

Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements: Complicated Conversations as Pathways to Success

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Executive Summary

This project was undertaken to build upon previous studies of the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements (AEEAs) within the BC school system (e.g., Castlemain, 2013; McGregor, 2013) to gain insight into the questions: How have AEEAs helped improve Aboriginal education and what improvements to the AEEAs are needed to move forward? This report provides an overview of the history and current state of AEEAs in British Columbia. It then provides insight into the successes and challenges encountered in implementing the AEEAs as well as emergent innovative and interdisciplinary practices addressing performance goals and outcomes of Aboriginal learners. Of particular interest is the discussion surrounding the sustainability of ongoing relationships between and among the Ministry, school districts, and Aboriginal communities as they negotiate the complexities of sharing best practice, promoting Indigenous¹ knowledge and ensuring successful educational outcomes for Aboriginal learners.

With this goal in mind, from November 2015 to April 2016, the authors of this report along with the assistance of research assistants conducted a mixed methods study that included: a qualitative content analysis (QCA) of current AEEAs and their annual reports from 22 districts, a survey of these same districts, and in-depth interviews and focus groups from four districts representing: (1) Northern BC; (2) Okanagan; (3) Lower Mainland; and, (4) Vancouver Island. In this way, a better representation of the needs of those regions were identified and provide insightful recommendations that need to be considered within the context of each district to the Ministry of Education.

AEEAs as Living Documents

The QCA of the existing (i.e., development) AEEAs and the reporting out of data (i.e., annual reports) helped identify key elements of AEEA with common themes and also provided insight into the unique circumstances and innovations occurring across the province.

The analysis of the 22 AEEAs revealed four distinct themes: *Academic Success*, *Trust*, *Cultural Alliances*, and *Collective Responsibility*. **Academic Success** was a dominant theme, which was logical given that the AEEAs were developed to support Aboriginal student success. While all of the AEEAs commented in some way on the academic success of Aboriginal students, how each district's AEEA focused on defining and then measuring academic success varied. **Trust** was related to the important process of laying the foundations for the development of transparent and sustainable communication as well as the evolution of relationships based on trust, honesty, and integrity between the Aboriginal rightsholders² and

¹ This report uses the terms *Aboriginal* and *Indigenous* interchangeably as stated by the participants and as reflected in the professional literature.

² *Rightsholders* is intentionally used in this report to refer to all those engaged in Aboriginal education. We recognize the unique relationship Aboriginal peoples have within Canadian society and their rights as sovereign

the school districts. **Cultural Alliances** addressed the complicated conversations surrounding the negotiated realities of honouring traditional territories and host nations while attending to the values and mores of diverse First Nation, Inuit, and Métis (FNIM) cultures present in these territories. **Collective Responsibility** emphasized the importance of shared and co-created cultural and educational initiatives between communities and school districts that fostered success via Indigenous knowledge, through the development and implementation of AEEAs.

The QCA of the 22 Annual Reports (ARs), building upon the goals expressed in the EAs, identified three recurring themes: *Sense of Place*, *Aboriginal Epistemology*, and *Ways of Teaching*. **Sense of Place** was related to finding one's sense of belonging and sense of self within the school system. **Aboriginal Epistemology** is indicative of the salient nature of articulating and integrating culturally-responsive pedagogy into contemporary curricula. School districts emphasized the importance of Aboriginal ways of knowing throughout their respective annual reports. **Ways of Teaching** acknowledged the challenges of negotiating Eurocentric structures, perspectives and modes of content-based delivery and assessment of content which ran contrary to cultural mores.

Success and Strengths

The collective findings from the online survey, semi-structured interviews, and the focus groups/sharing circles were grouped under three broad themes: *Trust and Relationship Building*, *Academic Success through Indigenous Inclusion*, and *Cultural Alliances*. **Trust and Relationship Building** were recognized in the QCA of the AEEAs and their annual reports as an ongoing process that needed to be nurtured throughout the district; the theme of trust was also discussed by interview and focus group/sharing circle participants and survey respondents. While many of these participants were not involved with the beginning stages of the AEEAs, many were familiar with the agreements, statements, discussions, and/or the signing process, and could speak to the importance of trust not only between the districts and Ministry, but also across all educational sectors. All rightsholders needed to trust each other to successfully work together on the AEEAs. It was evident across the data that many communities are working to achieve and to enhance relationships and trust. **Academic Success through Indigenous Inclusion**, as it was evident in the QCAs, for many districts was broader than grade progression or test scores; while it is recognized by all that numeracy, literacy, and ultimately, having a successful education that provides opportunities beyond high school was critically important. It was important for many participants to stress that the tracking of student success was important but it was one element of student success. It is the focus of education after all. However, what is clear from rightsholders was the need to conceptualize and implement broader understandings of success that value Indigenous learners and all that they bring to their own schooling. **Cultural Alliances** was an evident theme since many participants discussed various aspects of the concept and its importance in the Enhancement Agreements. It should equally be noted that being an ally includes addressing Aboriginal students' learning needs. In

nations. In a research relationship, as such in this report, rightsholders goes beyond "stakeholders" or "participants of research" in that it recognizes their inherent rights and knowledge holders.

other words, educators need to remember that “all educators, not just those in First Nations territories, must be alert to the presence of First Nations children in their classrooms” (Bainbridge & Haydon, 2013, p. 101) when reflecting on their practice.

Recommendations

Based on the analysis of all data sets, we present six recommendations for consideration by all who are involved in and impacted by the AEEAs.

- 1. Senior Administration at the Board and school levels need to be accountable and transparent in the development, implementation, and review of the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement with their rightsholders across the districts.**
- 2. The Ministry of Education and School Boards need to enhance professional development and learning opportunities for all in the school district (from custodial staff, support staff, teachers, and advocates to Senior Administrators) by informing and making all aware of how the AEEA relates to their work within the school, the district, and to the broader goals of the Ministry of Education.**
- 3. The Ministry of Education and school districts should continue to foster and build upon existing relationships between and among the school district, Aboriginal communities, including community partnerships with organizations (e.g., post-secondary institutions) and groups (e.g., non-profit organizations or service organizations) that would help support the implementation of the AEEA.**
- 4. Communication of goals and results is critical for AEEAs to have an impact. They should be featured in multiple locations from district and school websites to Parent Advisory Committee (PACs) meetings to school newsletters, and social media, to name but a few.**
- 5. In support of collective responsibility and engagement, the Ministry of Education and school districts should include parents and students as signatories and active members of the AEEAs.**
- 6. The Ministry of Education and school districts should advocate for and embrace culturally-relevant pedagogy, resources, and practices across all grade levels.**

Context

In 1999, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed to solidify partnerships between the British Columbia Ministry of Education and the BC Aboriginal Education Partnership. The MOU led to the development of a framework for the creation of AEEAs. These AEEAs are five-year formal agreements between and among school districts, local Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal organizations, and the Ministry of Education that address specific performance goals and outcomes for Aboriginal learners. Assembling First Nation, Inuit, and Métis (FNIM) communities and school districts, the aim of this collaborative process is to establish common definitions of success, and to set measurable goals, indicators, and targets for improved Aboriginal student outcomes. Ancillary objectives are also intended to support the mobilization and dissemination of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) and broaden the understanding of all British Columbians of Aboriginal people's history, culture, and contemporary contexts.

