



Equity Lab

A REPORT ON EQUITY FOR INDIGENOUS
LEARNERS IN SURREY SCHOOLS





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Territorial Acknowledgment

HONOURING THE LAND-BASED NATIONS

Working on the unceded traditional territories of the Semiahmoo, Kwantlen, Katzie, Qayqayt and Kwikwetlem, and Tsawwassen peoples, Equity Lab puts our hands up to the Land-Based Nations for allowing us to do this work on their unceded territories.

Meet the Chief of Semiahmoo First Nation Harley Chappell

Chief Harley Chappell Equity Lab's Campfire Gathering. He grounded Equity Lab in the collective responsibility to address systemic racism and foster equity for Indigenous learners in Surrey Schools.



EQUITY LAB'S MISSION:

To make Surrey Schools the **best**
place for **Indigenous Learners**.



Welcome to

Equity Lab

First Peoples Principles of Learning

- Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.
- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).
- Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions.
- Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities.
- Learning recognizes the role of Indigenous knowledge.
- Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.
- Learning involves patience and time.
- Learning requires exploration of one's identity.
- Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations.

<http://www.fnesc.ca/first-peoples-principles-of-learning/>



A Word from Equity Lab During the Covid-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has had major impacts for Indigenous families and communities in Surrey. Equity Lab Facilitators have heard that some on-line school measures are challenging for some Indigenous learners. We recognize that Aboriginal Learning - Surrey Schools has taken initiative to respond to Indigenous learner needs and to ensure their success during the COVID-19 pandemic. Equity Lab recognizes the energy and emotional toll that conducting a system-wide

strategy on racism can have on Surrey School staff. It may seem like a daunting task to conduct a research process on equity for Indigenous learners, families, and communities in these unprecedented times. Equity Lab would like to recognize the continued commitment of all participants who have assisted in the research, data collection and sharing of community wisdom on this critical issue of equity and the efforts made to apply the First Peoples Principles of Learning.



Introduction

With a focus on student achievement, the Ministry of Education (MoE) undertook a multi-year project (2016-2018) to develop, pilot, and implement an Equity Scan for use by school districts to identify barriers and challenges that Aboriginal learners experience within BC's education sector. Surrey Schools bases Equity Lab (EL), an Indigenous-Led Social Innovation Lab, on the Equity Scan framework from the BC Ministry of Education and has adapted it to meet the needs of the Indigenous community in Surrey. Currently, Equity Lab is spearheading a district-wide Equity Scan: a practical, systemic and action-oriented approach to taking further responsibility for the historic inequities in education and to problem solve solutions with diverse participants from across the

system including community members, Surrey Schools leadership and staff. Between March and June 2020, EL facilitators collected data to identify promising practices and barriers affecting Indigenous student achievement and success at various scales (e.g., district, school and classroom levels). Grounded in the principle of "Centering Indigenous Wisdom" and guide groups were established to answer questions provided by the MoE. Guide groups consist of the following:

- **Caregivers**
- **Director(s) of Instruction**
- **SPVPA**
- **Helping Teachers / Teacher Advocates**
- **Aboriginal Child and Youth Care Workers (ACYCW's)**

Introduction

On December 7th and 8th, 2020, Equity Lab virtually convened diverse leaders within Surrey Schools and Indigenous community members/subject matter experts with lived experience. Equity Lab called this event a "Campfire (an Indigenous social innovation lab term coined by Skookum Lab)".

Chief Harley Chappell opened the two-day session. He grounded the group's time in collective responsibility to address systemic racism and foster equity for Indigenous learners in Surrey Schools. We were able to capture some of his sharing during the Campfire:

Western world views, when introduced at contact brought a new way of life for Indigenous people in our territory. When you talk about systematic racism in the education system, from an Indigenous worldview, we need to look at the roots of our current education systems. In Canada, the residential school system was developed to assimilate our First Nations people into mainstream society. If you think of the challenge, that our children, those children, faced, not only on the on the receiving end of horrendous abuses, but also the completely restructuring of their worldview, forcefully...

The community wisdom shared in the Campfire by Indigenous community members provided a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of Indigenous learners and family members in Surrey Schools.

Gordon Powell, Surrey School's Principal expressed at the end of the Campfire:

"As our system empowers Indigenous families to be in charge of their own education, to have a say in their education; nothing about us, without us and that whole idea that if we are empowering families [then] we're also helping the entire system

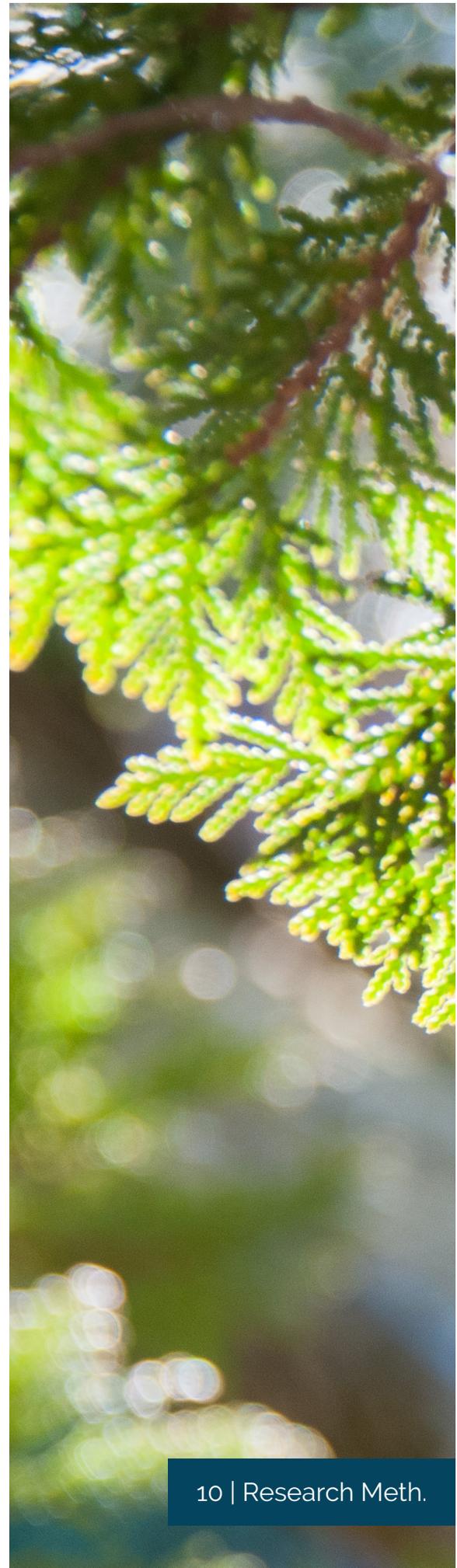
In this report, the results of the scan highlight how racism and bias and a lack of implementation of the First Peoples Principles of learning impacts Indigenous learners in Surrey. That said, there has been many recommendations developed by Equity Lab participants and "bright spots" where we are seeing change. This is a hopeful call to action to continue to work together.

