

School District No. 57 2019-2020 Equity Scan

Backgrounder

During the 2019-2020 school year School District No. 57 engaged with the 'Equity in Action Project' initiated by the British Columbia Ministry of Education to address systemic barriers impacting Indigenous student achievement. Rights Holders, stakeholders, district staff, students and families throughout the region were invited to engage in an analysis of **Policy and Governance, Learner Environment, Pedagogy and Learner Profiles**.

Equity Scan Circles were held for each family of schools throughout the district (Duchess Park/College Heights, DP Todd/Shag Ti, PGSS), for each of the host First Nations (Lheidli T'enneh and McLeod Lake Indian Band), as well as one with the Principals and Vice-Principals. Several of the Equity Scan Circles were held in person however due to Covid-19 there had to be a change in format for the final circle which was held online where information was gathered through breakout rooms. Throughout the answers to the provided questions, common themes emerged.

These can be summarized as **clarity, voice, engagement, and transparency?**

Policy and Governance

It is apparent that roles within the school district are not clear. There is not common understanding of the role of the Board of Education in developing policy and the role of the senior leadership team in ensuring policy is implemented. There also appears to be some discrepancies in the general understanding of how policy is developed leading to "gaps in the way current structures that support equity, policy may be present and informative, but not always realistic". Many respondents also indicated that this is not well known and there appears to be a lack of involvement in the local First Nations in policy development. Multiple responses indicated a need to "consult rights holders" when making decisions that impact Indigenous learners.

All voices need to be represented in the development of policy and practices and the decision making that directly affects Indigenous learners. These **voices** should include all Indigenous partners including local First Nations, parents, students, staff, and elders. Indigenous voices should be at the "forefront". "More voices are needed to be taken to heart when looking at policy and practice, we can no longer sweep issues under the rug, deep reflection and reflexive practice is required to move the district forward".

Engagement is a theme that emerged throughout as it is apparent that this is lacking within the organization and with community. There is a desire to see an increase in parent involvement and many questions around mechanism that will allow that happen were asked. Respondents indicated they are looking to see more Indigenous staff working with our students. With 30% indigenous learners we should see at least 30% of our staff Indigenous. There is a feeling that this will result in an increase in engagement from students, parents, and community. **Employment Equity**.

Finally, the need for **transparency** and openness came out. This emerged through questions around honesty and truth. Some respondents felt that truth and honesty was still a risk and worried about "blowback" if they speak their truth. "If the district cannot listen to honest feedback equity is sacrificed". This statement implies that we need to be more transparent with how we develop policy and practices to support Indigenous learners and we need to open to receive feedback from community. The district has many structures that are

not well known and many of the structures are colonial in nature and do not reflect the systems of First Nations.

Learning Environment:

- Need to develop trust in community (families, parents, students).
- Need to build **relationships based on trust**
- School Environments need to be more welcoming. Need **more training** on Indigenous ways of knowing/resources/history to get into all aspects of curriculum, classrooms, school, community.
- **Need to work on racial bias, racism as a district**
- Need **better communication** between all (district, school, PVP, teachers, parents, students, community)
- Elders are our teachers and need to be more present in all schools
- Need to develop district processes to scan this information regularly and see action.
- Need more student, parent, community **voice** in all that we do to guide our work as a district

Pedagogical Core:

The questions focus on teaching practice, professional development, student experience, assessment practices, growth plans, resources, and racism and/or racial bias. The themes are very closely related to these topics.

Themes: Racism, Community engagement, Parent and student communication

Overall, development of equity and anti-racist education must happen at each level in the education system. Students, teachers, and administration need support in understanding how equity and anti-racism can become part of their practice.

Communication with students, parents and community needs to be more inclusive.

Problems that were communicated in the response:

- Streaming Indigenous learners into Alt programs
- ELL designations when not needed
- Deficit focused ideology with Indigenous Learners
- Racism avoided and Anti-racism not a part of classroom learning
- Attendance and Late Policy keep students from learning
- Need to screen standardized assessments so to affirm culturally responsiveness
- Need more access to health, psych ed, other assessments to designate for support
- Need more direct support to students
- Need improved Communication and Involvement with Parents and Community (what will work best for them?) with follow-up actions
- Need more Indigenous people working in SD57

Teachers are starting to do the work and some schools have adopted practices that are more welcoming and understanding. Meeting students where they are at and welcoming students when they are late.

Assessment Practices have started to change towards a growth mindset but students still receiving zeroes for late or missing work. Still have task based and textbook based classroom.