Since that time, the scope of the BC Aboriginal Education Partnership has grown to include the First Nations Education Steering Group (FNESC). The steering committee is designed to advance and enhance the quality of education for all First Nations learners. The First Nations Schools Association is dedicated to supporting excellence in BC First Nations schools. The Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada is responsible at a federal level for improving social well-being and economic prosperity, health, and sustainable communities. The BC Teachers Federation is responsible for teachers/teacher assistant/education assistants in collaboration with the Canadian Union of Public Employees. The BC School Trustee Association is a professional association that supports public education and advocates for the role of publicly-elected trustees. The BC School Superintendents Association is comprised of the directors of instruction and senior executives of BC's 60 school districts. BC Confederation of Parents Advisory Council, BC Principals and Vice Principals Association is an autonomous professional organization advocating on behalf of BC's public school principals and vice principals. The United Native Nations has different local memberships throughout BC who provide skills development and job preparation. Métis Nation BC offers a variety of programs for the Métis people and their citizenship, and various external community partners and organizations (e.g., university, college, museums, city hall). In short, there are a great deal of organizations and rightsholders who are involved in BC education.

The relationships that have been built to develop and engage in the implementation of the AEEAs has been vast; however, despite the important and valuable work being undertaken in this province, there exists a dearth of studies on the impact of AEEAs in BC schools. One of the few studies conducted was under the auspices of the Aboriginal Enhancement Schools Network (AESN), funded by the Office of the Federal Interlocutor, Aboriginal and External Relations Branch (McGregor, 2013). In this report, the authors presented their research on "how selected participants in the Network describe and illustrate the nature of [the AESN] impact by sharing their experiences and stories" (p. 24). Specifically, they used case study research and the specific bounded examples of Prince Rupert and Arrow Lakes school districts. They used focus groups (with a total of 43 individuals), interviews (with 12 participants), and

written narratives (from 11 individuals). A major limitation of this study is that they only studied two school districts in a similar geographical area, Northern British Columbia.

The Castlemain Group (2013) study was conducted in partnership with FNEESC and the Ministry of Education and focused on the administration of the AEEAs by examining how the partnerships between Aboriginal communities and school districts had been enhanced by the AEEA initiative; how the AEEAs supported the academic achievement of Aboriginal learners; and how the AEEAs contributed to the promotion of language and culture in schools. Their mixed-method study involved reviewing AEEA politics and reports; analyzing district-level and aggregated data collected by the Ministry of Education; an online survey (303 responses: 38 District superintendents, 29 FNE Coordinators, and 161 school principals plus 53 Aboriginal education advisory council members [District staff] and 22 AEAC members non-district staff); and 15 interviews with district and community representatives from seven districts across the province. The unique contribution of this report is that it differentiated between districts with current AEEAs, those in process of developing AEEAs, and those with expired AEEAs. They also had secondary data from regional dialogues that, with their partners, were held across the province to present preliminary findings. The Castlemain Group (2013) also noted in the evolution of current AEEAs there was a recognition that “(c)urrent EAs now encompass a broad view of Aboriginal student success that includes indicators such as: sense of belonging, health and wellness, Aboriginal perspectives for all students; and participation in extracurricular activities” (p. 15). They concluded in their report that overall partnerships between Aboriginal communities/organizations and school districts had improved. Their analysis of current agreements found a strong focus on reading and writing (92%), goals related to graduation (77%), numeracy (69%), and postsecondary transitions (56%). While they found that 92% of EAs had articulated goals related to culture, only 41% of agreements had goals related to language. The general perception was that further support is needed to incorporate Aboriginal content into all aspects of learning. FNEESC, at Regional Enhancement Workshop Presentation in 2013, “stress[ed] the important role of traditional languages and cultures in promoting student development and student success. Fundamental to EAs is the requirement that school districts provide strong cultural programs, appropriate to the local first peoples on whose traditional territories the districts are located” (cited in Castlemain Group, 2013, p. 11).

In recent years, there has been increasing awareness of the dire need to acknowledge and to include Indigenous ways of knowing and being within the Eurocentric paradigms of contemporary educational systems to support Indigenous student success (ACDE, 2011; Battiste, 2013; Battiste, Kovach, & Balzer, 2010; Castlemain Group, 2013; CCL, 2007; Chrona, 2015; Office of the Auditor General of BC [OAGBC], 2015; St. Denis, 2007; TRC, 2015). In fact, “much effort has gone into developing and advocating culturally relevant education, including incorporating cultural traditions and practices into schools as well as developing culturally relevant curriculum content for all subject areas” (St. Denis, 2007, p. 1083). The inclusion of culturally-relevant curriculum and pedagogical practices does more than simply address academic achievement, as it honours the whole individual (e.g., emotionally, culturally, intellectually, and physically). Culturally-responsive pedagogy is an approach that asserts the value of focusing classroom curricula and practice upon students’ cultural frames of reference

(Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994). In British Columbia, this seminal discussion has been informed by the framework developed by Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991), emphasizing the 4Rs: *respect* for First Nations, Inuit and Métis cultural integrity, *relevance* to First Nations perspectives and experiences, *reciprocal* relationships and *responsibility* through participation, which was taken up in the work of Pidgeon, Archibald, and Hawkey (2014).

In 2009, Deans of Education in Canada signed the Indigenous Education Accord, recognizing the need for professional development and education of teachers in the area of Aboriginal education (Association of Canadian Deans of Education, 2009). For example, teaching from an Indigenous perspective offers a very different outlook from conventional Western school structure, where school subjects are divided into individual disciplines and students are required to learn in a more linear mode (Armstrong, 2005; Claypool & Preston, 2001). This holistic approach aims to “end the fragmentation of Eurocentric educational systems imposed on First Nations students and facilitate the goal of wholeness to which Indigenous knowledge aspires (Battiste, 2002, p. 30). How each teacher education program in Canada has taken up this work varies from a required mandatory course to an infused curriculum across the teacher education training program (ACDE, 2011). The key component is that, unlike previous times, there is a conscientization (Freire, 2013) of the collective responsibility all Canadians have towards empowering Aboriginal peoples. That is, the experience is consciousness raising and is occurring across the province and the nation. Education is seen by many as a key catalyst of this change of decolonizing education for all (Battiste, 2013). Archibald and Steinhauer (2015) indicated that they looked “forward to a growing corpus of scholarship about Indigenous teacher education and Indigenous education for teacher education in the future” (p. 4). This is further supported in the work of the Truth and Reconciliation reports, where in its Calls to Action, the commission was clear in the role education has in ensuring all Canadians truly understand the legacy and impact of residential schools on Aboriginal peoples and the education system responsibility to change to empower and embrace Aboriginal ways of knowing and being to support Aboriginal learners, families, and communities (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

One of the most significant sites of empowerment, negotiation, and contestation for Aboriginal people within the last two decades has been education (Kumar, 2009). According to Winzer (2008), current educators, like many before them, have high expectations for success placed upon them by governments, students, and society. The research indicates, that current educators manage larger class sizes, receive less funding for their students, and must contend with an increase in the inclusion of diversity in Canadian classrooms. In this climate of change, the education system in British Columbia is experiencing an increase in the cultural consciousness of their education system. In BC, there is a push to include cultural consciousness via *First Peoples Principles of Learning* within curriculum that is designed to close the learning gaps that exist between mainstream education and Indigenous education (First Nations Education Steering Committee [FNESC], 2015; Government of British Columbia, 2015). Further, the new BC curriculum emphasizes a holistic approach to teaching and learning by identifying core competencies, which support the social and emotional well-being of learners. There are several reasons as to why teachers should take on the responsibility of improving the

quality of education for Aboriginal Canadians, which largely involve the connection between educational attainment and quality of life, as well as the role of teachers in general in determining quality education.

The TRC's Calls for Action (2015) urges all Canadians to become literate in a distinctive dark period of history: the legacy of residential schools upon generations of Aboriginal families. As Canadians and public school systems progress towards truth and reconciliation it is imperative that educators recognize and acknowledge how students' familial affiliations have been significantly impacted by historical events. Concomitantly, educators must also realize the fact that the majority of Canadians have little to limited knowledge about this aspect of Canadian history. For this reason, educational institutions, as conduits of knowledge, must make informed commitments to mobilize and disseminate information relating to seminal events like Residential Schools, the Sixties Scoop, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Chrona, 2015). It is within this broader understanding of the research literature and current policy and national events, the research team undertook this inquiry on behalf of the BC Ministry of Education.