Research Methodology

Equity Lab uses a strengths-based and trauma-informed approach that celebrates Surrey Schools' accomplishments in closing the gaps for Indigenous learners.

Equity Lab's methods uplift the wisdom of Indigenous-community members and local champions who recognize the need for change and are at the table with energy and willingness to do this work.

Diverse participants contributing to Equity Lab from across the District, including local Indigenous leaders, principals, vice-principals, ACYCW's, teachers as well as the superintendent, vice superintendents, and other Surrey schools leadership. Equity Lab aims to reveal the current reality for Indigenous learners in Surrey Schools using the 4 Key Quadrants.

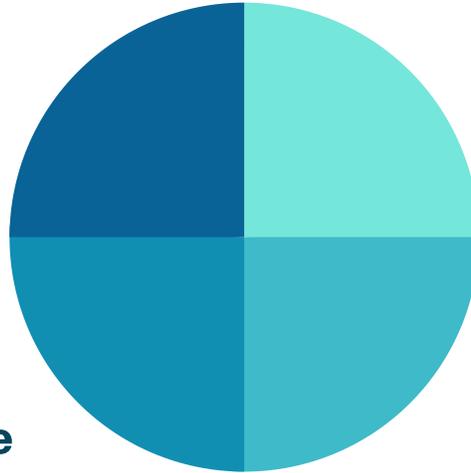


4 Quadrants

ASSESSING EQUITY AT SURREY SCHOOLS

Policy & Governance
25%

Learning Environment
25%



Learning Profile
25%

Pedagogical Core
25%

Equity Lab assesses the level of advancement in terms of equity for Indigenous learners in 4 "Quadrants". The number four is significant for many nations across Turtle Island and in keeping this tradition; these 4 Key Quadrants uplift a holistic path to equity, grounded in reciprocal relationship building, within the school system.

These 4 Quadrants were developed from the Ministry of Education in their second recommendations which are outlined in the Equity Lab Framework. In this report, the Equity Lab team will present a municipal scan which are Skookum Lab's (Surrey-based) findings on Indigenous education.



Campfire Process

WHAT IS A CAMPFIRE?

Campfire gatherings are a time to synthesize data collected with key participants including Surrey Schools Leadership, parents, students, Surrey Schools staff and _____ experts

In this report, the Equity Lab Team has synthesized content generated by Campfire participants. Importantly, this section documents how participants assessed each Equity Lab Quadrants:

- (1) Policy and Governance,**
- (2) Learning Environment (Where we teach),**
- (3) How we Teach, and**
- (4) Learning Profile (what we know about each student).**

Prior to the Campfire, participants familiarized themselves with the 4 Lab Quadrants. Participants were divided up into 4 groups to focus on one quadrant. The groups each had representation from Surrey Schools leadership, educators, and the Indigenous community to analyze and implement recommendations for each area.

Indigenous families from Surrey provided the backbone support for Equity Lab by courageous and hopeful conversations with Lab Facilitators. At the Campfire, three parents shared their lived experience of their children attending Surrey Schools.

LISTENING TO COMMUNITY VOICES

Equity Lab uplifts the voices, bravery, and strength of the Indigenous community in this work. The first step in this process was creating space and time for Surrey Schools to listen to the community with the intention of "centering" their wisdom in this equity in action process.



Community Wisdom

LEADERSHIP LISTENING TO COMMUNITY



RAVINA DHALIWAL + KRYSTAL DUMAIS

Ravina Dhaliwal (right) is a local social innovation coordinator, scholar and artist. She discussed her son's experiences in Surrey Schools and the weight of the past and present legacy of the residential school system.

Krystal Dumais (left) is a leader with Surrey Schools PACs as the president of both the KPU and Surrey Schools Parent Advisory Council. She shared the challenges related to her son's learning assessments. Also, Krystal's 10-year-old daughter shared a territorial opening on Day two.

MEGAN ROSSO

Megan Rosso is a local community organizer and leader in the Indigenous employment sector in Surrey and Surrey Schools parent. Megan discussed how she has experienced the hyper-vigilance of staff who are quick to report to the Ministry of Child and Family Development. Also, there is an over-representation of ministry calls for Indigenous families in Surrey.



Definitions

EQUITY

"Educational equity means that every child receives whatever she/he/they need to develop his/her/their academic potential and to thrive every day... academically, as well as social-emotionally. Educational equity means that there is no predictability of success or failure that correlates with any social or cultural factor—a child's educational experience is not predictable because of their race, ethnicity, linguistic background, economic class, religion, gender, sexual orientation, physical and cognitive ability, or any other socio-political identity marker."

