices and student attendance and achievement. Table 20 displays the means and standard deviations for Indigenous students' ADA at schools whose principals perceived their school's effectiveness at engaging parents of Indigenous students as very poor, poor, and fair as well as schools whose principals perceived their school's effectiveness at engaging parents of Indigenous student as good, very good, and excellent. An independent samples *t* test revealed no significant difference in Indigenous student daily attendance rates for the two groups ( $p > .05$ ). Interpretation of results should be cautioned as data were limited to 25 responses.

**Table 20**

*Means and Standard Deviations of Attendance and Achievement Based on Principals' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Engaging Parents of Indigenous Students*

Measure	Schools that rate themselves as very poor, poor, or fair			Schools that rate themselves as good, very good, or excellent		
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Average daily attendance	13	60.62	27.84	12	64.50	22.88
Provincial achievement	9	59.89	22.91	9	46.82	21.64

Table 20 displays a similar comparison of the means and standard deviations for students who achieved an acceptable level or higher on their PATs or diploma exam results as reported in the AEAM-FNMI and for principals that perceived their school's effectiveness at engaging parents of Indigenous students as very poor, poor, or fair and principals that perceived their school's effectiveness at engaging parents of Indigenous students as good, very good, or excellent. An independent samples *t* test revealed no statistically significant difference in means and standard deviations for students who achieved an acceptable level or higher on their AEAM results for the two groups ( $p > .05$ ). Interpretation of results should be cautioned as data were limited to 18 responses.

#### **Research Question 4: Relationship Between Practices and Attendance**

This study sought to examine the relationship between practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students and ADA from the 2021–2022 school year. Twenty-six schools reported attendance data. Table 21 describes the ADA report information for each district.

When I first began analyzing attendance data, I noticed that one of the school districts (District B) had significantly lower average attendance rates than the other school districts. I asked the district's data analyst if there was an error in our ADA calculations, and they assured me there was not. I then reached out to the district's superintendent, who also assured me the data was correct. The superintendent then put me in contact with one of the principals from District B to discuss the complexities of attendance in their district. It was through these conversations that I was able to understand more of the challenges affecting attendance at some schools.

**Table 21***Means and Standard Deviations of Average Daily Attendance by School District*

School district	Schools <i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
A	8	69.63	20.42
B	7	29.82	9.13
C	3	83.82	4.36
D	2	83.75	4.10
E	6	75.88	5.43

*Note.* One school from District B did not report daily attendance. They were eliminated from the data.

The COVID-19 pandemic affected school attendance significantly during the 2021–2022 school year. The principal I spoke with reported that many in their school population were bussed directly from two Nations and said that during the 2021–2022 school year, both Nations that bussed students to her school were on high alert as they took COVID-19 risks very seriously. Any time there was an outbreak in the Nation or a large number of community members contracted COVID-19, the Nation stopped running the busses ([Name redacted for anonymity], personal communication, November 30, 2022). The principal of the school said that most of the students attending the school did not have other transportation to get to school. The principal reported this was a huge factor contributing to the poor attendance for the 2021–2022 school year. The principal also reported that the roads in the Nation were not well maintained, so when there was heavy snowfall or rainfall, the busses could not get in or out, which also impacted attendance significantly. When I inquired about bussing

contractors, the principal said that each Nation controlled the bussing of their own students to the school. The school district had its own bus drivers that picked up county students ([Name redacted for anonymity], personal communication, November 30, 2022). According to the division's systems analyst, District B had 752 students living on the Nation, so there was strong evidence that bussing was a major factor affecting Indigenous students' ADA ([Name redacted for anonymity], personal communication, December 13, 2022).

The study sought to examine the relationship between practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students and Indigenous student attendance. Attendance for districts was calculated using an ADA individual student report in PowerSchool software. This report calculated membership, which reflected the number of days a student was enrolled at the school. It also calculated attendance as the average number of days a student was recorded as present. The total days of attendance were divided into the total days of membership. All student totals were averaged out to provide an ADA per school.

The attendance reports were further aggregated by self-reported Indigenous status: First Nations–Status, First Nations–Non-Status, Métis, and Inuit. However, the report is customizable, which could cause some inconsistencies in reporting. Schools can choose to set the number of instructional days and how to take attendance. For example, most elementary schools take attendance twice a day – once in the morning and once after lunch. A student could leave at 10:00 a.m., but their attendance would reflect .5 day missed. These customizations become more complex in junior high and high schools. Some junior high schools report attendance twice a day, but others

report attendance by class. If a school has 8 periods per day in which attendance was taken, each attendance period would equal .125 per day. For high schools, attendance is recorded by class. For a school that has four blocks per day, each attendance block would count for .25.

The attendance report enables a school administrator to see the ADA of students as a percentage of the number of days a student attends divided into the number of days the student was enrolled for a specified date range or attendance period. The report relies on how the school customizes which days to count for membership and which days to take attendance. Because of these customizations, there can be minor discrepancies by district. One of the district analysts consulted in the study stated that although there were a variety of customizations in these reports, these data could be a good way of measuring attendance across districts ([Name redacted for anonymity], personal communication, December 13, 2022). The district analyst reported that he had done spot-checking to determine consistency across schools and found the data consistent.

Table 22 reports results from a one-way ANOVA to examine school attendance scores by self-reported Indigenous groups across all five school districts. The analysis of variance showed no statistically significant difference between the means of ADA rates in different groups status ( $p > .05$ ). Interpretation of results should be cautioned as data were limited to 81 student groups. A Pearson's correlation test was also performed to examine relationships between the variables of Indigenous students' ADA scores and the percentages of students achieving acceptable results on their provincial diploma exams or PATs. This relationship between the four



Indigenous student groups for ADA was not statistically significant ( $p > .05$ ).

Interpretation of results should be cautioned as data were limited to 81 student groups.

Tables 23 to 27 report ADA results reported by district and by Indigenous status.

**Table 22**

*Analysis of Variance Between Self-Reported Indigenous Groups and Student*

*Attendance*

Indigenous Student Group	<i>n</i>	Attendance <i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
First Nations–Status	26	60.27	23.11
First Nations–Non-Status	25	62.16	30.63
Métis	25	62.44	30.50
Inuit	5	70.00	28.07

**Table 23**

*Average Daily Attendance for District A by Indigenous Status*

School	FN–Status <i>n</i> (%)	FN–Non- Status <i>n</i> (%)	Métis <i>n</i> (%)	Inuit <i>n</i> (%)	Total <i>N</i> (%)
A1	18(66)	11 (72)	30 (79)	0	59 (74)
A2	10 (21)	20 (13)	21 (18)	0	51 (16)
A3	7 (77)	8 (84)	8 (86)	0	23 (79)
A4	20 (69)	9 (76)	30 (77)	3 (79)	62 (74)
A5	5 (49)	3 (89)	7 (89)	0	15 (76)
A6	14 (79)	2 (85)	21 (84)	0	37 (82)
A7	10 (81)	16 (77)	36 (81)	0	62 (80)
A8	29 (72)	5 (88)	8 (83)	0	42 (76)

*Note.* FN = First Nations. Three students from School A8 who self-reported as Métis

were eliminated from the data because they attended 0 days. The *n* represents the

number of students, and the percentage is the proportion of days they attended school.

**Table 24***Average Daily Attendance for District B by Indigenous Status*

School	FN-Status <i>n</i> (%)	FN-Non- Status <i>n</i> (%)	Métis <i>n</i> (%)	Inuit <i>n</i> (%)	Total <i>N</i> (%)
B1	14 (21)	1 (7)	18 (19)	1 (20)	34 (20)
B2	146 (30)	6 (26)	31 (18)	0	183 (28)
B3	24 (20)	0	12 (22)	0	36 (21)
B4	25 (24)	3 (13)	9 (19)	0	37 (22)
B5	77 (34)	1 (27)	5 (26)	0	83 (33)
B6	20 (48)	0	3 (15)	0	23 (44)
B7	374 (41)	4 (26)	3 (18)	0	381 (41)

*Note.* FN = First Nations. Students who attended 0 days (9 students who self-reported as First Nations–Status and 1 student who self-reported as First Nations–Non-Status) were eliminated from the data. The *n* represents the number of students, and the percentage is the proportion of days they attended school.

**Table 25***Average Daily Attendance for District C by Indigenous Status*

School	FN-Status <i>n</i> (%)	FN-Non- Status <i>n</i> (%)	Métis <i>n</i> (%)	Inuit <i>n</i> (%)	Total <i>N</i> (%)
C1	32 (80)	20 (79)	57 (78)	1 (81)	110 (78)
C2	-	-	-	-	-
C3	2 (90)	1 (88)	0	0	3 (89)
C4	12 (82)	12 (85)	22 (84)	2 (85)	48 (84)

*Note.* FN = First Nations. One school did not report attendance numbers as they do not take attendance. The *n* represents the number of students, and the percentage is the proportion of days they attended school.

**Table 26***Average Daily Attendance for District D by Indigenous Status*

School	FN-Status	FN-Non-Status	Métis <i>n</i> (%)	Inuit <i>n</i> (%)	Total <i>N</i> (%)
	<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)			
D1	10 (88)	6 (90)	16 (87)	0	32 (88)
D2	76 (74)	21 (79)	50 (88)	3 (85)	150 (80)

*Note.* FN = First Nations. The *n* represents the number of students, and the percentage is the proportion of days they attended school.

**Table 27***Average Daily Attendance for District E by Indigenous Status*

School	FN-Status <i>n</i> (%)	FN-Non-Status <i>n</i> (%)	Métis <i>n</i> (%)	Inuit <i>n</i> (%)	Total <i>N</i> (%)
E1	30 (78)	11 (85)	30 (87)	0	71 (83)
E2	41 (58)	10 (89)	44 (89)	0	85 (79)
E3	31 (58)	16 (74)	15 (71)	0	62 (65)
E4	29 (74)	3 (72)	10 (76)	0	42 (74)
E5	10 (80)	7 (65)	10 (80)	0	27 (76)
E6	34 (73)	7 (65)	17 (87)	0	58 (76)

*Note.* FN = First Nations. One student who did not attend any days was eliminated from the data for School E5. The *n* represents the number of students, and the percentage is the proportion of days they attended school.

Table 28 displays the ADA means and standard deviations aggregated by practices that some schools used to engage parents of Indigenous students. An independent samples *t* test revealed no significant difference in Indigenous student ADA rates between schools that had an Indigenous liaison and schools that did not have an Indigenous liaison ( $p > .05$ ). Interpretation of results should be cautioned as data were limited to 26 schools.

Table 28 also highlights data collected to compare Indigenous student ADA percentages for schools who offered Indigenous language programs and those who did not. An independent samples *t* test revealed no significant difference in student ADA rates for schools that offered Indigenous language programs and schools who did not ( $p > .05$ ). Interpretation of results should be cautioned as data were limited to 26 schools.

Table 28 also displays the means and standard deviations for schools that used the telephone as their primary means of engaging parents of Indigenous students and ADA for Indigenous students. An independent samples *t* test revealed no significant difference in Indigenous student attendance rates for schools that used phoning as their primary means of engaging parents of Indigenous students and those who used other means ( $p > .05$ ). Interpretation of results should be cautioned as data were limited to 25 schools.

Table 28 also displays the means and standard deviations for schools who used text messaging to engage parents of Indigenous students. An independent samples *t* test revealed no significant difference in Indigenous student attendance rates for schools who used texting as their primary means of engaging parents of Indigenous

students and those that did not ( $p > .05$ ). Interpretation of results should be cautioned as data were limited to 25 schools.

Principals were asked if their school provided support or assistance specifically to Indigenous families to help them navigate educational transitions from one grade to the next. Table 28 highlights means and standard deviations of the ADA of Indigenous students and compared schools that offered specific support for Indigenous families and those that did not. An independent  $t$  test revealed no significant difference in Indigenous student attendance rates for schools that did or did not offer transition supports for their students ( $p > .05$ ). Interpretation of results should be cautioned as data were limited to 25 schools.

Table 28 highlights means and standard deviations of schools that offered and did not offer alternative forms of student reporting than the default online method. An independent  $t$  test revealed no significant difference in Indigenous student attendance rates for the two groups ( $p > .05$ ). Interpretation of results should be cautioned as data were limited to 25 schools.

Principals were also asked if they had Indigenous representation on their parent council. Responses were compared to ADA rates for Indigenous students. An independent  $t$  test revealed no significant difference in Indigenous student attendance rates for schools that had parents or family members of Indigenous students as part of the parent council and those that did not ( $p > .05$ ). Interpretation of results should be cautioned as data were limited to 20 schools.

Principals were also asked if they purposely sought opportunities to invite parents or family members of Indigenous students to be a part of the parent council.

Responses were compared to ADA rates for Indigenous students. An independent *t* test revealed no significant difference in Indigenous student attendance rates for schools that sought out opportunities to invite parents or family members of Indigenous students to be part of the parent council and those that did not ( $p > .05$ ). Interpretation of results should be cautioned as data were limited to 25 schools.

**Table 28**

*Comparing Average Daily Attendance Means for Practices for Engaging Parents of Indigenous Students*

Practice	Yes			No		
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Liaison	16	63.31	21.62	10	62.70	30.49
Languages	2	49.00	38.18	24	64.25	24.22
Phoning	11	59.36	26.14	14	64.93	25.01
Texting	9	56.33	27.08	16	65.94	24.16
Transitions	15	63.40	25.05	10	61.10	26.53
Reporting	8	54.75	25.95	17	66.12	25.05
Council representation	5	71.60	17.24	15	53.20	27.14
Council invitation	16	64.38	24.37	9	59.11	27.57

*Note.* For the question inquiring about Indigenous representation on the parent council, five principals responded, “I’m not sure,” and those responses were not included in the analysis.

### **Research Question 5: Relationship Between Practices and Achievement**

This study sought to examine the relationship between practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students and PAT and diploma exam results from the 2021–2022 school year. It should be noted that these results may have been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Security breaches occurred during the last few days of the 2021–2022 PAT exam. According to Alberta Education, students most likely impacted by these breaches were excluded from provincial data but are still included in individual school data reports. As the researcher, I have no information about which individual school cohorts were affected by these breaches and none of the schools from whom I received data told me their school was involved in these breaches. However, caution should be used when interpreting these results.

The first analysis conducted was a correlation test between ADA and AEAM results to determine if there was a relationship between these two variables. Only schools who reported ADA and provided AEAM results that included the percentage of students who scored acceptable or higher on the PAT (for students in Grades 6 or 9) or diploma exam (Grade 12) were included in this calculation. Schools who have only students under Grade 6 do not receive an AEAM report. PATs are criterion-referenced and have a cutoff score that is adjusted slightly annually based on test difficulty, but it is usually around 50% to be considered *acceptable* (Alberta Education, 2023). Provincial diploma exam *acceptable* results refer to the percentage of students who achieve 50% or higher on their diploma exams. For schools that reported both PAT and diploma exam results, each result was treated as though it came from a separate school. For example, one school was a K–12 school and

reported Grade 6 PATs, Grade 9 PATs, and Grade 12 diploma exams. For clarity, the results were treated as three separate schools.