The Inquiry & Process

The main purpose of this project was to better understand the impact of AEEAs in supporting Aboriginal education across BC school districts and to make recommendations on future change. Within this project, we sought to better understand what was working with the current AEEAs and what lessons could be learned from the successes and challenges of designing and implementing the AEEAs to better support Aboriginal student success. With these goals in mind, this project paid particular attention to the history and current state of AEEAs in BC; the role they play in education system change, particularly Aboriginal student success (e.g., how they are helping); identifying any successful innovative and interdisciplinary practices in BC schools; and, understanding the role school district-community relationships, and recommendations that emerge from rightsholders on how the AEEAs' process and implementation can be improved to support Aboriginal student success.

To undertake this investigation, there were four main data collection points, following a mixed-methodology (Kitchenham, 2009; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009) and an interpretive (hermeneutic) phenomenological approach (van Manen, 2014, 2015).

Phase 1 – Qualitative Content Analysis: The four researchers were responsible for examining the AEEAs and subsequent annual reports for four to five school districts in one of four geographic regions in the province; in the end, 22 school districts' AEEAs and Annual reports were analyzed (see Appendix A for a listing of these districts). The analysis was a thematic coding of the documents and then, as a group, emergent themes were identified that were common to all EAs. This process assisted us to identify "outliers" such as issues that might be specific to a school district or provincial region.

Phase 2 – Survey: In December 2015, we distributed an online survey to the 22 districts from Phase 1. The survey’s core questions were based upon the Ministry of Education’s nine expectations of an AEEA and a modified Likert scale was used so that participants could complete the survey easily and quickly. The survey link, housed on FluidSurveys at the University of Northern British Columbia, was distributed by the Principal Investigator through email to 22 School District Superintendents with the request that the Superintendent either complete the survey or pass it on to another person such as the District Principal – Aboriginal Education. In total, there were **26 completed surveys** completed by all 22 school districts (11 Superintendents, four Assistant Superintendents, one Deputy Superintendent, and 10 other education administrators). This resulted in a **response rate of 100%** in that all 22 districts completed the survey with two different people completing from five of the school districts.

In the first section of the survey, participants were asked to identify their agreement on a modified four-point Likert scale as to the development of the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement (“For each expectation, please indicate your level of agreement in relation to your school district’s Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement in terms of how **it was developed** [Strongly Disagree; Disagree; Agree; Strongly Agree]. Please include any additional comments in the textbox below.”).

The second section asked the participants to indicate their agreement on the operation or implementation of the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement (“For each expectation, please indicate your level of agreement in relation to your school district’s Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement in terms of how **it is currently operated** [Strongly Disagree; Disagree; Agree; Strongly Agree]. Please include any additional comments in the textbox below.”).

Each response for the first and second sections was coded by number to use the descriptive statistics of mean and median so that “SD” was entered as a “1”, and “D” became “2” and so forth (see Appendix D: Table 3; Appendix E: Table 4; Appendix F: Table 5; Appendix G: Table 6 for survey results; and Appendix H: Survey). A thematic content analysis was performed on the open-ended responses. As per the University Harmonized Ethics approval, the respondent/interviewee from a school district will not be identified by name.

RESEARCH PHASES

To undertake this investigation, there were four main data collection points, following a mixed-methodology (Kitchenham, 2009; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009) and an interpretive (hermeneutic) phenomenological approach (van Manen, 2014, 2015).

Phase 1 - Qualitative Content Analysis

Phase 2 – Survey

Phase 3 - Interviews and/or Focus Groups

Phase 3 – Interviews and/or Focus Groups: Based on the QCA and the survey results, the interview and focus group/sharing circle protocols were developed and provided ahead of time to school district Superintendents or District Principals – Aboriginal Education who passed them on to interested participants or provided researchers with email addresses of potential participants. In most cases, the participants volunteered to be part of the research rather than being selected by the Superintendent or District Principal – Aboriginal Education. Four geographic regions were selected and one school district within each region was invited to participate further in this study through interviews and focus groups. The semi-structured interviews and focus groups (or sharing circles) included: superintendents, principals, vice-principals, directors, district principals, teachers/supporters, parents, Aboriginal education workers, trustees/board members, local Band members, community and organization representatives, and First Nations Education Council members.

In total, the research team **interviewed 31 people** and conducted **focus groups/sharing circles with 22 others** within four school districts in the province. To ensure confidentiality, analysis was conducted across districts, and no identifiers are shared in this report. All rightsholders had years of experience in education, leadership, child welfare, community organization Aboriginal politics, policies and procedures experience; many were involved in the authorship of the Enhancement Agreement. The interviewees were both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal with predominantly, Aboriginal rightsholders.

All data sets were transcribed by the researchers themselves or by research assistants who signed confidentiality agreements. In the first cycle coding, each data set (focus groups/sharing circles and interviews divided by geographical region) were then analyzed by each of the respective researchers using coding frames from the themes that were derived from the QCA. Second cycle coding involved incorporating new themes and codes into existing ones (Saldaña, 2013).

AEEAs as Living Documents: Qualitative Content Analysis

In keeping with the initial aims of the AEEAs, *Academic Success of Aboriginal Learners*, was a common element found in all 22 school districts. Improving graduation rates, providing sustainable school-based and cultural programs, and developing validated measures were important considerations. Table 1 (see Appendix B) provides a summary QCA table of the 22 districts' AEEAs, of which four common themes were identified: *Academic Success*, *Trust*,

QCA THEMES

Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements:

- *Academic Success*
- *Trust*
- *Cultural Alliances*
- *Collective Responsibility*

Annual Reports:

- *Sense of Place*
- *Aboriginal Epistemologies*
- *Ways of Teaching*

Cultural Alliances, and Collective Responsibility. The analysis of the AEEAs demonstrated the partnerships involved in co-creating these documents with representation from school district and community rightsholders. Table 2 (see Appendix C) provides the QCA for the Annual Reports (ARs) of the 22 districts AEEAs, of which the top three themes were: *Sense of Place, Aboriginal Epistemologies, and Ways of Teaching.* While one would assume that themes prevalent in the AEEAs would also be evident in the annual reports; the analysis of the documents provided insight into the differences between the design of policy (e.g., AEEA) and the implementation of such a document (e.g., annual reports). This is not to say that the annual reports were disconnected; in fact, the ARs were insightful into what was successfully working within the school districts' AEEAs. As one can see, for a learner to be successful, there needs to be trust and a sense of belonging/place. To build cultural alliances, trust is paramount and so is understanding Aboriginal ways of knowing and being. While collective responsibility involves all rightsholders from the Ministry to the student, their families, and the broader community, this responsibility cannot be undertaken unless all involved understand how to engage Aboriginal learners (e.g., ways of teaching). This connection between policy and practice was also evident in Phase 3 interviews and focus group/sharing circle participants who spoke about their aspirations within their AEEAs and the realities of implementing complex ideas within a complex system.

ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Clearly culture and learning are inseparable for the school districts in this study as evidenced by their comments in the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements and followed up within their annual reports was further understanding the value of sense of place to supporting Aboriginal student engagement and ultimately their success.

Academic Success

It is logical, given that the AEEAs were developed to support Aboriginal student success, that almost all the school districts commented on the academic success of Aboriginal students. How districts focused on defining and then measuring academic success varied. For example, some school districts in their AEEAs and, subsequently in their annual reports, focused on the graduation rates, attendance rates, grade progression, and numeracy/literacy testing scores. For example, School District 23 noted the yearly increase in **graduation rates** “our graduation rate continues to improve (42% in 2001 to 68.9% in 2012)” (p. 5). Many other districts AEEAs took a more **holistic approach** and made explicit the connection between student performance and a sense of belonging and recognition of culture.