(p. 6) Aguilar, E. (2020). Coaching for equity. Conversations that change practice. Jossey-Boss.

RACISM

Racism is grounded in beliefs of racial inequality: the socially constructed idea that one race is superior to another. It is enacted through unfair treatment and a lack of opportunities for specific racialized groups. Anti-Indigenous racism specifically refers to the pervasive and diverse ways that racism is perpetuated towards Indigenous peoples. Authors of the BC Anti-Racism Report (2015) named different ways racism is expressed in schools, including:

- **Verbal attacks**
- **Psychological abuse**
- **Low expectations**
- **Social isolation and marginalization**
- **Professional indifference**
- **Systemic racism**
- **Denial of racism and its effects**
- **Contested racism**

Definitions

ANTI-INDIGENOUS SYSTEMIC RACISM

“Anti-Indigenous [systemic] racism is embedded at all levels of society. Interpersonal, community, institutional, provincial, national, and global systems are intentionally and unintentionally destructive towards Indigenous livelihoods. This is precisely why racism is so deeply embedded in Indigenous people’s daily lives.” - Seeing Racism Through an Indigenous Social Innovation Lens: Learning and Reflections from Skookum Lab Anti-Racism Symposium 2020.

BRIGHT SPOTS

When conducting systems mapping exercises it is important to document bright spots, meaning “what is working” or “what is right,” when addressing complex social issues. Cultural Safety



CULTURAL SAFETY AND CULTURAL HUMILITY

Cultural safety means an environment which is spiritually, socially and emotionally safe, as well as physically safe for people; where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need” (Williams, 1992)

The First Nations Health Authority (BC) defines cultural safety and humility:

Cultural safety is an outcome based on respectful engagement that recognizes and strives to address power imbalances. It results in an environment free of racism and discrimination, where people feel safe when receiving health care.

Cultural humility is a process of self-reflection to understand personal and systemic biases and to develop and maintain respectful processes and relationships based on mutual trust. Cultural humility involves humbly acknowledging oneself as a learner when it comes to understanding another’s experience.

Definitions

INDIGENOUS TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE

Indigenous trauma-informed practice is an emerging methodology benefiting both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples alike. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), an organization in the United States, describes a trauma-informed program, organization, or system as one that (2014, p. 9):

1. Realizes the widespread impact of trauma and understands potential paths for recovery
2. Recognizes the signs and symptoms of trauma in clients, families, staff, and others involved with the system
3. Responds by fully integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, and practices
4. Seeks to actively resist re-traumatization of both persons served and staff.

Indigenous trauma-informed practice invites the program, organization or system to deeply understand the legacy of trauma and on-going traumas in Indigenous communities, including urban-Indigenous communities.

SKOOKUM LAB FINDINGS

Work through the Skookum Lab revealed how inter-generational and current traumas exist for almost every family in Surrey. Inter-generational traumas related to residential school experiences have prevented the transfer of parenting skills, with severe impacts on family systems. Other inter-generational traumas include displacement from homelands through government policy, the Sixties Scoop and poverty-related issues. Displacement has severed Indigenous persons from cultural supports, and this has proven dire to family systems. Current traumas faced by urban Indigenous families include hyper-vigilance families experience with the over-representation in calls to the Ministry of Children and Family. Education-related traumas include, for example, activities asking students to “name the good things that Christopher Columbus did.” Many teachers or staff may not be aware of the painful, visceral reactions this can cause in Indigenous learners and families.

Equity Boosts

Equity Boosts are key factors identified by BC's Ministry of Education (MoE) to aid in the Equity Lab process. Equity Boosts include:

A. Respect for Indigenous ways of knowing and learning. There is a commitment to the First Peoples' Principles of Learning. Indigenous ways of knowing and learning are embedded across all curriculum areas and the system is welcoming to Indigenous learners.

B. Professional commitment to responsibility to intentional action. Adults in the organization are committed to creating the conditions for success for all Indigenous learners. Learners know that the adults around them believe that they will be successful, and those beliefs are associated with high standards.

C. Instruction and interventions are evidence-informed and routinely monitored. The system monitors each learner's progress towards graduation and provides interventions as needed. Learners are inspired to achieve at high levels. Information systems are used to alert educators to make appropriate adjustments in pedagogy as required.

D. Focused professional development and collaborative cultures of practice educators look to colleagues and to research on learning to improve methods of reaching and teaching Indigenous learners. Student success is elevated when educators collaborate to solve pedagogical challenges and to advance skills.

E. Awareness of bias and privilege when educators understand how bias and privilege can impact learning, they can make adjustments in order to create strong feelings of belonging and value in the learning environment. For Indigenous learners, feelings of belonging and being valued are key factors for their success.





Indigenous Social Innovation

COMMUNITY APPROACHES THAT UPLIFT INDIGENOUS WISDOM

Indigenous social innovation is a collaborative method of conducting research that uplifts Indigenous community wisdom while using systems thinking to address complex social issues. By honouring the gifts of the diverse participants involved, Equity Lab has been gifted with multiple perspectives that help to define:

- (1) how the issue is impacting Indigenous learners in Surrey,**
- (2) illuminate bright spots in the systems (i.e. what is working well) and**
- (3) identify blind spots and possible barriers to change.**

Research & Partnership in Surrey

The Surrey Urban Indigenous Leadership Committee (SUILC) was formed in 2015 to bring much-needed action to diverse issues that disproportionately affect Indigenous populations in Surrey, BC.