Professional development and resources are being offered but not reflected in classroom learning. Growth plans are inconsistent over the roles in the school system and lack accountability. **Teachers have fear around teaching incorrectly, parent backlash, and tokenizing the culture.**

Perception of teachers is not good. Parents, Students, and other staff see teachers as not believing Indigenous learners can be successful and are not meeting the learners where they are at; focus of SBT on student deficits not why they wouldn't want to come to class; no focus on learning environment, teacher relationship or barriers or bias present for learner. **Racism of low expectations** maybe from lack of understanding in how to be flexible in their teaching of students not content. Perception that teacher's choice of Pro-D is leading to no change in Indigenous perspectives and pedagogy in the classroom.

Students expressed they can be **put on the spot, experience racism, and feel unsafe**. Need to space to communicate their needs.

Parents need to be involved and consulted on how best they can give feedback on their child's education. Need supports and to feel welcomed to grow the relationship with the school and teachers.

Suggestions from Equity Scan Responses:

- SD: Survey teachers with their understanding of (Indigenous Perspectives and Resources)
- T: Exploring Indigenous Worldview, start with your own understanding, do your own research
- Could work with Post-Secondary Institutions to support teachers
- PSD: The LEA, start local and start where you're at. So invited Lheidli to guide the work at the beginning
- T: More focus on Content and bring in more on pedagogy and connect with Lheidli
- Individuals choice – union – should be formalized into a growth plan or wholistic growth plan
- How much are schools using local resources and opportunities such as "Hoduleh-a" at Exploration Place, Fish camp and in class presentations by Hubble Homestead
- Reconciliation Officer needed – once the dust settles the Indigenous students are covered with it and need more supports
- How about trauma informed education practices creating compassionate learning environments
- How are we assessing ourselves for bias? – both ways – Ed, Ab Ed

Pedagogical Core Questions Overall Rubric: 1.5 / 1-1.5

- The Pedagogical Core **lacks agency for equity work.**
- **Learners are assigned** to programs and classes **according to opinion about cultural background and perceived learning abilities.**
- Indigenous Worldviews and Perspectives are **beginning to be incorporated** into the classroom experience of **each learner.**
- Learners' **cultural backgrounds are acknowledged** and **attempts are made to connect** learning to personal experiences.

Learning Profile

Please note: report is broken into sections following themes

Students Unprepared: Language / behaviour

Data collection, from teachers highlighted struggles with differing levels of oral language ability and overall school readiness. The range of abilities, creates difficulties in classroom dynamic, can create a perception of limited school preparedness. There is further disparity in range of behaviour and focus.

Parents highlighted link between behaviour expectations and limited access to sports and trap line programs.

Question: What can be done to increase early intervention?

: what can be done to increase wrap around supports?

: Are we teaching to the child or to the curriculum?

Low Expectation: Cultural Bias

Parents indicated feeling frustrated with teacher / school low expectation of their children and their academic ability. Parents highlighted the struggle to receive supports, the need to increase advocacy to receive supports. There was a frustration in what seems like streamlining students through the academic system, with limited expectations and more pushing students through. Parents highlighted frustrations with students being placed in SLR /LSC programs and graduating with Evergreen certificates. There was a general agreement that students seemed to be segregated into lower levels of learner programs, while students that were doing well academically, in essence were left to flounder without direction to avenues of higher education. Information gathered further highlighted the need to believe in the students and their ability to move through adversity, to increase learning capacity and to move away from low student expectations. There is an overrepresentation of Indigenous students in 'junior alt'.

The question: is there a cultural bias with ELL?

Parental Quotes:

"without voicing my concerns, she would not have received supports"

"I don't feel I am being taken seriously—children falling through the cracks. My children have the right to an education."

Choices

The effort to access programs can be an obstacle

The question: are there enough choices and are they the right choices?

Sense of Belonging: Safety

Going to school is a challenge, students feel disconnected, disengaged. There appears to be a lack of transition planning to get students back on their feet. It is terrible to hear that students are committing suicide, or feel suicidal. There is the sense that students do not feel safe. There is a disconnect between what school thinks is happening and what parents and students are experiencing.

Parent quote:

"my two boys were very active throughout elementary school sports, got good grades...I think the coach recognized his work, but kids selected to be on teams were kids of parents who were connected, who were friends. If my son is not in the group he is not selected... In football the coach would only play non-native kids... my son only played two minutes at the end of each game, sometimes he was not even played"

Racial Discrimination: Bullying

There is a need to educate on systemic racism, understand that systemic racism is entrenched from the ground all the way to the top... what is the individuals' role, and educate on understanding individual bias.