A Pearson's correlation test was performed to examine relationships between the variables of Indigenous students' ADA percentages and AEAM-FNMI results, consisting of the percentage of students achieving acceptable results on either their provincial diploma exams or their PATs. There was a nonsignificant correlation of .44 ( $p > .05$ ) between ADA percentages and AEAM-FNMI results. Interpretation of results should be cautioned as data were limited to 22 schools.

Table 29 displays the AEAM-FNMI results and means and standard deviations for practices that some schools used to engage parents of Indigenous students. An independent samples  $t$  test was conducted to examine the AEAM-FNMI results for schools that employed and did not employ a liaison. The results revealed a nonsignificant difference in Indigenous student AEAM-FNMI results between schools that had a liaison and schools that did not have a liaison ( $p > .05$ ). Interpretation of results should be cautioned as data were limited to 20 schools.

Data were also collected to compare AEAM-FNMI results for schools that offered Indigenous language programs and those that did not. An independent samples  $t$  test could not be run as there was only one school that reported having an Indigenous language program.

An analysis was also conducted for schools that used phones as their primary form of communication with parents of Indigenous students and AEAM-FNMI results. Table 29 displays the means and standard deviations for schools using telephones as the primary form of communication to engage parents of Indigenous



students. Schools that used phoning as their primary method of communication with parents of Indigenous students ( $M = 42.22$ ,  $SD = 18.47$ ) reported significantly lower AEAM-FNMI results than those who did not use phoning as their primary method of communication ( $M = 64.49$ ,  $SD = 21.66$ ),  $t(16) = -2.347$ ,  $p = .032$ ). Schools whose primary form of communication with parents of Indigenous students was phoning reported average AEAM results for FNMI students 22.27% lower than schools who did not use phoning as their primary form of communication. Interpretation of results should be cautioned as data were limited to 18 schools.

Table 29 also displays the means and standard deviations for schools that used text messaging to engage parents of Indigenous students and AEAM-FNMI results. Schools that used texting as their primary method of communication with parents of Indigenous students ( $M = 68.43$ ,  $SD = 19.42$ ) reported significantly higher AEAM-FNMI results than those who did not use texting as their primary method of communication ( $M = 41.30$ ,  $SD = 17.65$ ),  $t(16) = 3.10$ ,  $p = .006$ ). Schools whose primary form of communication with parents of Indigenous students was text messaging reported AEAM-FNMI exam results that were 27.13% higher on average than schools who did not use text messaging as a primary form of communication with parents. Interpretation of results should be cautioned as data were limited to 18 schools.

Principals were asked if their school provided support or assistance specifically to parents of Indigenous students to help them navigate educational transitions from one grade to the next. AEAM-FNMI results were analyzed and compared between schools that offer specific transitional support for Indigenous

families and those that do not. An independent  $t$  test revealed no significant difference in AEAM-FNMI provincial schools that do or do not offer transition supports for their students ( $p = > .05$ ). Interpretation of results should be cautioned as data were limited to 18 schools.

Principals were also asked if their school offered alternate forms of academic student reporting (report cards) for Indigenous families other than online reporting. AEAM-FNMI results were analyzed and compared between schools that offer alternate reporting practices for parents of Indigenous students and those that do not. An independent  $t$  test revealed no significant difference in Indigenous student provincial achievement scores in the two groups ( $p > .05$ ). Interpretation of results should be cautioned as data were limited to 18 schools.

Principals were also asked if they had representation from parents of Indigenous students on their parent council. Two principals from District A were unsure, and their responses were eliminated from the calculations. AEAM-FNMI results were analyzed and compared between schools that offer alternate reporting practices for parents of Indigenous students and those that do not. An independent  $t$  test revealed no significant difference in AEAM-FNMI results for schools that have representation from parents of Indigenous students on their parent council and those that do not ( $p > .05$ ). Interpretation of results should be cautioned as data were limited to 16 schools.

Principals were also asked if they purposely sought opportunities to invite parents of Indigenous students to be a part of the parent council. AEAM-FNMI results were analyzed and compared between schools that seek opportunities to invite parents

of Indigenous students to be a part of parent council and those that do not. An independent  $t$  test revealed no significant difference in school-wide Indigenous student achievement rates for schools in the two groups ( $p > .05$ ). Interpretation of results should be cautioned as data were limited to 18 schools.

**Table 29**

*Comparing Achievement Means for Practices for Engaging Parents of Indigenous Students*

	Yes			No		
	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Liaison	15	50.87	22.84	5	62.70	15.29
Languages	1	65.70	<sup>a</sup>	20	53.83	21.47
Phone	9	42.22	18.47	9	64.49	21.66
Texting	8	68.43	19.42	10	41.30	17.65
Transitions	12	52.93	23.34	6	56.01	23.31
Reporting	6	53.12	25.85	12	53.48	22.10
Council representation	4	43.45	26.63	12	55.58	20.53
Council invitation	12	54.45	22.43	6	51.17	25.04

<sup>a</sup> No standard deviation was reported for schools that offer Indigenous language programs as there was only one school within this dataset that indicated that they provide Indigenous language programs. For Indigenous representation on the parent council, two principals responded, “I’m not sure,” and those responses were not included in the analysis.

**Summary**

This chapter provided an overview and analysis of the data collected for this quantitative descriptive analysis. The chapter summarized comprehensive descriptions of practices schools use to engage parents of Indigenous students, as well as barriers that prevent or hinder the engagement of parents of Indigenous students. This chapter also examined principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of their own practices and described the results of the quantitative analysis used to examine relationships between practices schools use to engage parents of Indigenous students and attendance and achievement data. The significance of the study's findings as well as recommendations for future research are discussed in Chapter 5.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

This chapter summarizes this quantitative descriptive analysis study of practices schools use to engage parents of Indigenous students and includes a discussion of conclusions drawn from the data presented in Chapter 4. The discussion of findings is followed by a section detailing implications for the education profession and recommendations for future research studies followed by the conclusion.

### **Summary of the Study**

Chapter 1 introduced the study and presented terminology. The chapter gave an overview of Indigenous history in Canada, including persistent acts of untrustworthiness by the Canadian government (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996). The research examined the history of IRS, which the government deemed as “the most effective means of civilizing” the Indigenous population at that time (Claes & Clifton, 1998, p. 12). The chapter also followed the path of assimilation to the establishment of the TRC and the journey towards reconciliation (TRC, 2015a). Chapter 1 examined the after-effects of IRS and the implications of intergenerational trauma that continues to affect many Indigenous families. The chapter also discussed the importance of engaging parents of Indigenous students in the education of their children. The chapter described gaps in achievement and attainment data between students who register as Indigenous and students who do not. Chapter 1 introduced the purpose of the study, which was to describe practices schools use to engage parents of Indigenous students, principals’ perceptions of the effectiveness of these parent engagement practices as measured by the EPIS-SSL, and whether these engagement

practices have a relationship with previously collected Indigenous student attendance and achievement data. The significance of the study was discussed, and the measurements of student attendance and student achievement were presented. Chapter 1 concluded with a passage from TRC's Calls to Action 10 (2015b), focusing particularly on Principles i, ii, and vi, which necessitate the need to close identified educational achievement gaps between students who identify as Indigenous and those who do not, to improve education attainment levels for Indigenous students, and to enable parents of Indigenous students to fully participate in the education of their children.

Chapter 2 described theoretical and conceptual frameworks to better understand the role of all parents, including parents of Indigenous students, in the development and education of their children. Chapter 2 looked at leadership theories that are relevant lenses for examining decolonization in education. Study findings were analyzed through frameworks discussed in Chapter 2. The literature review also examined the Alberta Assurance framework, a model designed for schools and school authorities to provide educational transparency for all students as well as specific reports for Indigenous students. One of the reports from this framework is the AEAM-FNMI report, which was one of the instruments used in this study to assess Indigenous student achievement. The importance of measuring attendance was also discussed in this chapter. Topics relevant to parent engagement were examined, including both benefits and barriers to parent engagement. Chapter 2 investigated practices schools use to engage Indigenous parents and explored how engaging parents of Indigenous students could play an important part in educational reconciliation. Chapter 2

concluded with an examination of best practices for engaging parents.

Chapter 3 began by restating the purpose and research questions of the study. The chapter included a description of the ethical considerations of the study and described details, rationale, and data collection instruments for the methodology used in this quantitative descriptive analysis. The chapter described specific details about the development of the EPIS-SSL, including piloting, distribution, validity, and reliability. It also described the other two instruments used in the study: ADA and AEAM-FNMI. The chapter examined procedures used to analyze the data aggregated by district and data analysis techniques. The study's delimitations and a timeline were also included in the chapter.

Chapter 4 summarized the data collected during this quantitative descriptive analysis and specifically identified and addressed the research questions guiding the study. The research questions were

1. What practices do schools use to engage parents of Indigenous students?
2. What barriers exist to prevent schools from engaging with parents of Indigenous students?
3. What are principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students?
4. What is the relationship between practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students and Indigenous student attendance?
5. What is the relationship between practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students and the level of acceptable PAT and diploma exam results from the AEAM-FNMI report?

According to Loeb et al. (2017), quantitative, descriptive analysis is useful for identifying and describing trends within populations that have previously not been recognized. This type of analysis is particularly useful to education research as it can contribute to the body of knowledge through rich descriptions and clear communication. A quantitative descriptive analysis contains research questions that will inform on current issues that are socially relevant and can inform decision-making policies. This research design allowed for a better understanding of the phenomenon of practices schools use to engage parents of Indigenous students.

Chapter 5 provides an overview of each chapter followed by a summary of the data collection process. This is followed by a discussion of the pertinent findings of the study relative to the research questions and a summary of the pertinent findings in the study. The discussion of the findings in this chapter is organized in the same order as the research questions appeared in Chapter 4. The chapter also includes an implications section, followed by limitations of the study and recommendations for future studies.

### **Overview of Data Collection**

Data from this study was collected through the administration of a survey (EPIS-SSL) developed to identify practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students, barriers to engaging with parents of Indigenous students, and principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of these practices. The survey was designed using existing data on recognized practices derived from a review of the literature. The development of the survey used content experts and peer reviewers to strengthen the design of the instrument. The survey was distributed to principals across five school



districts in Treaty 6 and Treaty 8 territories in Alberta, Canada, which encompassed both rural and urban communities. All schools in this study had a minimum 5% Indigenous student population. The survey contained both open- and closed-ended response items to guide the study and allow for depth in responses to better understand practices schools use to engage parents of Indigenous students.

First Nations, Métis, and Inuit attendance reports were used to examine relationships between practices schools use to engage parents of Indigenous students and ADA. Achievement data were also used to analyze the relationship between these practices and First Nations, Métis, and Inuit student provincial achievement test results (AEAM-FNMI).

## **Findings**

The study answered five research questions related to school practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students. This study contained both qualitative and quantitative elements to analyze these questions. Findings of the study are organized in the same order as the research questions that appeared in Chapter 4.

### **Research Question 1: Practices to Engage Parents of Indigenous Students**

Research Question 1 examined the practices that schools use to engage parents of Indigenous students. One finding related to Research Question 1 is discussed in the section below.

#### ***Finding 1: Schools Use a Variety of Practices to Engage Parents of Indigenous Students***

Principals reported using a wide variety of practices to engage parents of Indigenous students. These practices include hiring school liaisons, facilitating

cultural celebrations, initiating regular communication, and offering transitional supports. Participants also described encouraging parent council participation, purposeful relationship building, and offering Indigenous language programs. A brief discussion of each of these practices follows.

As defined in Chapter 4, an Indigenous liaison is a person hired to “help build and maintain positive and effective relationships between people of Indigenous (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) cultures” and organizations (Alis Alberta, 2022). Within schools, the liaisons’ roles included school responsibilities, student responsibilities, and family and community responsibilities. Fifty-five per cent of the principals who responded to a survey question describing the role of the liaison reported that an important part of the liaison’s job was to promote Indigenous culture to staff and students.

Of the principals surveyed, 56% reported that they employ a person acting as a liaison between the school, Indigenous students, and their families; 88% of principals who employed liaisons reported that these positions were filled by staff who self-identified as Indigenous. Thirty percent of schools employed a full-time liaison; and 78% of those reported that their full-time liaisons identify as Indigenous.

The importance of the role of the liaison is intertwined with an understanding of the implications of intergenerational trauma and its effects on open communication between schools and parents of Indigenous students. Chapter 1 discussed the history of IRS and the suppression of parent voices for generations (TRC, 2015a). Indigenous parents’ viewpoints have traditionally been disregarded, and there were often retributions to those speaking up. These inhibitions persevered through generations

and still exist today. The complexity of engaging parents of Indigenous students needs to be rooted in an understanding of systemic mistrust (Education Connections, 2017; R. A. Malatest and Associates, 2002; Milne, 2016; Moses, 2013).

Some parents in Milne's (2020) study reported getting "shot down" when approaching educators with concerns (p. 3). Many parents of Indigenous students expressed difficulty communicating openly with educators (Milne, 2016, 2020; Milne & Wotherspoon, 2023; Wotherspoon & Milne, 2021). Having a liaison to work with Indigenous students and families is unique to Indigenous people and reflects the inequity and power dynamics that persist between schools and parents of Indigenous students. Khalifa et al.'s (2019) IDSL framework suggested that colonized practices are so embedded in educational structures that unless leaders knowingly seek out processes to reduce historical oppression, colonization practices will persevere. Khalifa et al. (2019) suggested using practices that are accepted by Indigenous people to engage school and community. Almost all parents and students in Milne's (2020) study supported having an Indigenous liaison working in their school to allow for meaningful connections to grow between the school and community. In the same study, parents of Indigenous students also supported this position because it provided a "mediator role" (p. 5) within the school.

Some of the liaison's duties described in the study included specifically supporting Indigenous students to be successful in school while guiding them towards graduation and postsecondary opportunities. Duties of the liaison can include reporting attendance concerns, after-hours homework help, and advocating for students' needs. Liaisons can also help students and families navigate how to

transition to postsecondary education, including providing meetings with postsecondary institutions and helping families and students complete required documentation. According to Khalifa et al. (2016), a CRSL must maintain high academic expectations for students while advocating for student needs, which in turn opens up opportunities for minoritized students.