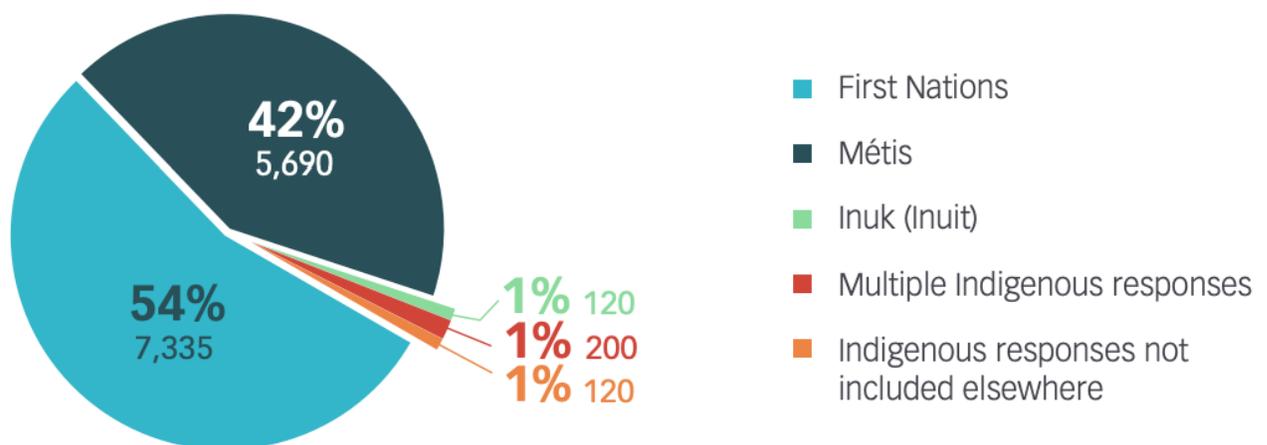
Surrey Schools has been an active member of SUILC since its inception. Partnership with Skookum Lab.

Skookum Lab was created by the SUILC to address the issue of Indigenous child and poverty. It is one of North America's first Indigenous-led social innovation labs. Throughout

Skookum Lab's community engagement and research, the theme of education was highlighted throughout Skookum Lab's initial research.

Skookum Lab has now released a number of reports that illuminate the lived history of, and current realities of Indigenous, Metis and Inuit people living in Surrey. These reports can be found here:

<https://surreyindigenousleadership.ca/skookum-lab/reports>



Indigenous population by Indigenous identity, Surrey 2016. Source: Skookum Lab 2019



Skookum Lab's Research

Skookum's Community Engagement Findings on Education The theme of education has been woven through Skookum's Community Engagement Findings and the Anti-Racism Report developed by the Skookum Lab Team.

In the initial community engagement phase of the Lab, hundreds of participants noted that there is a significant need for education-related interventions, projects, and programs such as:

- Indigenous knowledge and teaching styles (pedagogy) into the curriculum
- Enhanced curriculum that better incorporates spiritual teachings, language, culture, history and healing in schools and shifting the curriculum to meet the needs of the diverse Indigenous population in Surrey. This is in alignment with BC's Revised Curriculum which embeds Indigenous knowledge and perspectives into every grade's curriculum.
- Indigenous elementary and high schools in Surrey
- More after school programming that is culturally responsive
- Land-based education
- Culture camps
- Presence of Elders within the schools. Whole-family learning on Indigenous issues and more resources for parents
- Indigenous trauma-informed practices in schools
- Elective courses in Indigenous studies made more readily available
- Indigenous arts in schools
- Teaching effective communication methods

Skookum Lab's Research

There was an emphasis on whole-family learning; participants felt that family-based teaching in Surrey School would have great impacts on fostering “cultural safety” and “bias reduction” in families. Under the theme of education, there were many responses that spoke about school culture.

“Participants indicated a need for tolerant and welcoming schools where people have increased cultural awareness and celebrate Indigenous cultures. They noted that students should be able to see their identity reflected in their schools and that teachers practice cultural humility” (Skookum Lab Community Engagement Findings, 2018, p.2). Participants discussed stereotyping and racism in the education system

where Indigenous students are often labelled with negative stereotypes. Similarly, participants noted that service providers may hold bias, lack cultural competency, and misunderstand trauma for Indigenous clients” (Skookum Lab Community Engagement Findings, 2018).

In the theme of Advocacy, Knowledge and Awareness: “Participants primarily identified the need for increased awareness about the impacts of colonization and intergenerational trauma. To increase knowledge, participants suggested having more resource and knowledge centres, and including trauma-informed practices in school”

(Skookum Lab Community Engagement Findings, 2018 p.2).





Equity Lab Findings

Equity Lab Community-Based Research Findings



During Equity Lab's initial research, community members including parents, students and staff were interviewed to help define the issue of equity for Indigenous learners and offer possible ways to intervene. During these interviews, 5 key themes were identified:

1. **Access to Indigenous Culture & Cultural Safety in Schools**
2. **Communication & Active Participation**
3. **Continuity**
4. **A shift in the Curriculum**
5. **Racism & Bias**

Theme 1 - Access to Indigenous Culture & Cultural Safety in Schools

Cultural education: Urban Indigenous caregivers have not grown up with their culture. Surrey Schools could be a catalyst for change if they did a good job of embedding Indigenous cultural education within the classroom, playground and institution. Surrey Schools as a "gathering place" for the Indigenous community: Indigenous caregivers expressed that they feel disconnected from the Indigenous community in Surrey. While Surrey has the largest Indigenous population in BC, it has no Indigenous gathering place for the community to carry out ceremonies, cultural activities, eat together, and build a supportive, strong community.

Themes



Theme 2 - Communication & Active Participation

What is Surrey Schools doing for and with Indigenous learners? Indigenous parents had many questions, such as:

- How are the schools creating a culture of inclusion?
- How are schools addressing racism and bias?
- How are the schools enacting equity through supporting Indigenous learners?
- They felt that there should be more communication about what Surrey Schools is precisely doing to support Indigenous learners.