Parent quote:

"a lot of this has to do with our kids not feeling included, they feel singled out"

Trauma / SEL

There is the understanding of the level of trauma impacting student's families. There appears to be a disconnect between recognizing trauma and the level and amount of supports available. There is the notion that SEL (social emotional learning) support should come first. If the professionals cannot help students regulate emotions, it does not matter how much academics are taught in the classroom, the student(s) will be unable to learn. Key is to help with emotional learning, before meeting academics. There is a disconnect throughout the school system, trauma training reaches some, but not all. There appears to be limited understanding between what children experience in the home, particularly lack of stability, and how the system responds to student's family/ home struggles. Overall from transitioning students to kindergarten through their school years, more needs to be done in and for social emotional learning.

Question: Is there a disconnect between understanding the role of the SEL support and is the support being used within the school properly?

Transitions: school responsibility

IEW: *"there is lack of transition plan to help children get back on their feet and feeling comfortable at school...there is a struggle to get students back into proper programming."*

Kindergarten: in kindergarten the focus is the whole child, the transition between home and school differences, not a traditional focus on the whole child.

Grade 4: can also be an opportunity to look towards grad path, is there an understanding of where we start and stop in regards to planning? Improvements could be made around the conversations had with students which does not need to be extensive, but enough to get conversations around graduation happening.

Parent: *"have conversations, with children when young...what do you want to do? What do you want to be? ...Ask how do you get there and what do you need?"*

Grade7-8: A teacher noted that in grade 7 there is a focus on where we see our students going/placement, but not a lot of programs to support students struggling with academics. Further, there is not a lot being done to meet the transition needs between grades 7-8. Noted was the jump in expectations from grade 7 to grade 8 and concern around how students are being supported during the transition; there is a segment of students not ready for high school (emotional and academics). The question came up of super 12's, why not super 7's, is there a way to further help student's academic needs prior to entering grade 8? There is a lag, or the time it takes to get students focused in grade 8, "by the second part of the year, we are focused, but should be in September." There is the suggestion of specific counsellors for grade 7-8 transitions and high school preparedness, again goes back to SEL and academics.

There is a consensus on the need for increased communication between school, student and guardian around what is needed / requirements for graduation. The question came up again on when are we talking to students and engaging them in their understanding of graduation. All students should have the option and opportunity to graduate with an exit plan for what is available from attending university to work placements.

Parent: *"based on a conversation with my daughter, a graduate of SD57, no one really talked about grad until grade 10..."*

"CNC and UNBC constantly visible, take tours...keep the post sec conversation going."

"within district, I have not seen anything that talks about graduation."

Students not meeting academic standards

There are mixed feelings in this area of students not meeting academic standards, ranging from despondent teachers, to despondent students. There is the notion that students should be labelled immediately, and that often labelling creates challenges for the student. There is an agreement that quiet students suffer the most, and the success of the student is dependent in part on the relationship the student has with the teacher. There are support staff, however, it was identified *"the need exceeds what we can offer"*. There was the acknowledgement that learning options were *"not specifically connected to Indigenous students, instead offered to all students... understand through LEA, we have more options than we realized."* There are LSC, alt programs, SLR programs, *"not specifically designed for indigenous learners except Eagle program."* There is the recognition that *"teams often go above and beyond to keep students connected to school, there are strong relationships with families, aunties, friends, we are proud of our team."* Increase or identify, how we are supporting kids. Attendance is a huge issue, *"if students are not at school, where are they? Takes too long to get on top of it (attendance) referrals to ASW takes too long...need to get on top of student attendance."* There is a need to increase family connection to school, not just phoning when there is a *"problem"*, creates stress.

Students being pushed through

Dialogue has indicated the belief students are simply being *"pushed through"*, with no *"supports for a learning path."* Pushed through begins in elementary school and continues through high school. Students (many) *"receiving Evergreen-no opportunity for transitions to college or university."* Repeatedly highlighted was the notion that being *"pushed through"* does not support learning in a meaningful way and does nothing to prepare students for graduation and beyond.

Question: When students are pushed through what supports are put into place to fill the learning gaps?

"Indigenous students were graduating with AW math and earth science...make sure students have choices after graduation, SLR, LSC...try to provide a stream out so they are not just pushed aside."

Teacher noted *"...we push on to the next grade-no extra support added, no extra time is added, just trudge along and hope they miraculously catch up!"*

Student buy-in

There is a lot of student misinformation on the importance of school, ranging from social media to adult influence. In secondary school there is a students' belief that *"this class doesn't matter to me."* We need to help students understand the value and importance of education at an earlier age, work to build better connections and relationships with students and families.

Teacher relations

Where is the middle ground between SEL and academics, *"linear straight forward thinking dies not work."* Not enough class support for when students need help, students left out if they are not vocal.