Facilitating cultural celebrations and informal events were described as a good opportunity for schools to reach out and invite parents of Indigenous students into the building. Seventy-five percent of principals reported that they offered these events to welcome parents of Indigenous students into the school. Thirty-eight percent of principals in the study indicated that they purposefully invite parents to take part in cultural celebrations. Often the cultural events included food as well as teachings to get the whole community involved. Twenty-one percent of principals reported that offering foods was an important element in attracting families into the building, as food plays an important role in Indigenous cultures as it promotes values of sharing and represents cultural values of hunting and harvesting (Earle, 2013). According to Earle (2013), the role of food goes beyond nutrition to represent communal values.

Khalifa et al. (2016) suggested that CRSL seek out opportunities to celebrate cultural practices, to not only support other cultures but also to show the complex commitment of the school leader to learn these practices and engage the community. Khalifa et al. (2016) further stated that having a history of systemic oppressions made it difficult to create a welcoming environment for Indigenous students and their families. They suggested that safe, welcoming spaces need to go beyond physical locations and transcend to caring communities that contrast colonialist practices.

Principals in the study reported it was “important to establish individual family preferences with respect to how [families] want to communicate with the school” (SR 7); they described using several methods to communicate with parents of Indigenous students: phone, text, emails, face-to-face, as well through websites and apps like Facebook and Seesaw. Milne’s (2020) focus group study suggested that schools find means to communicate with Indigenous parents through culturally relevant practices. Milne suggested schools survey their parents to find out which means of communication works best for them (Milne, 2020). Soujah’s (2020) study examined the use of text messaging, which Soujah described as “a very intimate and personal modality” (p. 144). Soujah’s study indicated Indigenous parents favoured non-Indigenous parents in their preference for text messaging by a slight effect size. However, Soujah (2020) also stated “every opportunity for greater contact, digital or analog, resonated with Indigenous parents in a positive way” (p. 145).

Principals in the study reported a variety of ways to communicate with parents of Indigenous students. Twenty-four percent indicated that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to communicating with parents of Indigenous students. Initiating regular communication with parents is one of the critical functions of a school leader. Barr and Saltmarsh (2014) spoke of the importance of communication for marginalized communities. According to them, parents need to know their voices are being heard, and often the onus is on the school leader to initiate that communication.

Another practice to engage parents of Indigenous students described in the study was supporting students during educational transitions, which was described by Transitions (2016) as students moving from one stage in their educational journey to

another. Although many activities supporting educational transitions were used with all students, 25% of schools mentioned specifically supporting parents of Indigenous students in easing these transitions. Practices specific to parents of Indigenous students included the use of Indigenous graduation coaches or liaisons to encourage high school graduation, as well as offering support for completing postsecondary and scholarship applications. Other unique transition programs were described by individual schools.

Milne (2020) highlighted the need to help provide guidance to parents of Indigenous students when transitioning from high school to postsecondary institutions in particular, as many parents of Indigenous students did not transition to postsecondary themselves and might not have the skills needed to successfully help their children. Parents want their children to be successful in school and have postsecondary opportunities (Assembly of First Nations, 2010; Milne, 2020; National Indian Brotherhood/Assembly of First Nations, 1972). Providing parents with resources to successfully transition their children to postsecondary institutions helps fulfill Call to Action 10 to improve educational success rates and attainment levels (TRC, 2015b).

As discussed in Chapter 1, Alberta Education reported a 23% gap between 3-year high school graduation rates for students who registered as Indigenous and those who did not for the 2021–2022 school year. Similarly, there was a 19% gap reported for 5-year high school graduation rates between those who registered as Indigenous and those who did not for the same time period. Lareau & Horvat (1999) viewed various groups coming together to support the acquisition of postsecondary

opportunities for Indigenous students as “moments of inclusion” (p. 48) to provide future advantages to children. The gaps that currently exist for high school graduation rates would be considered “moments of exclusion” (Lareau & Horvat, 1999, p. 48), reflecting the disadvantage of social capital for minoritized cultures. Finding ways to minimize exclusionary practices is necessary if we wish to reduce the effects of colonization.

Principals were asked if parents of Indigenous students were represented on their parent councils. Of the principals surveyed, 24% reported that they have parents of Indigenous students as members of their parent council. Twenty-nine percent of schools mentioned providing a personal invitation to parents of Indigenous students. Principals described a variety of practices to encourage parents of Indigenous students to participate in parent councils, such as offering meals, childcare, and making personal invitations.

The Alberta government encourages all parents to become members of council to strengthen the voice of parents, encourage parent engagement, and build capacity in Alberta Schools (Alberta Government, 2021a). Parents of Indigenous students wanted to have a voice and feel like they are being heard when it comes to their child’s education (Milne, 2020; Wotherspoon & Milne, 2023). This idea was reinforced by members of an Indigenous parent council and advisory board (Milne et al., 2019). Parents of Indigenous students in Milne’s (2020) study stated they wanted to have a relationship with their children’s schools that was different than their own parents’ relationship with the education system. Parent in Milne’s (2020) study recommended schools seek out opportunities to engage parents of Indigenous students and

proactively reach out to all families.

The importance of relationship building was also highlighted in the current study. Reconciliation was defined by the TRC (2015a) as “an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining respectful relationships” (p. 16). Finding unique opportunities to build positive relationships with parents of Indigenous students can contribute to a welcoming environment. There was no one strategy that principals used to build relationships, rather, they described a long-term commitment to many small acts and persistence in the wake of generations of mistrust.

Ferlazzo (2011) stated that family–school connections based on caring, welcoming environments offered many benefits to students and could improve student learning. Purposeful relationships between families and students can also increase social development and improve overall student well-being (Epstein, 1995/2010, Grant & Ray, 2019, Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997, Willemse et al., 2018). Not only does relationship building offer many benefits to students, it can also prevent negative behaviours such as concentration problems, disruptive behaviours, and emotional dysregulation, according to T. E. Smith et al. (2019). Family–school relationships have been described as having a positive relationship with improved school attendance (Hornby & Blackwell, 2018).

The responsibility of relationship building should be on educational institutions (Wotherspoon & Milne, 2023). IRSs contributed to the lack of trust Indigenous people feel towards colonial educational institutions (Education Connections, 2017; Milne, 2016, 2020; Moses, 2013). CRSL requires school leaders to maintain strong relationships with students and families to better promote positive



student outcomes (Khalifa et al., 2016). If the overall goal with Indigenous students is to increase attendance to provide higher educational attainment, as stated by the TRC (2015b), then an important step is for schools to initiate means to build relationships with parents of Indigenous students.

Another practice described by principals was offering Indigenous language courses to students. Language programs can engage students and families. Seven per cent of the schools in this study reported offering Indigenous language programs in the 2021–2022 school year, and another 7% of schools reported that they had offered language programs previously but were not able to during the 2021–2022 year. Barriers to offering these programs included a lack of qualified applicants for the teaching positions and COVID-19 protocols that limited outsiders from entering school buildings.

Culturally responsive school leaders seek structures and resources to support Indigenous culture to the school (Khalifa et al., 2016). A CRSL seeks ways to nurture the cultural identity of students, at times leveraging and engaging resources in the community to bring forth opportunities to validate cultures (Khalifa et al., 2016). In contrast, the IRSL leader does not seek out a way of eradicating colonization, but instead seeks to affirm culture and languages that existed prior to colonization (Khalifa et al., 2019).

Indigenous languages were harshly suppressed through IRS (Claes & Clifton, 1998). It is important to find ways within the education system to purposefully rebuild these cultural structures. Khalifa et al. (2019) suggested that destroying Indigenous languages could affect groups for a “millenia” (p. 577). TRC (2015b) Call to Action

10 recommended that educators seek ways to “protect the rights of Aboriginal languages, including the teaching of Aboriginal languages as credit courses” (p. 2). Parents of Indigenous students in Milne’s (2020) focus group study also suggested that schools find ways to establish programs and rebuild lost languages.

Principals in the study reported many practices for engaging with parents of Indigenous students. Commonly reported practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students included having a liaison, facilitating cultural celebrations, initiating communication, and supporting educational transitions. Other practices that were described by participants included encouraging participation of parents of Indigenous students on parent councils, purposeful relationship building, and offering Indigenous language programs.

### **Research Question 2: Barriers to Engaging Indigenous Parents**

Research Question 2 asked what principals felt were barriers preventing schools from engaging with parents of Indigenous students. The discussion below is organized into four findings related to Question 2.

#### ***Finding 2: Technology Can Create Barriers for Engaging With Some Parents of Indigenous Students***

Although there have been many advances to technology over the past few decades, it is important to remember that some parents do not have regular access to technology. Many participants described multiple challenges, for Indigenous families in particular, with the education system’s reliance on technology for communication, registration, and reporting students’ marks. All the principals in the study reported using online methods to report students’ marks and 75% stated this was their only

means of reporting student marks, while 25% offered alternate reporting methods, such as printing report cards. One school from District E offered monthly debriefs to families. Because reporting student marks can give insight and information on students' engagement and understanding at school, it is important to find ways to impart this information effectively to parents of Indigenous students. Not recognizing the barriers that technology can present can hinder engagement for parents of Indigenous students.

Soujah's (2020) study ranked practices for engaging with parents of Indigenous students; electronic communication and written documentation were considered the least favoured. Sianturi et al. (2022) suggested that there is a significant need to adopt certain technologies to improve engagement with parents of Indigenous students; however, doing so also requires careful consideration as integrating technologies are also noted to exacerbate differences in socioeconomic stress and cultural barriers (Sianturi et al., 2022). Schools and districts should maintain a sound understanding of the demographics of their schools and be aware that some policies that encourage technologies cannot easily be accessed by some populations. To "enable[e] parents [of Indigenous students] to fully participate in the education of their children" (TRC, 2015b, p. 2), it is essential for them to be able to access information from the school. If there are systems that obstruct parents' access to report cards or school registration, alternate options need to be made available.

***Finding 3: Nonrecognition of Indigenous Family Structures Can Pose Barriers to Engagement***

Bureaucratic barriers can be described as "rigid bureaucratic structures that

require the person to fit the structure rather than vice-versa” (Campbell & Lupton, 2000). Nonrecognition of the legal parent or guardian status of the child can cause barriers to engaging with parents or caregivers of Indigenous students.

Principals from every district in the study spoke of the challenges of registering Indigenous students when the students were not living with their legal guardian. They described similar challenges in accessing counselling or specialized services or any situation requiring consent from a legal guardian. Indigenous families are often complex in nature and cannot easily be bound by the roles and boundaries of Western family structures (Tam et al., 2017). Systemic racism, according to Loppie et al. (2020) refers to “economic, social and political institutions and processes of a society that can create and reinforce discrimination” (p. 5). Current policies do not recognize the collective kinship that exists within Indigenous cultures. Often the government’s interpretation of kinship care represents deficit thinking and presents bureaucratic challenges within the public education system (C. Martineau personal communication, July 12, 2022).

Culturally responsive schools seek ways to support Indigenous home cultures and provide authentic acceptance to Indigenous families (Khalifa, 2016). Unyielding systems that do not recognize cultural differences can be prohibitive to engaging with parents of Indigenous students. The limited understanding of the term parent and the lack of Indigenous cultural understanding have serious implications for our education system and can impede engagement with parents of Indigenous students.

***Finding 4: Staff Limitations Can Act as Barriers to Engaging With Parents of Indigenous Students***

Staff perspectives can prevent schools from engaging with parents of Indigenous students. Principals in the survey reported that some of their staff had traditional perspectives that created barriers to parent engagement. There were also hints that some of the school leaders themselves did not recognize the significance and uniqueness of Indigenous families. Twenty percent of school leaders reported that they treated Indigenous families the same as any other families. One principal reported “Our Indigenous families are treated like any other family until they reach out for support.”

Both the TQS and LQS recognize that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students require purposeful consideration when teaching and leading. The LQS mandates principals and school jurisdiction leaders to play a fundamental role in establishing and supporting the conditions under which the learning aspirations and the potential of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students will be realized (Alberta Education, 2018a, p. 1). The standard further mandates leaders to pursue “opportunities and engage in practices to facilitate reconciliation within the school community” (Alberta Education 2018a, p. 4). An Australian study reported that schools’ failure to recognize the impact that Indigenous schooling had on parents was a significant factor in breeding mistrust between schools and families (Lowe et al., 2019). Previous studies report on problematic barriers of Indigenous policies and teacher training and the continued discomfort Indigenous people have with the education system (Milne, 2017; Milne & Wotherspoon, 2019, 2023). Critical self-awareness is an important value of the CRSL

framework. Leaders should not only be aware of their own views, but they need to be aware of inequitable factors within the school and within the system. When inequities involve staff, the “critically conscious” (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1281) leader will challenge those inequities with staff. Although many schools were doing excellent work engaging Indigenous parents, some principals recognized the need to do more. One principal described it well: “I have found that engaging Indigenous parents is not something that can be done passively; if we are looking and an Indigenous parent representation in the school, then personal relationships seem to be extremely important in engaging members of the community” (SR 6). If leaders wish to “improv[e] education attainment levels and success rates [of Indigenous students], then leaders need to actively reduce inequity in our schools” (TRC, 2015b, p. 2). In order to engage parents of Indigenous students, leaders need to challenge attitudes that can create barriers and impede student success. The CRSL framework suggests that it is the school leader’s responsibility to ensure that their staff is “continuously responsive to minoritized students” (Khalifa et al., 2016, p. 1274).

***Finding 5: Negative School Experiences Create Barriers to Engaging With Parents of Indigenous Students***

Having prior negative school experiences can impact a school’s ability to engage with parents of Indigenous students. The legacy of IRS continues to be a barrier between parents of Indigenous students and schools. Twenty-four percent of principals discussed this barrier and its continued effects. One principal reported “The past continues to cause families to not want to be engaged. We continue to work towards reconciliation, so families can see, feel, and hear that we are wanting them to

be a part of our school” (SR 5).

Although parent engagement can be challenging at times, some research indicates that it can be more difficult for Indigenous parents (Kim-Meneen, 2018; Milne, 2016). Grant and Ray (2019) suggest that negative past experiences, such as IRS, can act as psychological barriers, which can have a negative effect on parent engagement. For many Indigenous parents, the history of IRS in Canada poses one of the greatest barriers to parent involvement (Milne, 2020; OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, 2017). Indigenous parents’ fear and mistrust continue to inhibit parent relationships with school (Malatest et al., 2002; Milne, 2016).

### **Research Question 3: Principal’s Perceptions of Effectiveness**

Principals were asked to consider their perceptions of the effectiveness of practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students. The following discussion is guided by three findings.

#### ***Finding 6: Having a Liaison at School Builds Relationships Between Schools and Parents of Indigenous Students***

One of the significant findings in the study was how important the role of Indigenous liaisons is to building relationships between schools and parents of Indigenous students. Data on the proportion of schools with liaison roles was provided in Chapter 4 and Finding 1 above.