Theme 3 - Continuity

Staff turnover: Indigenous parents and learners had experiences of Aboriginal Support Workers and other staff leaving with little communication to the Indigenous learners and their families, whom they were directly supporting.

Theme 4 - Shift in the Curriculum

Lack of trauma-informed practice and application of Indigenous ways of teaching; Indigenous learners feel that the curriculum is not trauma-informed. They request more opportunities for healing within the school system. Indigenous learners, caregivers and staff expressed that there is a high need for teachers and professionals to understand historical and ongoing colonial realities that impact Indigenous families and learners

Ways of passing down knowledge is important: Passing down cultural knowledge, such as experiential ways of knowing, land-based learning and traditional cultural systems of mentorship and kinship, were identified as a priority by Indigenous caregivers. Lack of training and capacity: Many teachers and staff expressed that they would like to indigenize the curriculum or provide appropriate Indigenous learning opportunities but there lack the training or capacity to do so. Reliance on Aboriginal Support Workers: A key theme that arose in many interviews was a reliance on Aboriginal Support Workers. At the same time, there is a significant gap in resources allocated to this program to be run at the required capacity to meet Indigenous learner and family needs.

Themes

Theme 5 - Racism & Bias

Lack of awareness of the Canadian education system: Staff and other students often express, “why do we still need to learn about residential school?” as if it is in the past. Most Indigenous families still feel the impacts of legislated oppression and bias within the school system. Participants reported that there is a generalized lack of awareness of lived experiences of anti-Indigenous racism in Surrey Schools.

Feelings of fear, violence and being singled out: Some students and parents report that their children do not want to identify as Indigenous for one or a combination of reasons, including fear of violence, being singled out, and being “judged and scrutinized.” This is a common sentiment: a feeling of fear of judgment and lack of safety. It also plays out in the over-representation of Indigenous youth in Ministry care and calls to the Ministry. In other words, they experience the hyper-vigilance of Indigenous children and families in the school system.

A sentiment of “We need to do better”: Indigenous caregivers and learners, as well as school staff members, reported experiences of racism and bias towards Indigenous peoples in the school system. There was a general sentiment that “We need to do better.”





Equity Lab Campfire Findings

The Equity Lab Team has synthesized content generated by Campfire participants. **Importantly, this section documents how participants assessed each Equity Lab Quadrants:**

- (1) Policy and Governance
- (2) Learning Environment (Where we teach)
- (3) How we Teach, and
- (4) Learning Profile (what we know about each student)

Policy & Governance: How We Make Decisions and Lead



District staff said that "we're still in a time where people do not know the truth. And policy itself is very colonial." In this area, it was acknowledged that there is much work to do.

Access to Indigenous culture and language programming

There has been a shift in district culture seen in the practice of carrying out territory acknowledgements. However, participants expressed that district staff and learners may not fully understand why territorial acknowledgements are important and need to be taken seriously.

An Indigenous engagement policy or strategy for reaching out to the community

When Surrey Schools reaches out to the Indigenous community, many Indigenous community members and families have concerns about engaging with the school district such as fear of judgement and discriminatory treatment. They felt that challenges to get Indigenous learners to come to school are exacerbated by the lack of district staff efforts to build trust and safety with caregivers, parents, and the wider Indigenous community.

Participants felt that Surrey Schools should continue to build safe and culturally appropriate engagement processes and mutually beneficial relationships, including the Indigenous community in leadership and decisionmaking opportunities.

Equity in Practice: District-Level Commitment to Equity

District staff education about historical & current causes of inequity

Participants felt that Surrey School staff lack a high level of education and awareness of historical and current causes of low level achievement of Indigenous learners. They believe lack of education and awareness contributes to a lack of understanding, compassion, and trauma informed approach to Indigenous learners who are struggling in the classroom and general learning environment.

Participants described how district staff rely on the education and awareness of a minority group of Indigenous staff and non-Indigenous staff, specifically ACYCWs.

Budget for Indigenous Learning

Interviewees felt that the ACYCW program is under resourced and therefore Indigenous-specific events and supports are insufficient to meet the needs and interests of Indigenous learners and community. For example, one ACYCW can be responsible for multiple schools across the school district and this constrains their ability to be able to build meaningful relationships and provide diverse supports to Indigenous learners and families.

- Employment, hiring & specific service to Indigenous learners

Many interviewees felt that there could be more explicit engagement about policy and practice to ensure that Surrey Schools is hiring Indigenous peoples in roles, such as administrators to principals. An interviewee stated:

"You want to make a change, but how many indigenous teachers do you see? There is no one for Indigenous learners to look up to."

ACYCWs play a critical role in supporting Indigenous learners and families in safe and culturally appropriate ways. However, many interviewees felt that the program is understaffed and therefore, running under capacity.

Moreover, participants identified a lack of hired or subcontracted community members in schools, such as a permanent Elder or Indigenous community member in residence or more Indigenous knowledge keepers in the classroom.

One interviewee said: "it is a struggle to make the school culturally and socially safe because we don't have the people to do the cultural learning, critical awareness building, and Indigenous designed pedagogy."

Learning Environment

A Surrey School staff member stated in regards to the district's learning environment:

"We have a commitment as a district to, to invite families in and students and, and create a safe space, where indigenous ways of knowing and Indigenous knowledge are cherished"

Centering Indigenous wisdom in Surrey Schools' learning environment was a key priority identified. Some participants shared examples of how Surrey Schools has begun to develop initiatives "to indigenize" the learning environment, such as through the Indigenous Carving Program, Indigenous Author Readings, and the Wind Speaker: an Indigenous outdoor education initiative.