IEW: *"we are connected to teachers to provide basic needs. Maslow's hierarchy we as IEW'S are fulfilling basic needs- food, shelter, not a lot of time for higher needs. Most of the students...are for emotional and spiritual needs, more social work than academic."*

Teachers are always new to the student, not consistent, little to no connection with students and families *"can't talk to last years' teacher, she is gone, new staff."*

A teacher further identified, *"sometimes as a teacher you don't feel heard about where your students are at and what they need."*

Staff relations

Relationships and connections are the key to getting students in the building. Often the IEW *"is left out of planning meetings and team meetings...there are district conversations happening that we are not apart of...should be mandatory for IEW to be included in meetings."*

Teacher staff preparedness / burnout

There is the understanding of under or lack of experienced teachers, many first year teachers overwhelmed, further *“what is the data on uncertified teachers in class?”* There is the teacher shortage *“impacting planning, many doing more with less-tired, short staffed quality over quantity.”* There is the question of how do I infuse indigenous perspectives, teachers worried about *“taking risks and trying things differently...teachers may not know how to access resources to overcome barriers for support.”*

Academic assessment / achievement / data gathering

There is disparity in data and achievement, data does not reflect the student, is the achievement culturally relevant are assessment and data gathering demonstrate and *“inherent bias?”* Are schools gathering the right information on students, student is more than the reflection of a report card. There is the understanding *“teachers still need to put a grade out-when will the marking system change?”* There is discussion on the need to reflect experiential and assessment practices that align with learning. There is no inclusion or unifying system to track or reflect Indigenous student achievement; *“there is no connection of ab reports to anything else.”* There is the MyEd tracking system which holds demographic information, grade attendance, counsellors hold all the information, do they know the student outside the system, *“the story and the background of the student?”*

There is a lot to be done in this area, parents often unable to help students at home, teachers plate are already full, whose responsibility is it, *“all of us should be (responsible), shared effort.”*

Designation / Assessments

Understanding the purpose of the assessment, disparity in are too many getting done or not enough. There is a lengthy process to have them done, is the right information being gathered? What about early years' teachers, excluded from assessments? How to assess the learning needs of the whole child *“outside of school what is going on with family, look within school, look at ways to support.”* Brought up again is the notion of trauma, SEL and students being pushed through without proper skills. There are families trying to access private funding to get assessments done, waiting to long at school or are not being heard. There needs to be advocacy for students to get assessment, the process needs to be pushed through SBT. There is the recognition there are not enough school psychologists and the process is long, *“need done right away.”* Schools needs to have a more coordinated effort, there are silos *“to address the needs that are out there...becoming more efficient, trying to identify a point person for each student.”* There is the question who is driving programs *“accounting or education?”*

Food security

Large part of IEW job, *“food is a big issue...(students are) hungry”*

Support provided

Parent: *“additional supports have been both a blessing and a confusion, I greatly appreciate extra support and my kids needed it. The whole SEL connection is exactly what they need. It's what most of our students need, balance, academic disparity-absolutely, if a student is hungry they can't learn well.”*

There is the need to not only provide but discuss opportunities with students, bit inside the school district and out. Partner with CNC for tours and bring people in to talk with students, start conversations early so students understand what to work towards. At the school, there are rooms for culture, learning and behaviour at the end of the school year there is very little change for the struggling students. We keep doing the same things, frustrating to know there is very little change. There is a disconnect from what the policy or solution makers think is a good idea and what is happening for the specific school population; *“despite the evidence to demonstrate that this program is not the only approach, every lived experience we had that our students had and that the teachers brought forward and raw data was disregarded and the district brought their initiatives*

forward.” There is not enough listening to the people with the relationships with the students, the people doing the everyday work. Whose agenda is being met?

Lack of resources

There is a feeling of frustration, putting out fires daily. Teachers and workers know what needs to be done, only there are few resources to make it happen. If the support is not put in at the elementary level, what does that mean as the students continue to get pushed through without getting support for learning differences.

Individual needs

There is the recognition by all of not doing enough to meet the individual needs of students.

Teacher, “I agree not doing a good job of meeting our student’s individual needs—look at the majority and make broad decisions. I know this has to do with money and people, but one of the things we noticed in our school is that our kids have a deep connection with staff. Then they go to a large secondary school and that relationship need is not met...kids disappear.”

There is a concern that students who are doing well are overlooked. There is a noted differentiation in learning styles between Indigenous and Western learners: Indigenous learners do better with hands on and active or activity based learning.

LEA’s

There is need to work to ensure staff have understanding of LEA’s what are they and what the roles are of the school and the workers to support them. There should be better information for school counsellors and youth care workers, people want to help but are unaware. Of particular interest is the need to understand legal implications for the sharing of information.