As one principal stated, many parents of Indigenous students “struggle to trust administration” (SR 7). Principals described how having an Indigenous liaison broke down barriers and built relationships with parents of Indigenous student, and one reported “Many only trust the liaison in our school” (SR 15). Trust, or mistrust,

between Indigenous parents and educational institutions has been well documented (Milne, 2016, 2020; Milne & Wotherspoon, 2023; Wotherspoon & Milne, 2021). Many parents in Milne's (2020) study recognized the person in the liaison role as being "one of us" (Milne, 2020, p. 5) who could mediate if issues arose.

Call to Action 10 (TRC, 2015b, p. 2) stated the need to enable Indigenous parents to participate fully in the education of their children. Having a person whom parents of Indigenous students recognize and begin to trust is a good first step. As one principal in the study stated, "It is essential that school jurisdictions go out of their way to train and hire Indigenous staff!" (SR 7). Another principal explained "Our school liaisons have been a great asset in increasing our Indigenous parent engagement" (SR 28).

***Finding 7: Informal Events and Cultural Celebrations Offer Excellent Opportunities to Engage Parents of Indigenous Students***

Principals in this study described many unique opportunities to get parents of Indigenous students comfortable and familiar with the school building. School events, Soujah (2020) claimed, are a "soft form of engagement," (p. 146) and serve the purpose of bringing community members together and transforming "a place associated with trauma" (p. 146) to a place of restoration. Milne's (2020) report indicated that some parents of Indigenous students thought that teachers did not value Indigenous culture. Ceremonies can be a way of showing respect and honour to parents of Indigenous students.

One principal in the study stated, "hosting informal events increases the comfort levels of parents and allows them to feel more comfortable when a teacher



reaches out to them regarding their child” (SR 28). Offering specific cultural activities like pipe ceremonies or smudging were considered “very effective if we can get the parents to come into the school” (SR 6). Offering support and kindness when parents of Indigenous students take that first step into a school, which can be traumatic for some, can be considered an act of reconciliation.

Goodall and Montgomery (2014) recognized that ethnic minorities often have difficulties engaging with their schools. They conceptualized a continuum that suggested a shift in emphasis away from the relationship between parents and schools to an emphasis between parents and their children’s learning. However, building relationships with families can often open doors to communication. Finding ways to create connections with families can ease future conversations. The CRSL framework suggested that embracing cultural practices could positively impact relationships with parents of Indigenous students (Khalifa et al., 2016).

***Finding 8: Texting Should Be Available for Communicating with Parents of Indigenous Students***

Most contact with parents is considered beneficial; however, many schools still do not use texting as a means of engaging with Indigenous parents. Principals in the study described a variety of communication methods. Many (39%) principals reported using phone calls as their primary method of communication with parents of Indigenous students and 32% reported using text messaging. One principal in the study stated, “Parents communicate with their phones. Email and other school communication tools are largely ineffective with our Indigenous families” (SR 21). Milne (2020) suggested that schools survey their parents to find out which means of

communication works best for them, but schools should consider texting a viable option. Call to Action 10. vi. called for a commitment to “enable[e] parents [of Indigenous students] to fully participate in the education of their children” (TRC, 2015b, p. 2). Several schools spoke of poor phone reception and difficulty reaching parents of Indigenous students. Texting should be available as a communication option for families who prefer it.

See Finding 10 below: Text messaging should be used for communicating with parents of Indigenous students.

#### **Research Question 4: Engagement Practices and Indigenous Student Attendance**

Research Question 4 examined the relationship between different practices for engaging with parents of Indigenous students and Indigenous student attendance. The discussion is guided by one research finding.

#### ***Finding 9: Indigenous Student Attendance Was Not Statistically Significantly Correlated With Specific Engagement Practices But Did Reveal the Need for Further Research***

Lack of attendance in school is harmful to achieving successful student outcomes for any student (Reid, 2008). The OECD Directorate for Education and Skills report (2017) pointed out that Indigenous students’ absences increase once they reach the age of 13. Reid (2008) suggested that many attendance issues were caused by schools with rigid structures, outdated policies, and overbearing rules. Across all ages, Indigenous student absences were higher than non-Indigenous students’ (OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, 2017).

D. Smith et al. (2017) stated that attendance rates can show students’

connection with the school and the people who work there. As stated in Chapter 1, students vote with their feet, meaning student absences and inequity often go together (D. Smith et al., 2017; OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, 2017, p. 13). D. Smith et al. (2017) claimed that attendance can be directly linked to the relationship educators maintain with students and their families.

Sanderson et al. (2013) classified student attendance into the following categories: daily attendance rates from 90–100% were considered high attendance rates, daily attendance rates from 75–89% were considered moderate attendance, and daily attendance rates between 50–75% were considered low attendance rates. Attendance rates below 50% were uncategorized. Within the current study, three districts reported moderate attendance rates (76%, 84%, and 84%), one district reported low attendance rates (70%), and one district was uncategorized (30%).

Although the current study did not show significant differences between practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students and ADA scores, the average daily attendance rates may be cause for concern. More data are needed to increase understanding of the significance of these practices. A broader view of attendance aggregated by elementary and secondary schools would help inform future studies. As well, it is important to recognize that many students did not have regular access to school during the COVID-19 pandemic due to policies beyond their control, such as quarantines, bussing, and road conditions. Further research should investigate district bussing practices as well as bussing practices for students living on Nations.

## **Research Question 5: Engagement Practices and Indigenous Student Achievement**

Research Question 5 examined the relationship between different practices for engaging with parents of Indigenous students and AEAM-FNMI results. The discussion is guided by one research finding.

### ***Finding 10: Schools that Use Texting as Their Primary Form of Communication Scored Higher on Achievement Tests***

Research Question 5 examined the relationship between certain practices and AEAM-FNMI PAT and diploma exam results. Two results indicated statistically significant relationships between achievement results: using phone calls as the primary mode of communicating with parents of Indigenous students and using texting as the primary form of communication.

Schools that used phone calls as their primary method of communication with parents of Indigenous students reported significantly lower test results, an average of 22% below other test results, than those who did not use phoning as their primary method of communication. Alternately, schools that used texting as their primary method of communication with parents of Indigenous students reported statistically significant higher AEAM-FNMI results, an average of 27% higher than those who did not use texting as their primary method of communication.

Of the principals who responded to the survey question asking about their communication preferences with parents of Indigenous students, 39% stated that their primary form of communication with parents of Indigenous students was phone calls while 32% stated that their primary form of communication with parents of

Indigenous students was texting. The current study, except for the exemplar with the educational assistant using their personal cell phone, did not distinguish between personal or school cell phones.

### **Implications**

The Indigenous student population is the fastest-growing demographic population in Canada (Assembly of First Nations, 2012; Statistics Canada, 2021b). Alberta hosts approximately one quarter of the population of Indigenous youth across the country in regular programs (Statistics Canada, 2021c). Recent results indicate there continue to be significant gaps between both achievement and attainment in Alberta. Results from the 2021–2022 school year indicates a 23% gap between students registered as Indigenous and those who were not for high school completion within 5 years; similarly, there was a 19% gap for 5-year high school completion. There were also gaps in achievement scores for the 2021–2022 school year. There was a 21% achievement gap between students registered as Indigenous and those who were not in PAT results; similarly, there was a 6% gap for Grade 12 diploma exam results. Research indicates that engaging parents of Indigenous students offers the highest impact to student academic outcomes and high school attainment rates. (OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, 2017, p. 20).

This study was designed to describe practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students. The study also sought to examine barriers as well as effective practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students. The study was designed with educational stakeholders and policymakers in mind to address gaps of self-identified Indigenous students within Alberta. It is the educational system that produced the

harm caused to Indigenous cultures and education that will be the vehicle used to reconcile this harm (National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation of Canada, 2019). This research study sought to support Call to Action 10 with a particular focus on Principles i, ii, and vi (TRC, 2015b, p. 2) within the provincial public school system. The implications of the study will readdress the following principles: improving education attainment levels and success rates, involving Indigenous parents in the education of their children, and closing indicated achievement gaps for Indigenous students within one generation.

### ***Improving Education Attainment Levels and Success Rates***

Many of the engagement practices discussed above can also improve education attainment levels and success rates as described within this study (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018; OECD Directorate for Education and Skills, 2017). As of 2021, there was a 23% difference in 3-year high school completion rates and a 19% difference in 5-year high school completion rates between students who registered as Indigenous and those who did not register as Indigenous (Alberta Government, 2022a, 2022b).

Two practices can contribute directly to increasing educational attainment levels: The first is through the role of a liaison who can support children and ensure movement towards educational success in the form of future graduation. They can communicate regularly with families to ensure students have the best opportunities to achieve success.

The second practice that contributes directly to ensuring educational attainment is supporting educational transitions. Educational transitions are important

at each educational milestone; however, they are even more important when the goal is to increase high school completion for Indigenous students. Recognizing that some parents of Indigenous students have not successfully transitioned from high school to postsecondary makes it even more essential. Purposely supporting Indigenous students to complete high school to have access to postsecondary education should be a continued goal of all educators.

### ***Enabling Parents to Fully Participate in the Education of Their Children***

Certain practices supported the participation of parents in the education of their children. Hiring full-time liaison at schools continues to be perceived as an effective practice by school principals and has been previously reported by parents of Indigenous students as the most promising practice for engagement (Milne, 2016). Ensuring that schools continue to hire liaisons can bridge relationships between schools and parents of Indigenous students and encourage parents to fully participate in the education of their children.

Facilitating cultural celebrations at schools is also a low-risk way to encourage parents of Indigenous students to engage with their children's schools. It also provides the school with the opportunity to honour Indigenous cultures and demonstrate acts of reconciliation. Cultural celebrations offer the school an opportunity to become acquainted with parents of Indigenous students and begin the journey of building relationships over time. Adding a food element can highlight the value of sharing, which is an important aspect of Indigenous culture. Cultural celebrations can minimize the colonialist appearance of schools for parents of Indigenous students engaging for the first time.

Finding effective modes of communication for parents of Indigenous students is also an important element in enabling parents of Indigenous students to participate fully in the education of their children. Communication can incorporate technologies like Facebook or Seesaw, phone conversations, one-on-one meetings, texting or emails. However, it is important for schools to understand parents' limitations and vary their practices accordingly.

Encouraging and inviting parents of Indigenous students to parent council meetings allows parents of Indigenous students an opportunity to provide voice and perspective at their children's schools. This can be particularly important when initiating new policies or procedures to ensure that perspectives are understood before policies are implemented. School councils offer an opportunity for parents of Indigenous students to have their voices heard at an advisory level to the school.

### ***Diminishing Barriers That Prevent Parents From Participating in Their Children's Education***

Equally as important as recognizing practices that encourage parents of Indigenous students to participate in their children's education, is recognizing barriers that prevent engagement. Although the use of technology at school thrived through the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical to recognize that technology use continues to be a barrier for some parents of Indigenous students, both through foundational knowledge and through access. Examining school practices for reporting, informing, and inviting should be done inclusively after considering the demographic capabilities of each school's parent population. When implementing new policies, such as online registrations, populations whose access could be limited should be considered and



alternate arrangements put forth. Policymakers need to recognize the complexity of school systems and recognize the level of staffing required to offer inclusive practices to all parents, for example, offering one-on-one registration. Policymakers need to ensure that funding is provided to enable schools to actively engage parents of Indigenous students in ways that may not necessarily be efficient but are accessible to all.

Some staff continue to fail to recognize that engaging with parents of Indigenous students requires specialized practices that go beyond practices to engage all parents. Continued opportunities to engage and train staff is imperative to engaging with parents of Indigenous students. Adherence to policies such as the TQS (2018) or LQS (2020) is necessary step towards reconciliation. Regular monitoring of staff adherence to policies such as the TQS (2018) and the LQS (2020) is necessary to advancing reconciliation. The CRSL framework states that school leaders need to create a school climate that is culturally responsive (Khalifa et al., 2016).

One of the most significant barriers mentioned in the study was nonrecognition of Indigenous family structures. This barrier goes beyond school and division leaders to provincial policymakers and will be a complex, multidimensional barrier to overcome. When rigid bureaucratic policies interfere with recognition of cultural family units, the problem is vast. Every district in this study spoke of the challenge of registering Indigenous students when the students are not living with their legal guardian. Expecting parents (guardians, kinship caregivers, aunts, etc.) to fit into a rigid system of legal guardian recognition is heteronormative and colonialist. Policymakers need to look for ways to reduce this barrier in schools. The CRSL

framework states that culturally responsive school leaders must advocate for their communities when recognizing inequities in minoritized cultures (Khalifa, 2016).

### **Limitations**

Limitations are conditions of a study that could affect the results or limit the generalizability (Roberts & Hyatt, 2019). Despite measures taken to increase validity and reduce researcher bias, this study contained limitations that could have implications on future research and limit the broad generalizability of this work.

The greatest limitation to this study was that it was completed by a non-Indigenous person, and as such, it may lack a certain cultural awareness needed to better perceive underlying issues or data. I could also harbour intrinsic biases when analyzing the data, perhaps without even knowing that I am doing so. This required regular self-reflection to minimize any biases I might have. The principals who responded to the survey in this study also reported being non-Indigenous, which could also affect their perceptions of engaging parents of Indigenous students. As such, they too may lack a cultural understanding and awareness when responding to survey questions.

Another limitation of this study was the development of a survey instrument. Although the survey was developed in consultation with a psychometrician as well as a national content expert and underwent rigorous piloting, it did not undergo validation and reliability tests. Limited time to properly develop and test it could also limit the generalizability of the study.

Criterion-based sampling had a direct limitation on the number of participants in this study. The survey was initially shared across five school districts to 72

principals. Of those 72 principals, 57 responded to the survey, which is an initial 79% response rate. As described earlier, criteria for the survey excluded data from many participants. In total 30 participants had useable data in their responses. This small number of respondents also limits the generalizability of this study. This research study had a 42% response rate. According to Mills and Gay (2019), a response rate of 50% or can increase confidence of generalizability of a study. As this response rate is below that general rule of thumb, caution should be used when attempting to generalize these results to broader populations.

Data were gathered for this study using Qualtrics, an online software program designed to collect and organize data. The survey contained open-ended questions, which can be problematic as they required the respondents to use a great amount of energy to respond to the questions (Dillman et al., 2014). Online surveys that contain open-ended descriptive questions do not have a surveyor present to help motivate the respondents, which can hinder the complexity of responses and limit the data gathered within the study.

The COVID-19 pandemic also limited the generalizability of attendance data used in this research study. Many districts had lower attendance numbers during the 2021–2022 school year. Many students who were affected by COVID had to isolate at home for a period of at least 10 days when they became ill. Many classes were forced to isolate. Regular illness could have had a significant impact on attendance numbers. Poor attendance would also have an impact on achievement as well.