Participants acknowledged that there is a high need for teachers to become more compassionate and aware of how the past and present legacy of residential schools' manifests in the learning environment in Surrey Schools. One participant said:

"Taking a trauma and force, [using] trauma informed practice and perspectives; we need to be trauma informed with an understanding of the weight of what people are dealing with, including teachers"



Indigenous Perspectives

The Learning Environment readily reflect the First People's Principles of Learning (FPPL)

Classrooms may elect to display the FPPL on walls. Some teachers and staff may go further to incorporate the FPPL within the learning environment. However, many discussions concluded that the FPPL is inconsistently reflected in the learning environment and current efforts to reflect the FPPL are "tokenistic"

One participant expressed that:

"At my school, we have nothing reflected."

Another said:

"In my school, there are pictures on the walls of white settlers and the queen but not first peoples. At the same time, we have Indigenous art pieces on the walls too, but we have nothing that monumentally honours and reveals whose unceded land our school is located on."

There is a lack of consistency on how and where the FPPLs are reflected in the learning environment. Some expressed that they do not have enough training or district support in place to prioritize Pro-D training of FPPL. That said, there are some advocates within Surrey Schools who voluntarily indigenize the learning environment. Interviewees identified a shift to include Indigenous ceremonial practices in schools. Some staff have taken Indigenous and non-Indigenous students on land-based, cultural field trips so youth can collectively learn and talk about land-based, cultural practices.

Inclusive Environment

Education professionals are respectful and inclusive of Indigenous learners, families and communities

Participants felt that staff try to be respectful and inclusive. However, some observed judgemental behaviour of staff towards Indigenous learners and families. Also, there is a lack of inclusion of Indigenous voices and participation in the learning environment. For example, in one group discussion a teacher asked:

“What happens when an Indigenous learner is quiet and is located at the back of the classroom? Do teachers ensure that they are learning and participating in the classroom?”

While other participants did recognize that Indigenous learners at a particular learning centre were described as “choosing” to come to the centre because they heard about the “inclusive environment, staff, and students” from friends and other students.

- **Students, families and communities served by the district have significant opportunities to provide input regarding the student learning environment**

The Parent Advisory Council is a space where Surrey Schools could do better at enhancing this Council's capacity to provide input on the student learning environment. Surrey Schools staff also noted that Indigenous peoples are fearful to self-identify and therefore, staff have had challenges receiving input.

Anti-Indigenous racism and stigma were identified as one of the most pervasive barriers for students, families, and communities to participate, such as providing input on the student learning environment. One interviewee said:

“Some kids refer to themselves as Mexican and would rather identify as Latin or other ethnicities than Indigenous. They are scared of racism.”

Families & Community

Families and communities are made to feel welcome and valued as part of the learning environment

Indigenous caregivers and learners talked of being demeaned, experiencing judgement, feeling "uncomfortable," and talked of racism and bias.

One interviewee said that parent-teacher meetings feel invasive and unwelcoming when a child "is going to be designated" or is "in need of additional support." They expressed:

"If they [a parent] have negative interactions, this erases the positive experiences. They may have some experiences of respect and care but when they have negative experiences, then there is an erasure of the positive experiences."

In the words of another participant who shared the importance of creating a welcome environment, "If mom and dad don't feel safe coming into the school, then their children don't feel safe either."

At the same time, one interviewee accounted for a time when an Indigenous parent was invited into the classroom to tell stories. The interviewee never forgot this moment and expressed that there is a need for more Indigenous parents to feel welcome to come share their stories in the Surrey Schools learning environment.



How We Teach

Some teachers are asking “where do we even begin?” Many acknowledged that Surrey Schools is beginning to:

1. **Connect learning to the cultural backgrounds of learners; and**
2. **Aboriginal World views and Perspectives are beginning to be incorporated into the classroom experience of each learner.”**

Participants asked questions such as:

- What supports, assessments and opportunities are being given to Indigenous learners to express their gifts and hold them to a standard of excellence/gifted learners?
- How does Surrey Schools address the culture of fear that prevents teachers and staff from delivering Indigenous curriculum and implementing Indigenous pedagogy in a culturally appropriate way?
- How can Surrey Schools build awareness and provide easy access to Indigenous resources?

- Can there be more collaboration and communication between teachers and Aboriginal Education?
- Can we pilot a Pro-D training series created by teachers with advanced knowledge of how to apply the First Peoples Principles of Learning and with advanced knowledge of Indigenous worldview and curriculum?
- Would teachers benefit from an “online space” for educators to access support, ask questions and problem solve with Indigenous experts, Aboriginal Education staff and “teacher allies”. This space would allow teachers to ask difficult questions, normalize discomfort and identify areas for positive change in the pedagogical core.



Assessment

Interviewees described routine learning assessments. Many described these assessments as, at times, “invasive” for families and learners. There was a fear of judgement and racial bias and stigma. For example, staff bias can manifest in assumptions that Indigenous learners have learning challenges before an assessment is conducted. Indigenous peoples described feeling targeted and scared to even identify as Indigenous. For example, one interviewee shared that the tone of a psychological assessment was, “Here are all the deficits of your child.”

Another interviewee stated:

“I would love for Surrey Schools staff at all levels be more interested in Indigenous programming and caring instead of monitoring children and youth as problematic individuals and learners.”

Judgement and a deficit-based attitude towards Indigenous learners needs to change. An interviewee stated:

“Teachers say one thing about positive qualities in Indigenous students in meetings, but then they can say a lot of negative things [...]the School system seems to give up easily on Indigenous learners.”

Another participant expressed that they saw Indigenous parents left out of assessments and did not involve time to “build trust, understanding of Indigenous lived experiences, and relationships”.

That said, participants accounted for many experiences where students expressed feeling safe with their ACYCW and were made to feel worthy of support and success in the school system.