We will respect all Aboriginal cultures and traditions, including the tradition of respecting the primacy of the Witsuwit'en culture, and of the Witsuwit'en Nation within its territory” (AEEA, SD 54, Bulkley Valley, p. 3), and specifically, “*Alhk'ikh Hedilh*

highlights the importance of academic performance and relates local culture and language to Aboriginal student development and success. (AEEA, SD 54, Bulkley Valley, p. 3)

To increase the respect and understanding of language, culture, governance, and history of Sto:lo and Aboriginal peoples for all students in order to create a better sense of school and community (AEEA, SD 33, Chilliwack, p. 4).

Variations of this notion of **culture and student success being interconnected** were provided by several other school districts. At least four (of the 22) districts noted that success was also about maintaining **wellness and a healthy lifestyle**. School District 44 (North Vancouver) wanted “to increase the awareness and provision of healthy choices that will enhance the well-being of students of Aboriginal ancestry” (p. 12). Other districts identified the importance of **self-worth and confidence** to Aboriginal student success. For example, School District 22 (Vernon) argued that “Aboriginal students will have a strong vision of who they want to be” (p. 12), while School District 33 (Chilliwack) wanted “to ensure students with Aboriginal ancestry achieve **social and academic success**” (p. 4) and School District 45 (West Vancouver) expressed a desire to “support student learning and ensure all Aboriginal students in West Vancouver achieve success and graduate with dignity, purpose, and opportunities” (p. 4). School District 93 (Conseil scolaire francophone) wanted to “(d)velop students and staffs’ **leadership skills** by enabling them to play a role in their Francophone and Aboriginal communities” (p. 13).

Trust

Trust was related to the important process of laying the foundations for the development of transparent and sustainable communication as well as the evolution of relationships based on trust, honesty, and integrity between the Aboriginal rightsholders and the school districts. Seven school districts made many references to this theme in their AEEAs.

School District 72 (Campbell River) indicated that “(o)ver the course of the Enhancement Agreement, there is much greater evidence of Aboriginal culture and peoples in all schools and a significant increase in the number of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students receiving language and culture instruction” (p. 11). This

TRUST

School District 61’s (Greater Victoria) contribution to community involvement has been implemented in their Enhancement Agreement (2013-2018). They reported the movement and growth in public education involves the collaboration of Principals, Vice-Principals, teachers, parents, caregivers, families and Aboriginal communities. By doing so, they hope to increase Aboriginal student success by increasing cultural perspectives in the public education system.

Enhancement Agreement also pointed out that the school district parents had expressed a need for the school district to increase student and parent involvement in collaborative decisions. School District 61's (Greater Victoria) contribution to community involvement has been implemented in their Enhancement Agreement (2013-2018). They reported the movement and growth in public education involves the collaboration of Principals, Vice-Principals, teachers, parents, caregivers, families and Aboriginal communities. By doing so, they hope to increase Aboriginal student success by increasing cultural perspectives in the public education system. School District 39 (Vancouver) has established a specific committee, *Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement Implementation and Monitoring Committee (AEEA I & M)*, to oversee the governance and implementation of their Enhancement Agreement. School District 41 (Burnaby) names their committee the *Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement Working Group* with a similar mandate to monitor and implement the Enhancement Agreement.

Cultural Alliances

Cultural Alliances addressed the complicated conversations surrounding the negotiated realities of honouring traditional territories and host nations while attending to the values and mores of diverse FNIM cultures present in these territories. Respect for the wisdom of Elders as the holders of language and culture is presented as an important component of this thematic.

Several school districts discussed the importance of making connections to Aboriginal cultures. For example, in the student satisfaction survey sent to students in School District 27 (Cariboo-Chilcotin), students were asked whether they were being taught about Aboriginal peoples of Canada and the "many times" and "all the time" responses varied from 57% in Grade 3/4 to 33% in Grade 12 which demonstrated acknowledging traditional teaching. Similarly, School District 61 (Greater Victoria) stated:

As we paddle forward in this educational journey, we will focus on cultural competence with the vision of creating culturally safe learning environments. Schools and communities will continue to participate in activities that increase knowledge of factors that have impacted and continue to affect Aboriginal education (p. 6).

School District 35 (Langley) articulated a holistic balanced, life learning in that learning is not just schooling but rather it encompasses relationships to Elders and community, intergenerational learning, learning from place, and learning from culture. Comparatively, School District 41 (Burnaby) argued that the “focus must be centred on the development of the whole individual. Cultural development, social-emotional development, and academics must be interwoven to ensure the success of all students of Aboriginal ancestry in Burnaby schools” (p. 3).

School District 71 (Comox Valley) echoed this point of view as they indicated, “(o)ur vision for Aboriginal students is to have a balance between academic performance and Aboriginal culture and identity that will foster the value of lifelong learning” (p. 1). This school district’s Enhancement Agreement involved the contribution of the Aboriginal Education Council (AEC). The AEC developed an online survey that was distributed to community members, family members, students and staff. Some of the questions included in this survey were: “What does success in school mean to you?” “What does success in life mean to you?” and “What will support Aboriginal student success in school”. The themes that emerged from this survey included: Sense of belonging; academic success; awareness of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit history and culture for all students and Aboriginal student leadership. As a result of these emerging themes, Comox Valley district decided to use a cedar weaving as a symbol of strengthening relationships, protection and inclusiveness. This implementation has provided “visual meaning” to Comox Valley’s Enhancement Agreement. Other districts, also used culturally-relevant frameworks, such as canoes, for their Enhancement Agreements, such as SD 33 (Chilliwack) and SD 45 (West Vancouver).

Most of the school districts acknowledged the traditional territories within their Enhancement Agreements (and in the Annual Reports). For example, School District 61’s (Greater Victoria) Enhancement Agreement stated the “Guiding Principles [include] honouring and acknowledging the traditional territory and teachings of the Esquimalt and Songhees First Nations; acknowledge the traditional teachings of the Elders; support initiative that provide culturally relevant education to students; develop shared ownership and mutual respect through ongoing open dialogue; enhance a learning environment where Aboriginal students feel safe, respected and have a positive sense of place and belonging” (p. 4). School District 23 (Central Okanagan) recognized the input from Aboriginal students, parents, and families: “A special thank you to the Aboriginal students, parents, and families. Their invaluable responses to surveys and consultation groups, during the review of the Aboriginal Education Program, shaped the goals of the 2014-2019 Enhancement Agreement” (p. 21). There were

CULTURAL ALLIANCES

“As we paddle forward in this educational journey, we will focus on cultural competence with the vision of creating culturally safe learning environments. Schools and communities will continue to participate in activities that increase knowledge of factors that have impacted and continue to affect Aboriginal education” (p. 6).

acknowledgements of territory across the school districts located in the Lower Mainland, each recognizing the unique relationship of the traditional territories and also acknowledgement that their Aboriginal student population is diverse and represents many nations.

One of the main goals stated in Comox Valley’s Enhancement Agreement is, “to increase every Aboriginal student’s sense of belonging, cultural identity and self-esteem” (p. 4). As a result, they intend to implement this goal by providing students with positive role models which include Elders and community cultural presenters. As per Comox Valley’s Enhancement Agreement, there will be a visible presence of these role models which is desirable for students as it provides them with a sense of honouring and togetherness. Likewise, School District 61 (Greater Victoria) indicated that they provide

Cultural awareness and inclusion through Aboriginal Curriculum Support Teacher (ACST) roles by integrating content, developing experiential activities, supportive teacher awareness of Aboriginal content, describing and promoting availability of Aboriginal teacher resources, and modeling Aboriginal principles of learning and to provide cultural awareness through Aboriginal culture support-community cultural presentations, Elders in schools, connections to cultural resources and experiential learning opportunities (p. 5).