At times, there were inconsistencies between principal reports of aggregates of Indigenous and district reports. For example, one principal said that there were three

students who identified as Inuit in their school, but the district's report said there were none. Upon further inquiry, the district was able to find records of the Inuit students. Great efforts were undertaken to uncover inconsistencies and report accurate information. I decided to use the district aggregates as they were more familiar with the reports and were able to discuss the information from all schools, rather than just individual schools. However, it was possible that inconsistencies in the data remained. A great deal of effort was made to ensure consistency across districts, but differences in data reporting could limit the generalizability of this study. Having standardized reports across the province would be beneficial to measuring equity across school divisions.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The goal of this study was to contribute to the body of knowledge regarding the engagement of parents of Indigenous students. This study was unique from other studies of practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students, as it sought to use quantitative student measures, including both attendance and achievement data, to measure the effectiveness of practices used to engage parents of Indigenous students. To my knowledge, this is the only study of its kind that examines practices to engage parents of Indigenous students that uses underlying student data to measure these practices.

Having a quantitative element in this study was important as quantitative studies are underrepresented in Indigenous research studies, as most equitable studies are almost entirely qualitative in nature. Walter and Andersen (2013) pointed out that there is a "near absence" (p. 66) of quantitative discussion in Indigenous research.

Many previous studies used primarily qualitative approaches to examine engagement of Indigenous students (Milne, 2016, 2020; Milne & Wotherspoon, 2019, 2020a, 2020b, 2022a, 2022b, 2023; Moses, 2013). Skrla et al. (2004) stated that using achievement or attendance data is a particularly effective way to measure equity. This study used a combination of rural and urban data for describing and measuring practices for engaging parents of Indigenous students.

To conclude this section, I make the following recommendations for future research.

1. Continue to use methodologies that contain quantitative components to increase educational institutions' understanding of the effectiveness of practices used to engage parents of Indigenous students.
2. Expand the study to include attendance and achievement data from more districts to make comprehensive comparisons.
3. Repeat the study after the pandemic to analyze data without the impact that COVID-19 had on student attendance and achievement.
4. Add a comparative feature in future studies to allow for comprehensive comparisons between the engagement of parents of Indigenous students in urban and rural contexts.
5. Add a comparative feature in future studies that examines Indigenous student attendance differences between students who live on Nation land and those who live off Nation land.
6. Conduct a comparison of the perspectives of principal on the effectiveness of practices used to engage parents of Indigenous students and those of

parents of Indigenous students on the effectiveness of the same practices.

7. Conduct a study examining the effects of bussing on student attendance.

This study should include aggregates of district bussing and Nation bussing in rural areas.

8. Conduct a study examining differences in practices used for engaging parents of Indigenous students to determine differences in practices based on division/grade levels.

9. Examine primary methods of communication to see if the correlation with provincial exam results and the practice of texting can be duplicated.

10. Examine primary methods of communication to see if the relationship with provincial exam results and the practice of phoning can be duplicated.

### **Summary**

The education system in Alberta continues to have gaps between attainment and achievement levels for students who register as Indigenous and those who do not. One of the richest resources to fill these gaps is through working together with parents of Indigenous students. This study sought to describe and measure successful practices for engaging these parents. Principals described what practices they used to engage parents of Indigenous students; they also described barriers to engagement practices. Principals also examined their perceptions of the effectiveness of these practices. These practices were measured against student attendance and student achievement to seek out relationships that could inform on the effectiveness of these practices.

Throughout this study, the TRC's (2015b) Call to Action 10 remained prominently in the background, particularly Principles i, ii, and vi, guiding the study in the hopes of contributing in some small way to close identified educational achievement gaps within one generation, to improve Indigenous students' education attainment levels and success rates, and to enable parents of Indigenous students to fully participate in the education of their children.

As one principal from District A pointed out, "We are not there yet" (SR 22). The process for reconciliation is slow. Many of the respondents in the study reported innovative and inclusive practices to engage parents of Indigenous students with Albertan schools. Moving forward, patience and persistence will be required as we, as educators, continue to repair the harm that was caused and navigate an inclusive future.

## References

- Alberta Education. (2018a). *Leadership quality standard*. Alberta Government.  
<https://www.alberta.ca/assets/documents/ed-leadership-quality-standard-english.pdf>
- Alberta Education. (2018b). *Teaching quality standard*. Alberta Government.  
<https://www.alberta.ca/assets/documents/ed-teaching-quality-standard-english-print-ready.pdf>
- Alberta Education. (2022a). *Alberta education assurance measure result*. [Individual school]. Alberta Government.
- Alberta Education. (2022b). *Alberta Education Assurance Measure Results: First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) Report* [Individual School].
- Alberta Education. (2023). *General information bulletin: Grades 6 and 9 Alberta provincial achievement testing*. Alberta Government.  
<https://www.alberta.ca/assets/documents/edc-pat-general-information-bulletin.pdf>
- Alberta Government. (n.d.). *Powwow gatherings*. <https://www.alberta.ca/powwow-gatherings.aspx>
- Alberta Government. (2013). *First Nation, Métis, and Inuit funding allocation for school: Information for parents and guardians*.  
<https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/94f0558d-0e13-45fe-99a1-4467578e6453/resource/318a0fb3-d943-4e0c-9ead-dc63963db1c8/download/fnmifundinginformationforparents.pdf>



Alberta Government. (2020). *Aboriginal student self identification: Information for school authorities*. <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/39dad544-4e9a-40a4-a4f5-f3f48266010a/resource/620d66c7-935d-4afc-91d5-45552bed5869/download/edc-aboriginal-student-self-id-info-school-authorities-2020.pdf>

Alberta Government. (2021a) *Enhancing parent engagement in Alberta schools*. <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=79718C360FF5C-9CC8-6A88-2EB588F37789D736>

Alberta Government. (2021b). *Required Alberta education assurance measures: Overall summary: First Nations, Métis and Inuit students: Spring 2021*. <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/400288ca-8ad0-45ce-b06b-83873b626637/resource/9f8d4d59-b9c6-4bf3-86aa-c334a5808807/download/edc-education-assurance-measures-overall-summary-fnmi-2021-05.pdf>

Alberta Government. (2021c). *Required Alberta education assurance measures: Overall summary: Province: Spring 2021*. <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/400288ca-8ad0-45ce-b06b-83873b626637/resource/1a58fc03-9621-42c3-b0e5-e6b2a25f796b/download/edc-education-assurance-measures-overall-summary-province-2021-05.pdf>

Alberta Government. (2022a). *Funding manual for school authorities 2022/2023 school year: For school jurisdictions, accredited funded private schools and private ECS operators with children/students in ECS to Grade 12*.

<https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/8f3b4972-4c47-4009-a090-5b470e68d633/resource/e7865589-6774-4ba8-89b5-a61ca2f36843/download/edc-funding-manual-2022-2023-school-year.pdf>

Alberta Government. (2022b). *Education for reconciliation: Supporting reconciliation by including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit perspectives and experiences throughout Alberta's curriculum*. <https://www.alberta.ca/education-for-reconciliation.aspx>

Alberta Government. (2023). *Indigenous caregivers: Provide a safe, nurturing, healthy, and stable home for an Indigenous child in need of care*. <https://www.alberta.ca/indigenous-caregivers.aspx>

Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortium. (n.d.). *Conversation guide: Alberta treaties 6, 7, 8*. <https://empoweringthespirit.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Alberta-Treaties-678-1.pdf>

Alberta Teachers' Association. (2019). *Stepping Stones: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit music and dance*. <https://legacy.teachers.ab.ca/SiteCollectionDocuments/ATA/For%20Members/ProfessionalDevelopment/Walking%20Together/PD-WT-16j-10%20Music%20and%20Dance.pdf>

Alis Alberta. (2022). *Indigenous liaison*. <https://alis.alberta.ca/occinfo/occupations-in-alberta/occupation-profiles/indigenous-liaison/>

American Psychological Association. (2014). *Parent engagement in schools*. <https://www.apa.org/pi/lgbt/programs/safe-supportive/parental-engagement>

- Animiiki Indigenous Innovation. (2020, June 17). *Why we say “Indigenous” instead of “Aboriginal.”* <https://animikii.com/news/why-we-say-indigenous-instead-of-aboriginal>
- Anishnawbe Health Toronto. (2000). *Feasts and giveaways*. <https://aht.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Giveaways.pdf>
- Antony-Newman, M. (2019). Parental involvement policies in Ontario: A critical analysis. *The School Community Journal*, 29(1), 143–170
- Assembly of First Nations. (2010). *First Nations control of First Nations education: It’s our vision, it’s our time*. [https://www.afn.ca/uploads/files/education/3.\\_2010\\_july\\_afn\\_first\\_nations\\_control\\_of\\_first\\_nations\\_education\\_final\\_eng.pdf](https://www.afn.ca/uploads/files/education/3._2010_july_afn_first_nations_control_of_first_nations_education_final_eng.pdf)
- Assembly of First Nations. (2012, October 1–3). *A portrait of First Nations and education* [Fact sheet]. Chiefs Assembly on Education, Gatineau, QC. [https://www.afn.ca/uploads/files/events/fact\\_sheet-ccoe-3.pdf](https://www.afn.ca/uploads/files/events/fact_sheet-ccoe-3.pdf)
- Barger, M. M., Kim, E. M., Kuncel, N. R., & Pomerantz, E. M. (2019). The relation between parents’ involvement in children’s schooling and children’s adjustment: A meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 145(9), 855. <https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000201>
- Barr, J., & Saltmarsh, S. (2014). “It all comes down to the leadership”: The role of the school principal in fostering parent-school engagement. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 42(4), 491–505. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143213502189>

- Bartlett, R. H. (1980). Indian Act of Canada: An unyielding barrier. *American Indian Journal*, 6(4), 11–26.
- Battiste, M. (2013). *Decolonizing education: Nourishing the learning spirit*. Purich.
- Battiste, M., & Barman, J. (1995). *First Nations education in Canada: The circle unfolds*. UBC Press.
- Baxter, G., & Kilderry, A. (2022). Family school partnership discourse: Inconsistencies, misrepresentation, and counter narratives. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 109, Article 103561.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2021.103561>
- BC Treaty Commission. (2022, June 17). *National Indigenous Peoples Day*.  
<https://www.bctreaty.ca/national-indigenous-peoples-day-2022>
- Benner, A. D., Boyle, A. E., & Sadler, S. (2016). Parental involvement and adolescents' educational success: The roles of prior achievement and socioeconomic status. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 45, 1053–1064.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-016-0431-4>
- Berthelsen, D., & Walker, S. (2008). Parents' involvement in their children's education. *Family Matters*, (79), 34–41.  
<https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/agispt.20091531>
- Bombay, A., Matheson, K., & Anisman, H. (2009). Intergenerational trauma: Convergence of multiple processes among First Nations peoples in Canada. *Journal of Aboriginal Health*, 5(3), 6–47.  
<https://doi.org/10.3138/ijih.v5i3.28987>

- Bombay, A., Matheson, K., & Anisman, H. (2011). The impact of stressors on second generation Indian residential school survivors. *Transcultural Psychiatry*, 48(4) 367–391. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363461511410240>
- Boonk, L., Gijsselaers, H. J., Ritzen, H., & Brand-Gruwel, S. (2018). A review of the relationship between parental involvement indicators and academic achievement. *Educational Research Review*, 24, 10–30. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.edurev.2018.02.001>
- Bourdieu, P. (1989). *The state nobility*. Stanford University Press.
- Bousquet, M. P. (2021, July 14). *Residential schools: We must read the commission reports*. Policy Options. <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/july-2021/residential-schools-we-should-read-the-commission-reports/>
- British North America Act, 1867, 30-31 Vict., c. 3 (U.K.). <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/csj-sjc/constitution/lawreg-loireg/p1t11.html>
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1974). Developmental research, public policy, and the ecology of childhood. *Child Development*, 45(1), 1–5. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1127743>
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). Contexts of child rearing: Problems and prospects. *American Psychologist*, 34(10), 844–850. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.34.10.844>
- Campbell, S. M., & Lupton, A. M. (2000). *Bureaucratic barriers to normal day-to-day activities*. Muscle Power. <https://disability-studies.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/40/library/Campbell-bureaucratic-barriers.pdf>

Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, s 35 Part 1 of the Constitution Act, 1982,  
Section 35(2). [https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/PDF/CONST\\_TRD.pdf](https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/PDF/CONST_TRD.pdf)

Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research  
Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

(2018). *Tri-Council policy statement Ethical conduct for research involving  
humans*. <https://ethics.gc.ca/eng/documents/tcps2-2018-en-interactive-final.pdf>

Cardinal, H. (1999). *The unjust society* (2nd ed.). Douglas & MacIntyre.

Carr-Stewart, S. (2001). A treaty right to education. *Canadian Journal of Education*,  
26(2), 125–143. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1602197>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2018). *Parent engagement in schools*.  
[https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/parent\\_engagement.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/parent_engagement.htm)

Circle Teachings. (2023). Moving forward together: Residential school survivors  
support workers calendar. [https://www.circleteachings.ca/store/Moving-  
Forward-Together-p488715954](https://www.circleteachings.ca/store/Moving-Forward-Together-p488715954)

Claes, R., & Clifton, D. (1998, October 23). *Needs and expectations for redress of  
victims of abuse at residential schools* [Final report submitted to the Law  
Commission of Canada]. Sage.

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative,  
and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Sage.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design:  
Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.) Sage.

- Davies, S., & Rizk, J. (2018). The three generations of cultural capital research: A narrative review. *Review of Educational Research*, 88(3), 331–365.  
<https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654317748423>
- Davin, N. F. (1879). *Report on industrial schools for Indians and half-breeds*.  
<https://collections.irshdc.ubc.ca/index.php/Detail/objects/9427#>
- Dillman, D. A., Smyth, J. D., & Christian, L. M. (2014). *Internet, phone, mail, and mixed-mode surveys: The tailored design method* (4th ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
- Domina, T. (2005). Leveling the home advantage: Assessing the effectiveness of parental involvement in elementary school. *Sociology of Education*, 78, 233–249.
- Duranti, G., & Di Prata, O. (2009, May 20). *Everything is about time: Does it have the same meaning all over the world?* [Paper presentation]. PMI Global Congress – EMEA, Amsterdam, North Holland.  
<https://www.pmi.org/learning/library/everything-time-monochronism-polychronism-orientation-6902>
- Đurišić, M., & Bunijevac, M. (2017). Parental involvement as an important factor for successful education. *Center for Educational Policy Studies Journal*, 7(3), 137–153. <https://doi.org/10.26529/cepsj.291>
- Earle, L. (2013). *Traditional Aboriginal diets and health*. National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health. <https://www.ccsa-nccah.ca/docs/emerging/FS-TraditionalDietsHealth-Earle-EN.pdf>

Edmonton Public Schools. (2022, January 20). *Student registration form*.

<https://epsb.ca/media/epsb/schools/registerforschool/StudentRegistrationForm.pdf>

Education Act, Statutes of Alberta, 2012, Chapter E-0.3.