Success for All

A participant stated:

“Not all teachers, EAs and administrators believe that all students will be successful in school”.

In fact, staff described the need for teachers to be able to understand and appropriately respond to what Indigenous learners uniquely need to be successful and achieve their full potential.

Some interviewees shared that their school-based support teams have seen improvement in Indigenous learner achievement through wrap-around supports and a compassionate and trauma informed approach to learning. They shared that it was important to define “success” with the Indigenous community and on a case-by-case basis.

Addressing Bias & Racism

Many group discussions illuminated a general acknowledgement that there are implicit biases and many forms of racism experienced within instruction, assessment, and learning. For example, one staff person described seeing a stereotype of a cartoon drawings of an "Indian" in a loin cloth and sporting a bow and arrow in a lesson plan. This is one of the many stereotypes of Indigenous peoples within instruction and learning.

Also, many staff seem to quickly stigmatize Indigenous learners who experience challenges and barriers to successful learning as "problematic". Interviewees described teachers frequently sending Indigenous children to "the Learning Centre" as opposed to trying to keep them included and participating in the classroom.

Some participants identified implicit bias, or as a participant called it "micro-aggressions," embedded in teacher behaviour. An example of an instance of micro-aggression was provided; one participant said that a teacher expressed they did not want Indigenous children in their classroom because they are "disruptive." This negative stereotyping of Indigenous learners is harmful and stigmatizing.

Sometimes implicit bias was understood as teachers and staff making comments such as: "We don't have many Indigenous kids in our classroom or school" and therefore, many staff do not understand and question why there is ACYCW support in schools with a small number of children who identify as Indigenous. They do not understand ACYCW support as an equity-based initiative.

On a historical note, one interviewee said:

"The school system was made for European settler children and we really have not had much more movement forward."

Some interviewees recognized that implicit bias and racism is embedded because schools have been built for and by white, middle class, and settler populations. Also, interviewees felt that staff do not recognize that anti-Indigenous racism happens in the school.

Professional Development

Professional growth opportunities in terms of bias and anti-Indigenous racism training is not mandatory. Some staff have voluntarily sought such training on their own time. However, interviewees felt that this was a minority group in Surrey Schools.

Some staff described a desire to practice the FPPL but worry that they are not trained in how to appropriately apply these principles. One interviewee described inequity as a “reliance” on number of Indigenous colleagues and educators who have had to take on the sole responsibility of making Surrey Schools a good place for Indigenous learners and their community. They concluded that:

“It's time for us to do the work. We need to do the work. Especially as white educators because it is exhausting for my Indigenous colleagues to always be addressing inequities.”

Centering Indigenous Wisdom

Staff were critical of superficial efforts to center Indigenous wisdom. For example, one teacher said:

“Sometimes educators show a book by an Indigenous author in front of a classroom and they think that's enough.”

Some staff described moments in the classroom when they asked an Indigenous student to share their experience and knowledge. However, Indigenous learners recounted times when they felt singled out and hesitant to share their wisdom in the classroom because of stigma and racism.

Surrey Schools staff stated that there are opportunities for centering Indigenous wisdom through available educational resources. Also, some teachers invited knowledge keepers into their classroom with non-Indigenous students and Indigenous students.

Learning Profile

Participants acknowledged that the learning profile looks different for each Indigenous learner. They also shared that there are limited supports for learners to achieve their full potential.

Participants asked questions, such as:

- How much are we learning from our mistakes in profiling Indigenous learners?
- Do Indigenous parents have a space to voice their concerns and needs?
- Is the classroom set up for Indigenous learners to be successful?
- How are teachers including the FPPL?
- How can we educate staff about equity and how it applies to Indigenous learning?

Achievement

Interviewees talked of instances where Indigenous learners were undermined from small and consistent negative learning experiences. Some learners are challenged to find Surrey Schools spaces that will instill trust to support their learning and achievement. For example, staff explained that when Indigenous children are consistently separated from the classroom as a disciplinary measure; this is communicating to the learning community that staff do not have positive expectations or inclusive measures for Indigenous learners. Some felt that many Indigenous children are quickly sent to a learning centre.

Tracking toward graduation

One participant stated, "I know of students who turn down ACYCW and Aboriginal graduation programs and supports for not wanting to be identified as Indigenous."

Strategies

One participant discussed how their school does not offer special courses if there are less than 25 Indigenous learners to take these courses. However, it is hard to fill this requirement as some Indigenous children and youth do not want to be singled out or identify as Indigenous. That said, some teachers and schools are offering Indigenous courses and field trips not only for Indigenous learners, but also for non-Indigenous learners. This is a strategy so Indigenous learners do not feel singled out.

Another identified strategy was "the integrated room" where staff felt that it was effective to have a youth care worker and an Indigenous support worker in the learning environment to meet Indigenous learner needs.

Recommendations

Inclusive Environment

1. Increase awareness of Indigenous learner needs, interests, and concerns.
1. Create significant opportunities for and with Indigenous learners, as well as their families and communities to feel able and welcome to participate, and provide input, in the learning environment. For example, strengthen Indigenous-led spaces and Indigenous leadership opportunities, such as the Parent Advisory Council, so that Surrey Schools is enhancing opportunities for input.
1. Create anti-racism training opportunities for Surrey School staff
1. Create an affirming learning environment that recognizes the unique needs of Indigenous learners including a trauma-informed approach that meaningfully empathizes with Indigenous families' lived history with colonization and genocide.
1. Instill a learning environment that makes Indigenous learners proud of their identities.

Inclusive Environment (Cont'd)

Foster an equitable and safe learning environment for Indigenous learners is part of a teacher's job and profile. "Aboriginal considerations" are part of our work. This is not an add on. It should be a part of what we do.