Additionally, School District 63 (Saanich) shared that “[their] collective vision for learning for our Indigenous learners is based on a long history of working together through dialogue, building understanding, and open communication” (p. 3). School District 45 (West Vancouver) stressed that they “are grateful that many adults and Elders from our Aboriginal community are directly involved with learning activities and celebrations at our schools; often providing leadership for these events” (p. 5). School District 33 (Chilliwack) indicated they want all students and stakeholders to “value the tolerance, understanding, and respect of all cultures and beliefs” (p. 5).

Collective Responsibility

Collective Responsibility emphasized the importance of shared and co-created cultural and educational initiatives between communities and school districts that fostered success via Indigenous knowledge, through the development and implementation of AEEAs.

Cultural Awareness was also an important component of building authentic cultural alliances. School District 61 (Greater

COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

School District 68 (Nanaimo-Ladysmith) acknowledged “the collective responsibility for the success of all Aboriginal learners in our district” (p. 7) and indicated that they “focused on the development of a secure Aboriginal Education department which includes one Aboriginal Education Assistant in every elementary and high school. Additionally, this district believed in a “collaborative systemic approach” (p. 7) that involves aspects of the spirit, mind, body, and emotion.

Victoria) indicated that they would “(p)rovide cultural awareness through Aboriginal culture support-community cultural presentations, Elders in schools, connections to cultural resources and experiential learning opportunities” (p. 5). School District 68 (Nanaimo-Ladysmith) acknowledged “the collective responsibility for the success of all Aboriginal learners in our district” (p. 7) and indicated that they “focussed on the development of a secure Aboriginal Education department which includes one Aboriginal Education Assistant in every elementary and high school. Additionally, this district believed in a “collaborative systemic approach” (p. 7) that involves aspects of the spirit, mind, body, and emotion. This approach teaches that a holistic understanding of ways of learning is essential in creating lasting, sustainable, and positive changes for Aboriginal learners which was echoed by most school districts in this study. School District 45 (West Vancouver) indicated: “This Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement will provide direction for parties, as they work together to provide the finest possible learning opportunities for our students ...[through] appropriate and meaningful programs which will benefit all of our First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students” (p. 3).

Honouring partnerships was also important for the school districts in this study and a crucial element of collective responsibility. For instance, the Campbell River School District (72) focuses on including families and parental input into the schools and community. By doing so, they are hoping parents feel part of the school community and healthy partnerships and relationships are likely to be established. As discussed earlier in this report, **collaboration** was integral to the conceptualization, development and implementation of the EAs. Interviewees spoke about the importance of establishing and maintaining a trusting relationship with partner rightholders. Most of the AEEAs not only identified their partner/stakeholders, but also described how these collaborations were sustained (e.g., Aboriginal Education Council meetings, working groups, and formal committees) that meet regularly to discuss the goals of the AEEAs and related data collected, to set new targets, and make recommendations on what needed to be done next within the district related to the AEEA. For example, School District 53 (Okanagan Similkameen), the district’s Aboriginal Education Council meets according to the Annual Enhancement cycle so that full consultation and collaboration can be accomplished.

(t)he involvement of community continues to be a key aspect in the education of our Aboriginal students. Aboriginal people understand the world in terms of relationships. We have built strong relationships with the local First Nations and urban Aboriginal community and numerous agreements have been made with them to support diverse learning opportunities (AR, SD 61 Greater Victoria, p. 12).

Annual reports provided insight into the ways collaborative consultation took place throughout the districts. For example, School District 41 (Burnaby) presented clear numbers of dedicated staff and their positions within the Annual Report and reported that in the 2013-2014 school year, they implemented five Community Gatherings, four surveys for parents, three surveys for staff, and many student focus groups. This collaborative stance is echoed by School District 23 (Central Okanagan) which indicates that the second AEEA was co-developed in partnership with 4 community forums; 5 focus meetings with staff and members of the Aboriginal communities; student surveys (600 responses); parent surveys (400 responses) (p. 5).

Sense of Place

Sense of Place was related to finding one's sense of belonging and sense of self within the school system. In some cases, it also represented a specific physical location like an office, room or classroom where students felt safe and secure. School District 61 (Greater Victoria) emphasized that they wanted to "enhance a learning environment where Aboriginal students feel safe, respected and have a positive sense of place and belonging" (p. 4).

School District 72 provided an example of forming trust through establishing a safe and welcoming environment: "Students' perceptions of feeling safe at their schools on the 2012-2013 Ministry of Satisfaction Survey have remained consistent at the grade 4 level. The number of grade 10 students feeling safe has increased since 2010-2011 (37%-59%)" (Campbell River School District, p. 11). In fact, as per the district's analysis of progress and future action, it was suggested that safety for students at all grade levels was important to achieve. Therefore, ensuring that students feel welcome is a main area of focus for the district (SD 72 EA).

Sense of place and belonging also connected for other districts through **culturally relevant curriculum** and **cultural programming**. For example, School District 52 (Prince Rupert) implemented a program known as *LUCID* which stands for "Learning for Understanding through Cultural Inclusion and Imaginative Development". This program was co-developed by the Aboriginal Education Council, the school district, and Simon Fraser University. The *LUCID* team consists of a helping teacher who works specifically with Aboriginal students to assist with students' engagement with curriculum. Teachers help promote this by placing an emphasis on local contexts, resources, and involvement in community. By doing so, teachers hope to facilitate passion in students and develop their own understanding of learning. This program mainly focuses on cultural integration and provides students with the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of their culture. The program provides this by offering culturally-relevant materials and approaches.

In their Annual Report, School District 41 (Burnaby) outlined Performance Indicators and commitments that were developed for each of three goals: (1) Burnaby Aboriginal students will develop a strong sense of belonging and confidence through pride in their cultural heritage and participation in their community; (2) Aboriginal students will develop a healthy lifestyle based on the traditional Aboriginal teachings (Mental, Physical, Emotional, Spiritual); and, (3)

SENSE OF PLACE

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Aboriginal students will graduate from secondary schools prepared to further their education, realize their career goals and to live out their dreams.

Making **cultural connections** was described by school districts as an important part of a sense of place. When School District 27 (Cariboo-Chilcotin) students were asked on a Satisfaction Survey if they were being taught about Aboriginal people of Canada, more students reported an increase content regarding Aboriginal peoples (57% of Grade 3/4 students, 29% of Grade 10 students, 44% of Grade 12 students, and 33% of all grades). Further when First Nations students were asked if they enjoyed school, Grade 3/4 student responses increased by 61% in the last year; Grade 7 student responses increased by 48%; Grade 10 student responses increased by 49%. Elsewhere in the report, the school district cited a noted Aboriginal scholar: “Dr. Martin Brokenleg’s teachings of the Circle of Courage tells us that if students are going to be successful they must first have a sense of belonging and it is nurtured by a relationship of trust and we build on this through language, relationships, culture, friends, faith and family” (AR, SD 27, Cariboo-Chilcotin, p. 3). A sense of belonging and academic success are also connected to the theme of trust.

Aboriginal Epistemologies

Aboriginal Epistemology is indicative of the salient nature of articulating and integrating culturally-responsive pedagogy into contemporary curricula. School districts emphasized the importance of Aboriginal ways of knowing throughout their respective annual reports.

School District 61 (Greater Victoria) included four main goals in their Annual Report; each of which outlines the importance of facilitating awareness of Aboriginal culture in the curriculum. Each goal includes a symbolic representation of animals significant in Aboriginal culture (e.g., bear, raven, wolf, and salmon). The bear is a representation of self-awareness so the district considers the importance of providing a sense of place, caring, safety and belonging for all Aboriginal students. Next, the raven, which represents cleverness and imagination; in order to encourage these skills, the school district ensures they continue raising awareness and understanding of Aboriginal history among staff and students. Further, the wolf represents a sense of communication, culture, and family which are important aspects of the home-community relationship. Lastly, the salmon, representing critical thinking, is realized by concentrating on increasing Aboriginal student success.