<https://www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/e00p3.pdf>

Education Connections. (2017). *Strengthening attendance and retention of Indigenous youth in elementary and secondary schools in Canada and beyond*.

[http://www.afn.ca/event\\_download/478e1939-2d72-47c0-83ef-05440aae1381/40754b7b-4569-43fc-82e5-6aa212f01b21/544475d1-9b73-4a1d-9a39-559dce3bf3fb/D5.%20FNEII%20-%20Attendance%20Environmental%20Scan.pdf](http://www.afn.ca/event_download/478e1939-2d72-47c0-83ef-05440aae1381/40754b7b-4569-43fc-82e5-6aa212f01b21/544475d1-9b73-4a1d-9a39-559dce3bf3fb/D5.%20FNEII%20-%20Attendance%20Environmental%20Scan.pdf)

Education Quality Improvement Act, 1997, S.O. 1997, Chapter 31.

<https://www.ola.org/en/legislative-business/bills/parliament-36/session-1/bill-160>

Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, Pub. L. No. 89–10, § 2938.

<https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/COMPS-748>

Epstein, J. L. (1987). Toward a theory of family-school connections: Teacher practices and parent involvement. In K. Hurrelman, F. Kaufmann, & F. Losel (Eds.), *Social intervention: Potential and constraints* (pp 121-136).

DeGruyter.

Epstein, J. L. (2010). School/family/community partnerships: Caring for the children we share. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 92(3), 81–96.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/003172171009200326> (Original work published 1995).



- Epstein, J. L. (2018). School, family, and community partnerships in teachers' professional work. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 44(3), 397–406.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2018.1465669>
- Epstein, J. L., Sanders, M. G., Sheldon, S. B., Simon, B. S., Salinas, K. C., Rodriguez Jansorn, N., Van Voorhis, F. L., Martin, C. S., Thomas, B. G., Greenfeld, M. D., Hutchins, D. J., & Williams, K. J. (2019). *School, family, and community partnerships: Your handbook for action* (4th ed.). Corwin.
- Epstein, J. L., & Connors, L. J. (1992). School and family partnerships. *The Practitioner*, 18(4).
- Every Student Succeeds Act, 20 U.S.C. § 6301 (2015).  
<https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/1177>
- Family Law Act, Statutes of Alberta, 2003, Chapter F-4.5 §20.(2021). <https://kings-printer.alberta.ca/documents/Acts/F04P5.pdf>
- Feir, D. L. (2016). The intergenerational effects of residential schools on children's educational experiences in Ontario and Canada's western provinces. *International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 7(3), Article 5.  
<https://doi.org/10.18584/iipj.2016.7.3.5>
- Ferlazzo, L. (2011). Involvement or engagement? *Educational Leadership*, 68(8), 10–14.
- First Nations Child & Family Caring Society. (n.d.). *Bear Witness Day*.  
<https://fncaringsociety.com/events/bear-witness-day>

Forrest, L. -A., du Preez, J., & Brownlow, C. (2021). Family: Pacific perspectives.

*Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 13(4), 428–446.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12433>

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act, Statutes of Alberta 2000,

Chapter F-25 RSA 2000. <https://kings->

[printer.alberta.ca/1266.cfm?page=F25.cfm&leg\\_type=Acts&isbncln=9780779](https://kings-printer.alberta.ca/1266.cfm?page=F25.cfm&leg_type=Acts&isbncln=9780779)

[762071](https://kings-printer.alberta.ca/1266.cfm?page=F25.cfm&leg_type=Acts&isbncln=9780779)

Friedel, T. L. (1999). The role of Aboriginal parents in public education: Barriers to

change in an urban setting. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 23(2),

139–158. <https://doi.org/10.14288/cjne.v23i2.195872>

Friesen, J., & Krauth, B. (2012). *Key policy issues in Aboriginal education: An*

*evidence-based approach*. Council of Ministers of Education.

<http://www.cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/295/Key->

[policy-Issues-in-Aboriginal-Education\\_EN.pdf](http://www.cmec.ca/Publications/Lists/Publications/Attachments/295/Key-policy-Issues-in-Aboriginal-Education_EN.pdf)

Gadacz, R. (2022). First Nations in Canada. In *The Canadian Encyclopedia*.

<https://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/first-nations>

Gaywish, R., & Mordoch, E. (2018). Situating intergenerational trauma in the

educational journey. *IN Education*, 24(2), 3–23.

<https://doi.org/10.37119/ojs2018.v24i2>

Goodall, J., & Montgomery, C. (2014). Parental involvement to parent engagement: a

continuum. *Educational Review*, 66(4), 399–410.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2013.781576>

- Government of Canada. (2018, February 15). *Research involving the First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples of Canada*. <https://ethics.gc.ca/eng/documents/tcps2-2018-en-interactive-final.pdf>
- Government of Canada. (2020). *The numbered treaties (1871-1921)*. <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1360948213124/1544620003549>
- Grant, K. B., & Ray, J. A. (2019). *Home, school, and community collaboration: Culturally responsive family engagement* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Guba, E. G. (1981). Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries. *Educational Communication and Technology Journal*, 29, 75–91.
- Guy-Evans, O. (2020, November 9). *Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory*. Simply Psychology. [www.simplypsychology.org/Bronfenbrenner.html](http://www.simplypsychology.org/Bronfenbrenner.html)
- Hanson, E. (2009). *The Indian Act*. Indigenous Foundations. [https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/the\\_indian\\_act/](https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/the_indian_act/)
- Hill, N. E., & Tyson, D. F. (2009). Parental involvement in middle school: A meta-analytic assessment of the strategies that promote achievement. *Developmental Psychology*, 45(3), 740–763. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2782391/>
- Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., & Sandler, H. M. (1995). Parental involvement in children's education: Why does it make a difference? *Teachers College Record*, 97(2), 310–331. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146819509700202>
- Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., & Sandler, H. M. (1997). Why do parents become involved in their children's education? *Review of Educational Research*, 67(1), 3–42. <https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543067001003>

- Hoover-Dempsey, K. V., Walker, J. M., Sandler, H. M., Whetsel, D., Green, C. L., Wilkins, A. S., & Closson, K. (2005). Why do parents become involved? Research findings and implications. *The Elementary School Journal*, *106*(2), 105–130. <https://doi.org/10.1086/499194>
- Hornby, G., & Blackwell, I. (2018). Barriers to parental involvement in education: An update. *Educational Review*, *70*(1), 109–119. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131911.2018.1388612>
- Johnson, R. L., & Morgan, G. B. (2016). Survey scales: A guide to development, analysis, and reporting. The Guilford Press.
- Khalifa, M. A., Gooden, M. A., & Davis, J. E. (2016). Culturally responsive school leadership: A synthesis of the literature. *Review of Educational Research*, *86*(4), 1272–1311. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654316630383>
- Khalifa, M. A., Khalil, D., Marsh, T. E., & Halloran, C. (2019). Toward an Indigenous, decolonizing school leadership: A literature review. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *55*(4), 571–614. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X18809348>
- Kim-Meneen, J. (2018). *Understanding parenting styles of second-generation parents of residential school survivors within Treaty 8 reserves*. [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies. <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/5735/>
- King, D., Napier, D., & Kechego, J. (2004). *The federal government's funding of Indian residential schools in Canada for the years 1877–1965*. The Aboriginal

- Healing Foundation. [http://archives.algomau.ca/main/sites/default/files/2010-058\\_001\\_018\\_0.pdf](http://archives.algomau.ca/main/sites/default/files/2010-058_001_018_0.pdf)
- Kiyama, J. M., & Harper, C. E. (2018). Beyond hovering: A conceptual argument for an inclusive model of family engagement in higher education. *The Review of Higher Education*, 41(3), 365–385. <https://doi.org/10.1353/rhe.2018.0012>
- Lafrance, J., & Collins, D. (2003). Residential schools and aboriginal parenting: Voices of parents. *Native Social Work Journal*, 4(4), 104–125.
- Lareau, A., & Horvat, E. M. (1999). Moments of social inclusion and exclusion race, class, and cultural capital in family–school relationships. *Sociology of Education*, 72(1), 37–53. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2673185>
- Leithwood, K. (2021). A review of evidence about equitable school leadership. *Education Sciences*, 11(8), 377. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci11080377>
- Leshem, S., & Trafford, V. (2007). Overlooking the conceptual framework. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, 44(1), 93–105.
- Little Bear, L. (2000). Jagged worldviews colliding. In M. Battiste (Ed.), *Reclaiming Indigenous voice and vision* (pp. 76–85). UBC Press.
- Loeb, S., Dynarski, S., McFarland, D., Morris, P., Reardon, S., & Reber, S. (2017). *Descriptive analysis in education: A guide for researchers* [NCEE 2017-4023]. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance.
- Lopéz, G. R., Scribner, J. D., & Mahitivanichcha, K. (2001). Redefining parental involvement: Lessons from high-performing migrant-impacted schools.

*American Educational Research Journal*, 38(2). 253–288.

<https://www.doi.org/10.3102/00028312038002253>

- Loppie, S., Reading, C., de Leeuw, S. (2020). *Social determinants of health: Indigenous experiences with racism and its impacts*. National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health. <https://www.nccih.ca/docs/determinants/FS-Racism2-Racism-Impacts-EN.pdf>
- Lowe, K., Harrison, N., Tennent, C., Guenther, J., Vass, G. Moodle, N. (2019). Factors affecting the development of school and Indigenous community engagement: A systemic review. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 46(2), 253–271. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13384-019-00314-6>
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook*. Sage.
- Mills, G. E., & Gay, L. R. (2019). *Educational research: Competencies for analysis and applications* (12th ed.). Pearson.
- Milne, E. (2016). “I have the worst fear of teachers”: Moments of inclusion and exclusion in family/school relationships among Indigenous families in Southern Ontario. *Canadian Review of Sociology*, 53(3), 270–289. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cars.12109>
- Milne, E. (2020). *Indigenous parent involvement in education in Edmonton Public Schools: Examining definitions and promising practices* [Research report]. Edmonton Public Schools. <https://www.albertaschoolcouncils.ca/public/download/files/181303>

- Milne, E., Lean, J., & Holmes, J. (2019). *Sharing our voice: Establishing an Indigenous parent and caregiver advisory council in EPSB* [Annual Report 2018/2019]. Indigenous Parent and Caregiver Advisory Council.  
<https://www.albertaschoolcouncils.ca/public/download/files/181304>
- Milne, E., & Wotherspoon, T. (2019) “Alignment-Plus”: Alignment with schooling requirements and cultural-bridging among Indigenous middle-class parents. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 41(1), 127–143.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01425692.2019.1668749>
- Milne, E., & Wotherspoon, T. (2020a). Schools as “really dangerous places” for Indigenous children and youth: Contradictions in pathways to reconciliation. *Canadian Review of Sociology*, 57(1), 1–19.  
<https://doi.org/10.1111/cars.12267>
- Milne, E., & Wotherspoon, T. (2020b). Seeking to improve student success by building connections between Indigenous parents and schools: A case study in Alberta, Canada. In C. Muller (Ed.), *Handbook of social justice interventions in education* (pp. 1–20). Springer.
- Milne, E., & Wotherspoon, T. (2022a). Exploring definitions of Indigenous student success. In E. Grabb, J. G. Reitz, & M. Hwang (Eds.), *Social inequality in Canada: Dimensions of disadvantage* (7th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Milne, E., & Wotherspoon, T. (2022b). Student, parent, and teacher perspectives on reconciliation-related school reforms. *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education*, 17(1), 54–67. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15595692.2022.2042803>

- Milne, E., & Wotherspoon, T. (2023). “Success is different in our eyes”: Reconciling definitions of educational success among Indigenous families and education systems. *Critical Studies in Education*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17508487.2023.2173266>
- Morris, A. (1991). *The treaties of Canada with the Indians of Manitoba and the North-West territories*. Fifth House. (Original work published 1880).
- Morrissette, P. J. (1994). The holocaust of First Nation people: Residual effects on parenting and treatment implications. *Contemporary Family Therapy, 16*(5), 381–392. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02197900>
- Moses, M. R. (2013). *Aboriginal parental involvement/engagement for student success*. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Brock University.
- Muijs, D. (2011). *Doing quantitative research in education with SPSS* (2nd ed.). Sage.
- National Association of School Psychologists. (2019). *School-family partnering to enhance learning: Essential elements and responsibilities* [Position statement].  
<https://www.nasponline.org/x26822.xml>
- National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation Canada. (2019). *TRC mini documentary: Murray Sinclair on reconciliation* [Video]. YouTube.  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wjx2zDvyzsU>
- National Indian Brotherhood/Assembly of First Nations. (1972). *Indian control of Indian education* [Policy paper]. Assembly of First Nations.  
<https://oneca.com/IndianControlofIndianEducation.pdf>
- Newchurch, A. (2017). The impact of parental involvement on student success: School and family partnership from the perspective of parents and teachers.



*Doctor of Education in Teacher Leadership Dissertations. 21.*

[https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/teachleaddoc\\_etd/21](https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/teachleaddoc_etd/21)

Nishnawbe Aski Nation. (2022a). *The Davin report*, 1979.

<http://rschools.nan.on.ca/article/the-davin-report-1879-1120.asp>

Nishnawbe Aski Nation. (2022b). *The Ryerson experiment*.

<http://rschools.nan.on.ca/article/the-ryerson-experiment-1119.asp>

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, P.L. 107-110, 20 U.S.C. §6319 (2002).

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/PLAW-107publ110/pdf/PLAW-107publ110.pdf>

OECD Directorate for Education and Skills. (2017). *Supporting success for*

*Indigenous Students*. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and

Development. <https://www.oecd.org/education/promising-practices-in-supporting-success-for-indigenous-students-9789264279421-en.htm>

Orange Shirt Society. (n.d.). *About Orange Shirt Day + Orange Shirt Society*.

<https://www.orangeshirtday.org/about-us.html>

Padilla, J. -L., & Leighton, J. P. (2017). Cognitive interviewing and think aloud

methods. In B. Zumbo & A. Hubley (Eds.), *Understanding and investigating response processes in validation research* (pp. 211–228). Springer.