How We Teach

1. Train non-Indigenous teachers and staff in an "equity approach" to learning and improve the ability to authentically and consistently apply the FPPL in their classroom and learning environment.
1. Hire Indigenous knowledge keepers, Elders, and Indigenous professionals

Success for all & The Learning Profile

1. Develop a comprehensive Indigenous learner profiles for a comprehensive picture of Indigenous learner needs, concerns, interests, and priorities.
1. Centre Indigenous worldview in determining what "achievement" and "success" means.

Recommendations

Success for All & The Learning Profile (Cont'd)

- Assess classroom and schools' environments and how they contribute to Indigenous learner challenges.
- Ensure learners are aware and referred to UBC and SFU resources and supports for those transitioning from high school to post-secondary education (e.g. on-campus living, scholarships, Band financing, etc.) Also, ensure Indigenous learners have significant support in navigating their vocational and career development.
- Ensure that there is effective communication and support (i.e. change management plans) when staff members leave their roles in supporting Indigenous learners and parents
- Increase program funding and capacity for Aboriginal Support Workers.

Assessment

- Develop resources and staff capacity to ensure culturally appropriate, anti-racist, trauma-informed, and strengths-based

assessments carried out with Indigenous learners and their families.

Professional Development

1. Increase mandatory Pro-D opportunities to improve the capacity of teachers and staff (1) to integrate the FPPL in their work and (2) to attend anti-racism and anti-oppression training.

If Surrey Schools provided mandatory training, then staff could be more equipped to implement Indigenous education and address equity issues.

Centering Indigenous wisdom

1. According to one interviewee, "We need to truly make Indigenous learning a best practice rather than an adaptation." It was suggested that hiring more Indigenous peoples, such as Indigenous Elders, storytellers, and facilitators would be a step in the right direction to centering Indigenous wisdom in the learning environment.

1. Enhance access to Indigenous culture in Schools

References

SUBTITLE

(Robyn Williams, 1992)

https://www.utas.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/246943/RevisedCulturalSafetyPaper-pha.pdf

SUBTITLE

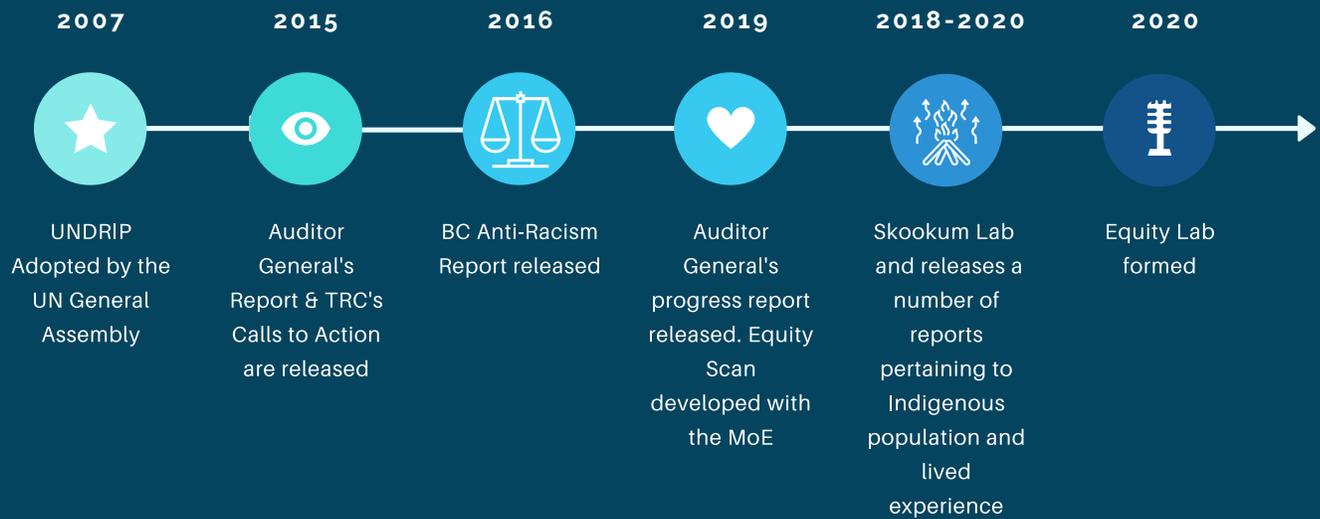
With a focus on student achievement, the Ministry of Education (MoE) undertook a multi-year project (2016-2018) to develop, pilot, and implement an Equity Scan for use by school districts to identify barriers and challenges that Aboriginal learners experience within BC's education sector.

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TIMELINE

A brief history of Equity Lab





Equity Boosts



A. Respect for Indigenous ways of knowing and learning

There is a commitment to the First Peoples' Principles of Learning. Indigenous ways of knowing and learning are embedded across all curriculum areas and the system (district, school, and classroom) is welcoming to Indigenous learners.

B. Professional commitment to responsibility to intentional action

Adults in the organization are committed to creating the conditions for success for all Indigenous learners. Learners know that the adults around them believe that they will be successful and those beliefs are associated with high standards.



C. Instruction and interventions are evidence-informed and routinely monitored

The system (district, school and classroom) monitors each learner's progress towards graduation and provides interventions as needed. Learners are inspired to achieve at high levels. Information systems are used to alert educators to make appropriate adjustments in pedagogy as required.

D. Focused professional development and collaborative cultures of practice

Educators look to colleagues and to the research on learning to improve methods of reaching and teaching Indigenous learners. Student success is elevated when educators collaborate to solve pedagogical challenges and to advance skills.



E. Awareness of bias and privilege.

When educators understand how bias and privilege can impact learning, they can make adjustments in order to create strong feelings of belonging and value in the learning environment. For Indigenous learners, feelings of belonging and being valued are key factors for their success.



Equity Lab

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