In their Annual Report, School District 28 (Quesnel) acknowledged that they operated on the traditional territories of the southern Carrier First Nations, which includes four nations. They reported that, in 2013-2014, they had educated 826 First Nations students, which encompassed 26% of the total student population. They also indicated that they conducted monthly meetings with the Aboriginal Education Council to ensure that all stakeholders—especially First Nations groups—were consulted on curriculum and student achievement. Elucidating further, they indicated that the school district “follows a balanced and holistic model of Aboriginal Education. We nurture the Response Ability Pathways of Belonging, Mastery, Independence and Generosity. In partnership with schools, families, students and community agencies, we seek to support the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual wellbeing of all students and in particular of our Aboriginal students” (p. 2). An impactful graph indicated that 71% of students felt a sense of belonging, 56% felt that they had demonstrated mastery of content, 38% acknowledged generosity from others, and 37% experienced a feeling of independence.

By doing so, specific programs and services are provided to First Nations students and families that are sensitive to and follow cultural protocols. In fact, they reported that “(o)ur Elders tell us that we need to know who we are in order for us to know where we are going. It is this important teaching that drives this goal area in School District # 27. We know that providing culturally-relevant materials to our First Nations students improves their sense of belonging and ultimately their academic achievement” (AEEA, SD 27, Cariboo-Chilcotin, p. 8). This school district reported that they are improving cultural awareness by funding more cultural activities and creating language kits that are translated into three languages: Carrier, Chilcotin, and Shuswap. Additionally, they reported that “(t)he Aboriginal Education Culture teacher provided support and guidance to classroom teachers developing Aboriginal curriculum. Ongoing support for the inclusion of Residential school histories within curriculum continued via the ‘Untold Histories Literature Unit’, school-based residential school panels and luncheons, project of heart activities and Elder and residential school survivor presentations at elementary and junior schools” (p. 6). Specifically, in order to acknowledge residential school trauma, the school district has implemented an initiative known as the

ABORIGINAL EPISTEMOLOGIES

This school district reported that they are improving cultural awareness by funding more cultural activities and creating language kits that are translated into three languages: Carrier, Chilcotin, and Shuswap. Additionally, they reported that “(t)he Aboriginal Education Culture teacher provided support and guidance to classroom teachers developing Aboriginal curriculum. Ongoing support for the inclusion of Residential school histories within curriculum continued via the ‘Untold Histories Literature Unit’, school-based residential school panels and luncheons, project of heart activities and Elder and residential school survivor presentations at elementary and junior schools” (AEEA, SD 27, Cariboo-Chilcotin, p. 8).

“Orange Shirt Day” which is a tribute to and an acknowledgement of the survivors of residential schools. By having a tribute, the school district hopes to acknowledge and reclaim shared histories.

School district annual reports outlined the importance of Aboriginal epistemologies and their recognition and connection to student learning through poignant quotes.

- Schools are making a commitment to continue to broaden and strengthen their engagement with the implementation of the Enhancement Agreement and Indigenous ways of knowing and learning” and “(w)ith this growing expectation of deepening our knowledge of Indigenous Peoples, we witness a growing trust and respect between students and school staff as well as school staff and community members and helping organizations (School District 63 [Saanich], p. 2);
- We will build on the partnerships between families and schools to support student achievement. More of our classrooms will provide culturally relevant curriculum and programs that honour all children. Aboriginal Education is for everyone (School District 61 [Greater Victoria], p. 2);
- To increase the respect and understanding of history, culture, governance and languages of the First Nations for all students in order to create a better sense of school and community belonging (School District 27 [Cariboo-Chilcotin], p. 7).

The Annual Reports demonstrate that most school districts acknowledged—overtly or implied—that honouring Aboriginal epistemologies is paramount to the success of the students and of the school districts.

Ways of Teaching

Ways of Teaching acknowledged the challenges of negotiating Eurocentric structures, perspectives and modes of content-based delivery and assessment of content which ran contrary to cultural mores. Several school districts provided comments on how their students learn and ways to accommodate their learning; other districts, like SD 41 (Burnaby), recognized the need to have teachers feel more knowledgeable and confident in teaching Aboriginal education and, as a result, they developed professional development training program for 25 classroom teachers. Further, they stressed that although there was still room for improvement in their Aboriginal student six-year completion rate, they were pleased with the overall trend of the past five years and, they were hopeful that earlier intervention might assist current and future students in developing the supports and strategies necessary to successfully complete Grade 12 within six years of entering high school.

School District 52 (Prince Rupert) discussed several goal areas for their Aboriginal student learners. According to the Annual Report, “(t)he Aboriginal Education Council develops and implements a range of programs that support the mission and goals of the Partnership Agreement and that increased the success and strength of Aboriginal learners, the engagement

of families and their children's education and community understanding of Aboriginal culture and history" (p. 1). In order to honour the diverse needs of students, the school district stresses the importance of **differentiated instruction** in their foundational principles. By doing so, the school district acknowledges that instruction celebrates diversity and meets all children where they are at (i.e., ensures learning meets the needs of every child). They also emphasized early learning and early intervention as they "assess young learners before they enter kindergarten to find out how they are doing when they come into school and how they are doing almost after a year of school. Information about how they are doing before they start school helps us understand what children still need to learn to be successful readers" (p. 14).

School District 27's (Cariboo-Chilcotin) Annual Report outlined that they will review the number of First Nations cultural activities in school and the number of poems in First Nations poetry contents. Their Annual Report also mentioned school staff would increase the number of Aboriginal students who will serve as **role models**. They reported, "(a)s we know, First Nations students are more engaged with their learning when it's meaningful, relevant and their culture is reflected in the subject areas. Not only is it important to ensure that there is culturally responsive educational opportunities for students to succeed academically, but providing additional supports in a variety of ways also increases First Nations students success" (p. 5). According to the school district, encouraging students to become role models in Aboriginal culture is likely to increase pride and encourage students to pursue their education. Further, in order to assist Aboriginal students with their education, the district will ensure students will receive culturally-appropriate support by implementing working groups that will focus on First Nations language and curriculum development.

In order to facilitate integration of Aboriginal culture in School District 63 (Saanich), their Annual Report focused on three main outcomes known to encourage learning and support for students which included cultural awareness and respect, sense of identity and belonging, and successful transitions. Each of these goals contributes to increased success in student learning. To acknowledge cultural awareness and respect, the school district encourages the integration of Indigenous themes throughout schools. They will also provide students with field trips to historical places to learn about traditions of local First Nations people).

Outliers

There were a few outliers in the AEEAs in the sense that the school districts discussed something unique to that school district which were, for some, due to geographic location. For instance, School District 27 (Cariboo-Chilcotin) discussed Aboriginal learning styles which is a contentious issue among academics. That is, they argued that Aboriginal students have unique learning styles rather than learning preferences.

Several school districts recognized the Medicine Wheel as a metaphor or model for Aboriginal learning, while a useful teaching tool if appropriately understood and implemented

however, it comes from Cree teachings and consequently may not be culturally relevant for many Aboriginal students. A more culturally-appropriate model was evident in School District 67 (Okanagan Skaha) who based their model from Okanagan traditional knowledge and stories: “We have framed our AEE on the *Four Food Chiefs* – a Syilx (Okanagan) oral story based on the Skemxist (Black Bear), Siya? (Saskatoon Berry), Speetlum (Bitterroot), and Ntityix (Spring Salmon)” (p. 7). The Chilliwack School District likewise undertook their AEEA within the traditional knowledge system of the Stö’lo peoples, and build their framework around the teachings of their canoes.