[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-56129-5\\_12](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-56129-5_12)

Popping, R. (2015). Analyzing open-ended questions by means of text analysis

procedures. *Bulletin of Sociological Methodology*, 128(1), 23–39.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0759106315597389>

- Povey, J., Campbell, A., Willis, L., Haynes, M., Western, M., Bennett, S., Antrobus, E., & Pedde, C. (2016). Engaging parents in schools and building parent-school partnerships: The role of school and parent organization leadership. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 79, 128–141.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2016.07.005>
- Pratt, R. H. (1892, June 23–29). The Advantages of mingling Indians with whites. In J. Barrows (Ed.), *Proceedings of the national conference of charities and correction at the nineteenth annual session held in Denver, Colorado*. Geo. H. Ellis. [https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/sites/all/files/docs-resources/CIS-Resources\\_1892-PrattSpeech.pdf](https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/sites/all/files/docs-resources/CIS-Resources_1892-PrattSpeech.pdf)
- R. A. Malatest and Associates. (2002). *Parent and education engagement partnership project: A discussion paper*. BC Ministry of Education.  
[https://bccpac.bc.ca/upload/2016/05/parent\\_and\\_education\\_engagement\\_partnership\\_project-\\_a\\_discu.pdf](https://bccpac.bc.ca/upload/2016/05/parent_and_education_engagement_partnership_project-_a_discu.pdf)
- Reading, C. (2020). *Social determinants of health: Understanding racism*. National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health (NCCIH).  
<https://www.nccih.ca/docs/determinants/FS-Racism1-Understanding-Racism-EN.pdf>
- Reid, K. (2008). The causes of non-attendance: An empirical study. *Educational Review*, 60(4), 345–357. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131910802393381>
- Roberts, C., & Hyatt, L. (2019). *The dissertation journey: A practical and comprehensive guide to planning, writing, and defending your dissertation* (3rd ed.). Corwin.

- Romsaitong, P. & Brown, S. S. (2020). A systematic review of parental involvement in the education of their children. *ASEAN Journal of Education*, 6(1), 33–40. <https://ejournals.dusit.ac.th/openpdf/openpdf.php?id=89>
- Rose, H. A. (2018). “I didn’t get to say good-bye... didn’t get to pet my dogs or nothing”: Bioecological theory and the Indian residential school experience in Canada. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 10(2), 348–366. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12261>
- Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. (1996). *The report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*. <http://data2.archives.ca/e/e448/e011188230-01.pdf>
- Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Sage Publications.
- Sanderson, K., Hutchinson, B., & Grekul, J. (2013). Exploring the link between school attendance, developmental assets, and social capital in a First Nations community. *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies*, 4(1), 42–53. <https://doi.org/10.18357/ijcyfs41201311836>
- Sheldon, S. B., & Jung, S. B. (2018). *Student outcomes and parent teacher home visits*. Center on School, Family, & Community Partnerships, Johns Hopkins University. <https://gradelevelreading.net/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Student-Outcomes-and-Parent-Teacher-Home-Visits.pdf>
- Sheridan, S. M., Koziol, N., Witte, A. L., Iruka, I., & Knoche, L. L. (2020). Longitudinal and geographic trends in family engagement during the pre-kindergarten to kindergarten transition. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 48, 365–377. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-019-01008-5>

- Sianturi, M., Lee, J. -S., & Cumming, T. M. (2022). Using technology to facilitate partnerships between schools and Indigenous parents: A narrative review. *Education and Information Technologies*, 1–24.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-022-11427-4>
- Siedlecki, S. (2020). Understanding descriptive research designs and methods. *Clinical Nurse Specialist*, 34(1), 8–12.  
<https://doi.org/10.1097/NUR.0000000000000493>
- Skrla, L., Scheurich, J. J., Garcia, J., & Nolly, G. (2004). Equity audits: A practical leadership tool for developing equitable and excellent schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 40(1), 133–161.  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X03259148>
- Smith, D., Frey, N., Pumpian, I., & Fisher, D. (2017). *Building equity: Policies and Practices to empower all learners*. ASCD.
- Smith, T. E., Reinke, W. M., Herman, K. C., & Huang, F. (2019). Understanding family–school engagement across and within elementary and middle-school contexts. *School Psychology*, 34(4), 363–375.  
<https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000290>
- Smith, T. E., Sheridan, S. M., Kim, E. M., Park, S., & Beretvas, E. (2020). The effects of family–school partnership interventions on academic and social-emotional functioning: a meta-analysis exploring what works for whom. *Educational Psychology Review*, 32, 511–544. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10648-019-09509-w>

- Soujah, S. R. (2020). *The role of the rural principal in fostering Indigenous parent-school relationships: examples from the Yukon*. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Nebraska.
- Statistics Canada. (2021a). *Educational attainment of a person*.  
<https://www23.statcan.gc.ca/imdb/p3Var.pl?Function=DEC&Id=85134>
- Statistics Canada. (2021b). *Projections of the Indigenous populations and households in Canada, 2016 to 2041*. [https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/daily-quotidien/211006/dq211006a-eng.pdf?st=\\_ylbOx39](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/daily-quotidien/211006/dq211006a-eng.pdf?st=_ylbOx39)
- Statistics Canada. (2021c). *Study: Indigenous youth in Canada*.  
<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/daily-quotidien/211201/dq211201b-eng.pdf?st=PoTu7UH2>
- Statistics Canada. (2022, October 13). *Number of students in regular programs for youth, public, elementary and secondary schools, by Indigenous identity, grade, and sex*.  
<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tb11/en/tv.action?pid=3710021301>
- Stefanski, A., Valli, L., & Jacobson, R. (2016). Beyond involvement and engagement: The role of the family in school community partnerships. *School Community Journal, 26*(2), 135–160.  
<https://www.adi.org/journal/2016fw/StefanskiValliJacobsonFall2016.pdf>
- Tachini Drums. (2020). *The significance of the drum circle*.  
<https://tachinidrums.com/the-significance-of-the-drum-circle/>

- Tam, B. Y., Findlay, L. C., & Kohen, F. D. (2017). Indigenous families: Who do you call family? *Journal of Family Studies*, 23(3), 243–259.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13229400.2015.1093536>
- The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015a). *Honouring the truth, reconciling the future: Summary of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. [https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Executive\\_Summary\\_English\\_Web.pdf](https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Executive_Summary_English_Web.pdf)
- The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015b). *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to action*.  
[https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls\\_to\\_Action\\_English2.pdf](https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf)
- Transitions. (2016). *Supporting First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students in school & career success*. <https://oneca.com/transitions/>
- Van Vaerenbergh, Y., & Thomas, T. (2013). Response styles in survey research: A literature review of antecedents, consequences, and remedies. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 25(2), 195–217.  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/eds021>
- Walter, M., & Andersen, C. (2013). *Indigenous statistics: A quantitative research methodology*. Left Coast Press.
- Willemse, T. M., Thompson, I., Vanderlinde, R., & Mutton, T. (2018). Family–school partnerships: a challenge for teacher education. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 44(3), 252–257. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2018.1465545>

- Wotherspoon, T., & Milne, E. (2020). Public schooling and contested public discourses concerning reconciliation. *Canadian Public Policy*, 46(4), 445–457. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/790374>
- Wotherspoon, T., & Milne, E. (2021). “Errors were made” Public attitudes regarding reconciliation and education in Canada. *Canadian Review of Sociology*, 58(3), 306–326. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cars.12351>
- Yamauchi, L. A., Ponte, E., Ratliffe, K. T., & Traynor, K. (2017). Theoretical and conceptual frameworks used in research on family-school partnerships. *School Community Journal*, 27(2), 9–34. <https://www.adi.org/journal/2017fw/YamauchiEtAlFall2017.pdf>

## Appendix A

### Permission

**From:** Gartner, Karen <gartner21@up.edu>

**Sent:** May 29, 2022 1:12 PM

**To:** Emily Milne <milnee4@macewan.ca>

**Subject:** Permission

Dear Dr. Milne:

My name is Karen Gartner, and I am a doctoral student at the University of Portland. I am currently researching Parents of Self-Identified First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students. I have read a great deal of your work around parents of Students who identify as Indigenous, and I find it very proactive.

I am proposing a project for my dissertation in which I would use some of the Promising Practices you uncovered in one of your studies of Indigenous Parent Involvement in Education: Examining Definitions and Promising Practices. I am hoping to identify some of those practices in existing schools and categorize them quantitatively and compare them to attendance rates at the same schools. I would love to build on some of the amazing work you have already done. The purpose of this email is to request permission to use some of your previous work as the foundation for my dissertation. I look forward to hearing from you!

Karen Gartner

Doctoral Student

University of Portland





## Appendix B

### Research Project Application

APPLYING FROM: University of Portland

Title of Research: Describing Practices Schools Use to Engage with Indigenous Parents and Measuring the Relationship Between these Practices and Indigenous Student Achievement and Attendance

Date submitted: August 17, 2022

Proposed start date: September 1, 2022      Proposed end date: Nov 15, 2022

APPLICANT: (please print clearly)

Name: Karen Gartner

Position/Faculty Status: Doctoral Candidate

Phone: [redacted]      Email: gartner21@up.edu

Applicant Signature Karen Gartner

Date Signed and Submitted August 17, 2022

#### DESCRIPTION AND REQUIREMENT FOR RESEARCH PROJECT

Please complete the following in point form under each of the sections

1.      Description of the research project

Title    Describing Practices Schools Use to Engage Indigenous Parents and Measuring the Relationship Between These Practices and Indigenous Student Achievement and Attendance.

Objectives    The purpose of this study is to describe the ways that schools engage with Indigenous parents and principals' perceptions of the effectiveness of Indigenous parent engagement strategies as measured by the Indigenous Parent Engagement Questionnaire for School Leasers (IPEQSL). This study will also address whether these engagement strategies have a relationship with de-identified Indigenous student attendance and achievement data.

Procedure    This study will take place in two parts. Participants (school principals whose Indigenous student population exceeds 5% of total school population) will be asked to fill out an open and closed ended questionnaire (this will take about 20 minutes). The survey will also ask participants to name their school; this information will be used to match survey responses to data collected in phase 2.

The second part of the study will be data collection: providing the researcher with previously collected attendance reports from the 2021-2022 school year (available

from PowerSchool) and a pdf copy of individual school Accountability Pillar Results for Annual Education Results Report (AERR) – to be released by Alberta Ed in the fall of 2022.

#### Evaluation instruments

Indigenous Parent Engagement Questionnaire for School Leaders (IPEQSL)  
(attached)

AERR - Accountability Pillar Results for Annual Education Results Report (exemplar attached)

Attendance Report (exemplar attached)

#### Link to Division Goals

This project connects to the [redacted] Public Schools' Three Year Education Plan's Assurance Elements ensuring that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students are successful. Your focus on student success and achievement through multiple partnerships and community collaboration closely links to this research study. There is limited research describing best practices in Indigenous parent engagement and measuring their effects on Indigenous student attendance and achievement. As I am sure you are aware, engaging Indigenous parents offers the highest impact on Indigenous student outcomes (OECD, 2017). Looking for relationships between parent engagement practices and attendance and student achievement can inform stakeholders and the professional community on best engagement practices and is an important step in reducing gaps for Students who identify as Indigenous.

## 2. Educational Value

A recent survey released by Statistics Canada (2021) indicates more Indigenous youth are completing high school; however, gaps continue to exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous youth – in 2016, 70% of Indigenous youth completed high school while 91% of non-Indigenous youth did. Within Alberta, 62% of Students who identify as Indigenous have completed high school, while 83% of non-Students who identify as Indigenous completed high school (Alberta Government, 2021). Finding ways to reduce gaps is important to our Canadian society and Albertans in particular. Seeking ways to contribute to Students who identify as Indigenous' academic success is a responsibility of all educational organizations.

An in-depth report from the Organization for Economic Development (OECD, 2017) suggests that engaging Indigenous families at the school level offers the highest impact to student success. A Key policy report from the Council of Ministers of Education (CMEC, 2012) points out that increasing Indigenous parental involvement and community engagement in education was one of the key priorities in improving outcomes for Students who identify as Indigenous. The Truth and Reconciliation Call to Action 10 vi. requests the government to include a commitment to enabling

[Indigenous] parents to fully participate in the education of their children; this commitment should be echoed in our schools as well.

In a focus group study by Milne in 2020, Indigenous parents claimed they wanted to have a relationship with schools that was different than their own parent's relationship with the education system. They also claimed that it was important for schools to reach out to Indigenous parents proactively. Indigenous parents in this study also spoke about the importance of Indigenous liaisons and language programs.

The next step is to measure these implementations at the institution or school level. This is what my study intends to do. The IPEQSL survey asks school principals about their engagement practices, such as having access to Indigenous liaisons or Indigenous language programs, then asks principals to measure their perceived effectiveness. These results will be compared with student attendance and achievement data to look for patterns and relationships. Do students in schools who have an Indigenous liaison attend more often? Do they score higher in Provincial Achievement Tests? It is important to measure the programs we have in place.

There is a negligible amount of quantitative research measuring school-implemented Indigenous practices (Walter and Anderson, 2013). The 2012 CMEC (Canadian Ministers of Education, Canada) report states that many proposed interventions for increasing engagement for Indigenous parents lack the quantitative evidence necessary to properly evaluate their effectiveness. Their 2019-2022 three-year CMEC Indigenous Education Plan stresses the importance of measuring implementations in order to advance the work of reconciliation in Canada. Sklra et al., (2004) suggest that using school data such as attendance is an important piece of measuring equity in our schools.

It is clear from reviewing your Education Plan, that First Nations, Métis, and Inuit student success is a priority of your school district. This research study would allow us to measure Indigenous parent-engagement implementations and their perceived effectiveness through principal perceptions. Having this knowledge in hand could help inform future decisions and budgetary planning decisions within the district. This type of research can also help inform the government and allow for increased funding requests in areas that show a demonstrated relationship with improving Indigenous student outcomes.

### 3. Personnel and Time Expectations

Anticipated Duration 3 months (between initial contact and commencement of data analysis)      September to November)

Length/School visits Principals complete survey - 20 minutes

Personnel you wish to participate Principals in schools with an Indigenous student population of 5% or more

Reports to be pulled by division staff or principals. Principals will be emailed a Qualtrics link by division staff to complete the survey. The researcher will be available to speak at a staff meeting if needed.

Contacting Teachers Principals will not need to be contacted directly by researcher

Identification of Participants Participants will be identified by schools that have self-reported First Nations, Métis, and Inuit student populations exceeding 5% of the total school population. Most principals would know this or can easily pull up this information in PowerSchool.

Time requirements Survey: 20 minutes

#### Data Collection:

Attendance Aggregated by First Nations status. First Nations non-status, Métis, and Inuit (estimated duration to pull report – (7 minutes max per report) Tutorial available

Accountability Pillar Results for Annual Education Results Report AERR – per individual school – (2 minutes max per report)

The data collection phase of this study can be done by principals or division staff – I am happy to pay for coverage for an employee to pull these reports – or I can send over a research associate (if you prefer – if you would allow access). The times listed above are generous. If run at division level – for example, if you had about 30 schools x 9 minutes = 270 minutes.

Expectation teachers leave classroom: n/a

#### 4. Timeline

Anticipated project timeline and completion date.

When you are creating timelines for conducting research in schools, remember to include four to eight weeks for processing the application.

NOTE: Normally, research to be conducted in the schools is not encouraged during the months of May, June, July August and September.