Technology

Students understand technology, but not books.

Culture

Participant understanding that “information intermingles, information can be deficit based, often not (only me) speaking to the gifts, the strengths, trying to fit our students into our model, not looking at cultural model, cultural knowledge, ways of knowing and being, the land, the trap line, the knowledge is dismissed in the academic profile.”

There is agreement that increasing cultural programming is a good thing. There could be increased awareness for the staff and an ability to communicate when things go wrong. There is a “*pitting against*” meaning there is not recognition of the difference. Staff say to each other “*while this elder says this.*” Non-Indigenous staff fearful of being chastised for not doing it correctly. “*Cultural awareness is continuing and it needs to be practised daily.*”

Access and transportation

There is an impact on the family when the child cannot attend, no communication means “*lack of success on the bus.*” In the outlying areas transportation is barrier to students and “*better learning opportunities.*” There is the feeling like I won’t be heard any ways, why am I even bothering to do this.

Communication

There needs to be increased open dialogue about the individual needs of a school. Where is the collaborative practice, indigenous education as part of the overall plan, not our plan and your plan...is it recognized as valid?

Learner Profile: Key Findings / Themes

- Students are not academically prepared for entering elementary and transitioning to high school
- Pushing students through school is harming, not helping students
- Culture of low expectations, racial bias and bullying harms students.
- Large concern around streaming students which limits their options for the future and further segregates students.
- Assessment of students is slow and doesn't always result in additional student supports.
- Classroom assessment practices may contain bias, harming students and doesn't fully reflect student abilities.
- Building relationships is integral to success and sense of belonging.
- Attendance needs to be a primary focus, link to larger issues.
- Social emotional learning needs to come first.
- IEWs and families need to be included in planning for students, what is the whole student profile - culture, increase connection to land based learning, activity based learning.
- Better guidance and communication with families, increase positive communication, not always negative.
- What can we do to better support grade 7 / 8 students?
- Start conversations around graduation early, help students understand what it takes to graduate, what are the options of education and after grade 12.
- Continue with professional development for teachers

Student Survey Feedback

– 7 student responses; 3 stakeholder responses

1 – not really/struggling

2 – somewhat/okay

3 – mostly/good

4 – strongly/excellent

Student Responses			Anecdotal (Principal, Teacher, Elder, Parent, Student, Community)
Statement/Question	Rank	Score	Page/Comment
<i>There are plans in place for Indigenous Learners who are struggling to keep up</i>	1	3.71 - strongly	
<i>Indigenous people feel welcome and valued in the learning environment</i>	2	3.57 - strongly	21: Many schools aren't welcoming to families still – we need to be doing a better job at welcoming them 26: For the most part, you are welcome [but] your indigenous identity is not unless invited – not culturally safe at all
<i>There are support to help Indigenous students to succeed</i>	3	3.42 - mostly	
<i>There are ways for staff to learn more about Indigenous perspective and teaching</i>	4	3.28 - mostly	

<i>How are Indigenous Learners doing at school?</i>	5	3.14 - mostly	21: Our kids are not getting what they should be getting
<i>The adults in the schools believe that Indigenous students will be successful</i>	6	3.00 - mostly	
<i>Local First Nations participate in decision making for school programs and services</i>	7	2.85 - mostly	5: Lack of inclusion in development in programs can be a concern, indigenous people need to be approached to build inclusion Advisory council not included until decision had already been made, bypassing the consultation process More varied perspectives needed from the Indigenous community, cannot have token individuals, must need real representation
<i>Indigenous people have input into the learning environment</i>	7	2.85 - mostly	13: The deep learning and engagement is not immersed in the district 23: We have a long way to go in that. Trust not there – especially families to come in and say. They do not feel they will be heard, so why bother; There is discrimination – there is put down by other students and teachers with students
<i>Our schools have policies about Indigenous language and culture</i>	8	2.71 - mostly	6: We need a better understanding of the discrepancy between policy and teaching staff. Current practices do not reflect Indigenous lens, top down approach eliminates community input; Policies [need to be] reviewed with more equity lens 8: Increase parental involvement in policy creation; Need to raise awareness and access for all staff around policy 12: Policy is currently creating barriers for Indigenous families
Student Survey Feedback - Stakeholder Responses			
<i>What would you like school staff to learn, do or learn about you and/or Indigenous people?</i>	“They already know a lot”		

ANALYSIS

- Rankings in the Student Survey Feedback not reflected in the anecdotal comments;
- Student Survey Feedback sample size very small – does this represent feelings/opinions of Indigenous learners?