Additionally, only three school districts (out of 22 reviewed) discussed professional development of teachers in relation to addressing goals in the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreements (SD 39, 41, and 37). In supporting professional development in their districts each of these districts send the message that everyone was responsible for Aboriginal student success and that many teachers require support in integrating culturally appropriate curriculum for Aboriginal learners.

Another unique factor that was stated clearly by SD 41 (Burnaby) was the fact that they were developing and implementing their AEEA without a clearly defined Aboriginal community (e.g., reserve or organizational representation) and their diverse Aboriginal student population came from all over BC and Canada.

Only one school district discussed the impact of suicide rates among Aboriginal youth. School District 28 (Quesnel) provided suicide intervention workshops and had an At Risk Youth Team in place to support students in crisis. Clearly, given the national statistics regarding Aboriginal youth suicide, more school districts should make this type of development an integral part of the school district’s mandate.

Also, the transition from Grade 12 to post-secondary institutions and career goals was unique to a few school districts. For example, the AEEAs of SD 23 (Central Okanagan), SD 33 (Chilliwack), and SD 37 (Delta) made connections to transition to university or college, including how many students received scholarships/bursaries to attend post-secondary education.

In summary, while it seems logical that the AEEAs were designed initially to support success across the many school districts, there are also various aspects that some schools are trying to improve on such as attendance, numeracy, and literacy. Some schools are focusing on developing a sense of place, belonging and culture. A sense of place speaks to cultural identity, health and wellbeing, cultural relevance and interconnectedness. As noted, a sense of belonging and academic success are also connected to the theme of trust. In order to build trust, relationships have to be established and within relationships are the foundations of honesty and integrity, all of which must include Aboriginal rightsholders and the school districts. It was also mentioned in some of the agreements that there must be an increase in parental involvement.

Cultural Alliances also addressed the realities of acknowledging and honouring traditional territories, knowledge holders, language and culture. Metaphors are used to demonstrate collectivism, culturally-safe learning environments, academic performance, Aboriginal culture and identity that will foster the value of lifelong learning. In terms of Aboriginal epistemology or ways of knowing, it is essential to community learning. For example, hunting a moose is not just about hunting; rather, it is a community effort for shared responsibilities (dividing of food, tanning and scraping a hide, drum making preparation, prayers, incantations, songs). Collective responsibility as demonstrated above belongs to the whole community. The importance of collective responsibility is also about honouring partnerships between school districts. Ways of teaching was also highlighted with the importance of acknowledging colonial discourses, cultural awareness and sensitivity. What is important to note is that there are efforts in some schools that has made many changes in how the information is delivered, but at the same time, we still have a long way to go.

The analysis of the current AEEAs and their annual reports provided insight into the goals and aspirations of the documents, the relationships and trust that needed to be built to develop the agreements, and the recognition within the documents of the inherent value and importance of Aboriginal cultures and languages to supporting Aboriginal student engagement and success.

Building upon the themes from the QCA, the surveys, interviews, focus groups/sharing circles provided insights into how districts went about implementing their plans, the successes they encountered, the challenges and limitations of implementing the plans, and recommendations that they saw needed to support the work of the AEEAs (see Appendix G-Table 6 for summary table of analysis of the interviews and focus group/sharing circles). The next sections provide a synthesis of the surveys, interviews, and focus/group sharing circle results that help us better understand the strengths of the AEEAs (what is working across the province) and what are the current challenges that require attention to move forward the implementation of the AEEAs, and most importantly support Aboriginal student success (see Appendix I – Interview Questions and Appendix J – Focus Group/Sharing Circle Questions).

SUCCESS AND STRENGTHS

For the purposes of explication and presentation, it is prudent to outline our collective findings from the online survey, semi-structured interviews, and the focus groups/sharing circles. To this end, we have grouped all data sets under three broad themes: *Trust and Relationship Building, Academic Success through Indigenous Inclusion and Cultural Alliances*.

Success and Strengths

For the purposes of explication and presentation, it is prudent to outline our collective findings from the online survey, semi-structured interviews, and the focus groups/sharing circles. To this end, we have grouped all data sets under three broad themes: *Trust and Relationship Building, Academic Success through Indigenous Inclusion, and Cultural Alliances.*

Trust and Relationship Building

Trust was recognized in the QCA of the AEEAs and their annual reports as an ongoing process that needed to be nurtured throughout the district; the theme of trust was also discussed by interview and focus group/sharing circle participants and survey respondents. While many of these participants were not involved with the beginning stages of the AEEAs, many were familiar with the agreements, statements, discussions, and/or the signing process, and could speak to the importance of trust not only between the districts and Ministries, but also across the educational sector. All rightsholders needed to trust each other to successfully work together on the AEEAs. It was evident across the data that many communities are working to achieve and to enhance relationships and trust.

From the survey, there was general agreement by participants that school districts collaborated and consulted with rightsholder groups in the development of the Enhancement Agreements (the median response was above 3.0 for Statements 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, and 9, see Appendix D: Table 3). When responding to the statement, “Both the Aboriginal communities and the school district must support participation in the Enhancement Agreement”, the mean response was 3.62 which indicates that the overwhelming majority of the respondents strongly agreed that sharing responsibilities was a major component in the development of their respective Aboriginal Enhancement Agreements. The following quote speaks to the strengths of having partnerships:

TRUST AND RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

“The development and implementation of the District's two Enhancement Agreements has been instrumental in advancing Aboriginal student graduation rates in the ... School District. Shared goals, a common purpose, and ongoing collaboration and consultation with the Aboriginal Education Council has ensured the goals of the Enhancement Agreement remain a priority. I honestly believe that our positive trajectory of Aboriginal student achievement (K-12) has resulted from a shared commitment to meet the goals of the Enhancement Agreement.” (Assistant Superintendent, Survey respondent)

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In sum, the school districts indicated through survey ratings and comments that they made major progress in the development of their respective Aboriginal Enhancement Agreements.

The community was involved by SD asking for help in appointing committees & staff to help oversee budget – this was a collaborative effort between SD and community groups. (Assistant Superintendent, Survey Respondent)

We have a good relationship with our parents and the communication is good depending on where their schools are at. Trust is a huge challenge but we are working hard at trying to bring people together. There are many communities who are trying hard to develop their own relationships, but challenges lie amongst our communities. We do have to improve our support system especially in resources. (Principal, Interviewee)

A clear benefit of the AEEA process was the opportunity to build and enhance on these relationships, with Aboriginal communities, within the district and also with broader non-Aboriginal community partners. Some participants spoke of the opportunities that the AEEA process has in bringing together rightsholders to talk through complicated issues within their districts, all with the common aim of supporting Aboriginal learners. These meetings and sometimes difficult conversations, due to different perspectives being at the table, have led to improved relationships in the districts and with rightsholders.

It was clear from the senior administrators who responded to the survey that the respective Aboriginal Education Advisory Council or First Nation Education Council for each school district provides major input for the school districts. They were named in on one way or another as the manner in which the school districts meet the nine expectations. It is also

CENTRAL ROLE OF AEAC AND FNEC

It was clear from the senior administrators who responded to the survey that the respective Aboriginal Education Advisory Council (AEAC) or First Nation Education Council (FNEC) for each school district provides major input for the school districts. They were named in on one way or another as the manner in which the school districts meet the nine expectations.

evident that all stakeholders who completed the survey have a deep respect for the Aboriginal Education workers and rights holders (inside and outside the school district) and the work that they perform to ensure that the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreements are a success, and if there are areas of concern or improvement, the voices of all will be shared.

Within discussing trust and relationship building, it was also recognized by several interviewees from across the province that conversations about Aboriginal education could not be held in isolation and that the historical challenges that have impacted the trust relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples, particularly the legacy of residential schools, were paramount (see Appendix G: Table 6 for thematic analysis).