Timeline	Phase
Aug/Sept 2022	District approval –
October 2022	Survey distribution
Oct/Nov 2022	Data Collection reports forwarded to researcher

#### 5. Ethics Review

This research was approved by the University of Portland on July 28, 2022. The approval is attached to this application. Consent forms (embedded), surveys and interview questions are attached. The web address for the Ethics policies at the University of Portland is [www.up.edu/irb/](http://www.up.edu/irb/)

## Appendix C

### Email to Principals

Good Morning!

My name is Karen Gartner, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Portland.

Your school district is supporting my research study on Engaging Parents of Indigenous students. I am asking you to complete a principal questionnaire that should take less than 15 minutes to complete,

Here is a video introducing my study. Once you have viewed it, please complete the attached survey link below.

Introduction to Survey Video (3:40)

Survey Link

**Can you please complete this survey by Friday, October 28th?** Thank you for your time! Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns (or would like a copy of my dissertation once it's complete).

All the best!

Karen Gartner  
Doctoral Candidate  
University of Portland  
gartner21@up.edu  
[redacted]

## Appendix D

### Transcript of Video Introduction Sent to Principals

Hi, my name is Karen Gartner and I'm a doctoral candidate with the University of Portland I'm also an educator here in Alberta I just want to give you a bit more information about my study before you complete the survey this should be attached to the same email as this video.

The focus of my study is on engaging Indigenous parents. I've always been curious about how engaging with parents of our students can contribute to Student Success. There are many benefits of parent engagement that include promoting healthy behaviors to support child development as well as improving student achievement scores. Improving parent engagement can also decrease unhealthy behaviors such as substance abuse and violence. Improving parent engagement has also been shown to decrease student absenteeism - in some cases up to 20 percent.

As I've been learning more about parent engagement I can't help wondering about our Indigenous parent population how does one go from living with cultural genocide to embracing partnership with the same type of institution that caused the harm in the first place this is a question that resonates with me and continues to guide my research I am curious about the purposeful efforts schools use to engage with their Indigenous parents the organization for economic development did a study on promising practices in supporting Indigenous students in 2017. The study reported that engaging Indigenous families offers the highest impact to Indigenous educational outcomes for the lowest cost. Purposely engaging Indigenous parents can offer a significant benefit to our students.

The purpose of this research study is to describe how schools engage with Indigenous parents. I'm very interested in the strategies that you are using, so please be as explicit as you can when providing details that will help inform us of what you do in your school. I'm also going to give you an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies you use. I want to remind you that your responses will be confidential and not shared with your school districts so please be as candid as possible. I will also be asking you for demographic data which will include specific details about your school I'll be using this information to look for patterns between school responses for engaging Indigenous parents and Indigenous student attendance as well as achievement data, so I really need you to include as much demographic data as you can as this will be important to my study.

Again, I want to remind you that your responses will remain confidential and will only be shared in the aggregate form. Finally I just want to say thank you for contributing to this very important body of knowledge and for the many contributions you make to your Student Success if you have any questions or concerns don't hesitate to contact me. If you would like a link to my completed study, please email me, and I will be happy to share it with you when it's complete. Once again, thank you for your time and I wish you the very best in your educational journey

## Appendix E

### **Indigenous Parent Engagement Questionnaire for School Leaders**

This survey is part of a research study conducted by Karen Gartner as part of the University of Portland School of Education doctoral program. The purpose of this research study is to **describe the ways that schools engage with parents of Students who identify as Indigenous**, and principals' **perceptions of the effectiveness of Indigenous parent engagement practices** as measured by the Indigenous Parent Engagement Questionnaire for School Leaders (EPIS-QSL) and **whether these engagement practices have a relationship with previously collected Indigenous Student de-identified attendance and achievement data**. If you agree to participate, please complete the attached survey. If at any point you decide that you no longer want to participate, you may close this window to end the survey.

This is a **confidential survey** and there are **no anticipated risks** to your participation in this survey; however, it is unlikely yet possible that a data breach could occur with the Qualtrics survey and that the data may not be truly confidential. All data will be kept in a password protected computer and will be reported in the aggregate.

This research is non-evaluative and there will be no links to your name or your school name mentioned in the study.

Participating in this research project will help **contribute to the general body of knowledge on engaging parents of Students who identify as Indigenous**. These results may be published anonymously in a conference or journal paper. However, we cannot guarantee that you personally will receive any benefits from this research.



Your participation is voluntary, and your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your relationship with University of Portland or your school district. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact Karen Gartner at [redacted] or at gartner21@up.edu or my faculty advisor Dr. Jacqueline Waggoner at waggoner@up.edu. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB (IRB@up.edu).

Do you consent to participating in this survey?

Yes, I consent.

No, I do not consent.

This questionnaire is a combination of open responses, closed responses, and rating responses. Please respond to each question by considering the practices that you are aware of at your school to the best of your knowledge. **Please base your responses on the previous 2021-2022 school year.**

Qualifier: Is the Indigenous population at your school 5% or more of the total student population?

Yes

No

I'm not sure

Qualifier: Were you posted at your current school during the 2021-2022 school year?

Yes

No

Tip: The questions below are designed to reflect **your school's practices that foster Indigenous parent engagement**. Please keep this in mind in your responses.

Does your school employ a person who acts as a liaison between **Indigenous families**

**and the school?**

Yes: Full-Time

Yes: Part-Time

No

Does the liaison identified in the previous question self-identify as Indigenous?

Yes

No

What is the job title of the liaison person at your school? Please provide a brief description if applicable.

---



---

Approximately how long have you had a liaison role designed to foster Indigenous parent engagement in your school?

Less than a year

1-2 years

3-4 years

5 or more years

Does your school offer programs to support **Indigenous languages for Indigenous families**? (These are not just programs for students - but include families as well).

Yes

Previously, but not for the 2021-2022 school year

No

Why did your school not offer programs to support **Indigenous languages for Indigenous families** in the **2021-2022** school year?

---

---

Please provide a short description of the language programs you offer (or have offered) that are designed to **foster Indigenous parent engagement**.

---



---

What **practices** does your school use to **specifically foster Indigenous parent engagement**? Please list as many as you can as this will add to the body of knowledge surrounding Indigenous parent engagement and can be used by other schools as a reference.

---

What is your opinion on the **effectiveness of these practices**? *Please provide specific examples if you can.*

---

Does your school provide support or assistance **specifically to Indigenous families** to help them **navigate educational transitions** from one grade to the next? Please select all that apply.

Transitions to Early Childhood Services (Pre-K and/or Kindergarten)

Transitions to Div 1 (grades 1 - 3)

Transitions to Div 2 (grades 4 - 6)

Transitions to Div 3 (grades 7 - 9)

Transitions to Div 4 (grades 10 - 12)

Transitions to University

We do not specifically support educational transitions at this time

We have supported educational transitions in the past, but we did not during the 2021-2022 school year.

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

What practices does your school use to specifically assist Indigenous families in navigating educational transitions?

---



---

What is the **primary method of communicating** with Indigenous parents at your school?

text messaging

phone calls

emails

face-to-face

school website

school newsletter

other \_\_\_\_\_

Would you like to provide more information on the way your school communicates with Indigenous parents?

---



---



---

Does your school offer **alternate forms of academic student reporting** (report cards) for Indigenous families (for example, printed progress reports versus online reporting)?

Yes

Previously, but not now

No

What alternate methods of reporting student academic achievement (report cards)

does your school offer to Indigenous families?

---



---

Does your school have Indigenous representation on your parent council?

Yes

In the past, but not for the 2021-2022 school year

No

I'm not sure

Does your school purposely seek out opportunities to invite parents or family members of Students who identify as Indigenous to the parent council?

Yes

In the past, but not for the 2021-2022 school year (2)

No (3)

Please describe the practices your school uses to purposely **welcome Indigenous parents or family members** of Students who identify as Indigenous to the **parent council**?

---



---

Does your school seek opportunities to welcome parents of Students who identify as Indigenous into the school?

Often

Sometimes

Rarely

Never

Please provide examples of opportunities your school uses to **welcome Indigenous parents into your school**.

---

---

In what ways, if at all, do **differences** between Indigenous and Western family structures or guardian status **present a challenge** for registering Students who identify as Indigenous?

---

---

Please describe any **barriers** that prevent your school from **engaging with Indigenous parents**.

---

---

Based on your responses to the above questions, how would you **rate your school** at engaging parents of self-identified Students who identify as Indigenous? **Reminder:** *Your responses will be kept confidential and will not be shared with your school district!*

Very Poor

Poor

Fair

Good

Very Good

Excellent

Is there **anything else** you would like to share about your school engaging with Indigenous parents?

---

---

Demographics The next section of the questionnaire will ask for **demographic data** from your school.

This information is extremely **IMPORTANT** and will be used to:

- provide a better understanding of the Indigenous population at your school
- compare to your school's attendance data (2021-2022 school attendance data)
- compare to your school's provincial achievement results (AERR report)
- compare to other schools' Indigenous attendance and achievement data

**Your responses will be kept confidential from your school division and only reported in aggregate form.**

THANK YOU FOR CONTRIBUTING TO THIS BODY OF KNOWLEDGE!

What is the name of your **school district**?

---

What is the **name** of your **school**?

---

What is your **position** in your school?

Principal

Assistant Principal

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Do you self-identify as Indigenous?

Yes

No

Which best describes your school? Select all that apply.

Div 1: Kindergarten to Grade 3

Div 2: Grades 4 - 6

Div 3: Grades 7 - 9

Div 4: Grades 10-12

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Approximately how many **students attend** your school?

\_\_\_\_\_

How many students in your school self-identify as **First Nations - status** according to their **2021-2022** registration?

**Tip:** To find this out you can go to 2021-2022 school year and type S\_AB\_STU\_X.FNMI=331 in the PowerSchool student search bar.

\_\_\_\_\_

How many students in your school self-identify as **First Nations - non-status** according to their **2021-2022** registration?

**Tip:** To find this out you can go to the 2021-2022 school year and type S\_AB\_STU\_X.FNMI=332 in the PowerSchool student search bar.

\_\_\_\_\_

How many students in your school self-identify as **Métis** according to their **2021-2022** registration?

**Tip:** To find this out, you can go to the 2021-2022 school year and type S\_AB\_STU\_X.FNMI=333 in the PowerSchool student search bar.

\_\_\_\_\_

How many students in your school self-identify as **Inuit** according to their **2021-2022** registration?

**Tip:** To find this out, you can go to the 2021-2022 school year and type S\_AB\_STU\_X.FNMI=334 in the PowerSchool student search bar.

\_\_\_\_\_

How many students in your school indicate they **reside on-reserve** according to their 2021-2022 registration?

**Tip:** To find this out, you can go to the **2021-2022** school year and type S\_AB\_STU\_X.FNMI=330 in the PowerSchool student search bar.

\_\_\_\_\_



## **Appendix F**

### **Cultural Celebrations**

#### **Bear Witness Day**

This day is celebrated on May 10 and recognizes the first time the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal called for Canada to implement Jordan's Principle, human rights legislation implementing a child-first policy to ensure that all First Nations children received the service and supports they need. This holiday recognizes the story of Jordan River Anderson, a First Nations child who was born with multiple disabilities. When he was two, it was recommended that he move to a special home to meet his complex medical needs. Federal and provincial governments could not agree on who should pay for these medical costs. Jordan passed away at the age of 5, still in the hospital awaiting funding resolutions. Jordan's Principle states that First Nations children should get the services and support they need – the government can work out payments later. More information can be found on this website:

<https://fncaringsociety.com/events/bear-witness-day> (First Nations Child & Family Caring Society, n.d.).

#### **Drum Circles**

A drum circle consists of a gathering of a group of people who play drums or other percussion instruments. They stand or sit around a circle and drum. The beat of the drum represents Mother Earth's heartbeat. Many say that these ceremonies can build connection, improve moods, and improve spirits. More information on drum circles can be found on <https://tachinidrums.com/the-significance-of-the-drum-circle/> (Tachini Drums, 2020).

## **Feasts**

Feasting can be a small or large group gathering. Larger groups often have drumming, singing, and dancing. Feasts are opportunities to acknowledge spirits, ancestors, relatives, and community for the assistance they have given. Foods vary according to the customs of the community. Many feasts include an offering of tobacco as well. For more information of feasts, go to <https://aht.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Giveaways.pdf> (Anishnawbe Health Toronto, 2000).

## **Indigenous Graduation Ceremonies**

Schools often honour Indigenous graduates and their families in a ceremony that recognizes Indigenous culture. Although the ceremony varies from school to school, some schools offer their graduates a special gift, such as a blanket. Some graduates can order beaded graduation caps. The event also provides a celebration with music and dance for the convocating students and their families.

## **National Indigenous Peoples Day**

This day (formerly known as National Aboriginal Day) takes place on June 21 each year and has been recognized since 1996. The day was initially chosen for symbolic reasons as it takes place during the summer solstice – the longest day of the year. The day is set aside to further learning of Indigenous people and continue the work of reconciliation. More information can be found on this website.

<https://www.bctreaty.ca/national-indigenous-peoples-day-2022> (BC Treaty Commission, 2022).

## **National Day for Truth and Reconciliation/Orange Shirt Day**

Orange shirt day was first celebrated on September 30, 2021, and is now

celebrated as a statutory holiday, the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. The date was chosen as it was near the time when students returned to their residential schools for the next year. Phyllis (Jack) Webstad's story is about the pride and excitement of having a new shirt to wear when she first arrived at residential school. However, the orange shirt was taken away from her and made her feel like she didn't matter. Phyllis described the sadness and confusion she felt when her shirt was taken and not returned. Today, many students and staff wear orange shirts on September 30 to raise awareness of intergenerational trauma and promote the concept that every child matters (Circle Teachings, 2023). More information on Orange Shirt Day can be found on this website: <https://www.orangeshirtday.org/about-us.html> (Orange Shirt Society, n.d.).

### **Powwows**

A powwow is an Indigenous cultural gathering that celebrates and reinforces social and spiritual bonds. There are two main types of powwows: competitive and traditional. Often, they contain dance demonstrations and competitions as well as initiations. Many people who attend powwows wear bright, meaningful, and colourful clothing embedded with spiritual significance. Often there is a giveaway at the end of these events. Learn more about powwows here: <https://www.alberta.ca/powwow-gatherings.aspx> (Alberta Government, n.d.).

### **Round Dances**

The Round Dance can be done as either a memorial or as a celebration that promotes healing. This event often starts with a pipe ceremony and a feast. The drums represent a heartbeat. All gather and join hands in a circle. As more come, the circle

gets larger. The circle moves to the left as that is the way the earth moves around the sun. The feet represent our close connection to the earth. The celebration ends with a giveaway to honour the intent of the celebration and thanks to those who have attended the evening (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2019).