Because many of our children are of Aboriginal descent, it is important to talk about Residential School. As uncomfortable as it may be, it is something we have to pay attention to. We encourage our students to share some of their cultural stories, but for many students, they would say, we don't have any stories because we are too busy trying to survive, and that had always been a challenge. (Principal)

In fact, Battiste (2013) argued that this method of educating is grounded in *cognitive imperialism*, “a form of manipulation used in Eurocentric educational systems” which has resulted in cultural minorities believing “that their poverty and powerlessness are the result of their cultural and racial origins rather than the power relations that create inequality in a capitalistic economy” (p. 163). In other words, it is difficult for some to trust when there is a long history of breaking that trust.

Another participant reiterated the importance of feeling safe in the trust relationship:

We talked about how, when we are talking about trust, you know, the families have to feel safe, nourished, protected, before they can even...their life has to be at a good place before they can go out and engage in the community. (School Trustee)

I think the key one is the trust piece and I do think it is getting so much better. It is getting better politically, and we continue to build strong relationships. To prevent parent anxiety, we want to show what support looks like. (Principal)

During her interview, a Band Council member stressed the importance of how having a long-standing relationship of

COGNITIVE IMPERIALISM

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trust can improve the present-day trustful collaborations as exemplified by her comment:

My grandfather worked very hard in the 50s and other [local First Nation Band] members in making the relationships in the community strong. I would say that is our strength [in this school district] and I would say that is our big strength that we have here that we have good communication and relations. (Aboriginal Stakeholder)

I think watching the evolution of the enhancement agreement is definitely getting better. We had a lot of time to work on communication. One of our goals was to work on effective communication. There were some Aboriginal Agreements that were successful and some that were not. (Principal)

In other words, trust does need to be earned but, in many instances, the trust between school district personnel and Aboriginal rightsholders is based on decades of established communication. These statements also acknowledge the importance of not assuming that Aboriginal parents “do not care” because they may not be present at school or district events; deficit thinking of parents also negatively impacts Aboriginal children in school and further demonstrates the need to build trust as a reciprocal responsibility.

In sum, many participants echoed the OAG’s (2015) recommendation that the Ministry of Education “collaborate with boards of education, superintendents, and Aboriginal leaders and communities to provide all students with a curriculum that addresses the past and present effects of the colonization of Aboriginal peoples in British Columbia” (p. 8) which would go a long way to improving trust where little exists now and enhancing trust where it currently exists.

Academic Success through Indigenous Inclusion

Academic success, as it was evident in the QCAs, for many districts was broader than grade progression or test scores; while it is recognized by all that numeracy, literacy, and ultimately, having a successful education that provides opportunities beyond high school was critically important. It was important for many participants to stress that the tracking of student success was important but it was one element of student success. It is the focus of education after all. However, what is clear from rightsholders was the need to conceptualize and implement broader understandings of success that value Indigenous learners and all that they bring to their own schooling. Most discussed what Battiste (2013) argued in her interpretation of cognitive imperialism that “Indigenous peoples have a science or way of knowing, but it is a concept that has embodied a way of life, an intimacy and directness with nature” (p. 160). In other words, knowledge and academic success can be attained inside and outside the school walls or **holistic learning**. These rightsholders articulated that view:

We want the whole to be accountable to learning and the band in this area is pretty supportive and active within our high school. Any student who wants to participate in

sports (e.g., hockey, baseball) and/or travel, we will certainly assist from the cafeteria donations. We have hands-on experience and everyone helps to celebrate the successes of achievements as well, we are trying to be supportive. One of many challenges arises when we have a qualified and certified person, but because there is a union involved, the person applying has difficulty getting a position. (Vice Principal, interviewee)

This is why we hire a team of teachers to work alongside their colleagues in the classroom to help them with integrating curriculum, bringing resources to their classrooms without forgetting student achievement and assessment along the way. (District Principal – Aboriginal Education, survey respondent);

It is only through acknowledging and incorporating Indigenous knowledge, and being culturally conscious in the classroom that the Canadian education system can begin to close the gaps in its practice, make their classrooms inclusive, and create equitable learning opportunities for all students; regardless of where they come from.

The **sense of belonging** here is very important for my students because they come from public schools sometimes, alternate schools, and they sometimes feel like they don't belong. So we make sure that they are going to be included and they have to feel like they belong. What we try to do is that we try to get as many people as possible to come in and [mentor] those kids. There a lot of schools who don't have a strong male role models in their lives, so we have two male role-models come here and help them. (Teacher)

This other participant stresses the importance of **open communication** avenues:

The uniqueness about our school is the communication. I meet on a daily basis with our principal and staff to debrief. We try to focus a lot on our Aboriginal learners and in particular, literacy and Aboriginal student performance by monitoring. I have a natural interest in the data we are collecting on how to improve student performance. Students pretty much know what is going on in their classrooms and with the assistance of their Aboriginal Education Workers, they seem to manage. We also see a lot of teamwork involved however, our concern is the attendance. The principal is encouraging the teachers to connect and to build relationships amongst the community. (Vice Principal)

Another teacher in a focus group expressed concern about and desire for **retaining** Aboriginal students from the early grades to high school graduation as she indicated:

It's key to the enhancement agreement but making sure that we keep the kids from high school to junior high and all the way up. Because I get them [in the early grades] and they are excited, eager, try to get the families in the door, try to have integrative

programs and then you see them leaving and falling off of it a bit and things change. Making sure kids stay in school. (Teacher)

Equally, a participant from a different school district discussing the nine statements set out by the Ministry talked about the importance of knowing how Aboriginal students are performing in school:

...it allows us to think about our tracking process and to collect further data which is a big part of accountability. This is also a bit of challenge particularly between ancestry and poverty issues, so we offer breakfast, snack and lunch program for children of Aboriginal ancestry. For children who have no clothing or shoes or basic needs, we try to offer the donated clothing from local communities. Currently, we are working on a backpack program. We are working hard in supporting the basic needs of Aboriginal children. I know we are trying hard to support the needs of Aboriginal children, but we also have to deal with racism in our schools. We try to address that immediately. (Director)

In other words, the participants were reinforcing the need to support Indigenous students holistically and, from the survey participants, it was evident they wished to have more leadership and top-down direction (i.e., BC Ministry of Education) to track the successes of Aboriginal students in order to make curricular decisions. As part of its recommendations, the OAG (2015) indicated, among many others, that the BC Ministry of Education “had not provided the education system with sufficient leadership and direction to close the gaps” and “undertook limited analysis of the wide range of student outcome data it monitored, to understand trends and outcomes for Aboriginal students and inform change” (p. 5).

In order to attain this substantial goal of enhancing others’ knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal culture and beliefs, educators require to continually advance their knowledge as well as their students’ knowledge about Aboriginal peoples and their history.

I think now we have a pretty good balance. We encourage the students to acknowledge the territory and for the most part, the students will just acknowledge without thinking about it. When the students write their theme songs in [the local First Nations language], it is also shared with our French Immersion students. In terms of meeting all nine elements, I don’t think we are all there yet, but with truth and reconciliation we are hoping to achieve some if not all, because we are really not good at trying to achieve all the statements. (Principal)

HOLISTIC LEARNING

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Many scholars consider that cultural heritage of Aboriginal peoples including oral tradition, storytelling, traditional knowledge, and experiential/holistic learning and spirituality has a huge impact on Aboriginal children's learning in schools. For example, the Canadian Council on Learning [CCL] (2007) points out that, holistic learning which engages and develops all aspects of an individual including emotional, physical, spiritual, and intellectual should be properly assessed instead of focusing on standardized assessments that test intellectual performance rather than the development of the whole person.

Educators can become allies of Aboriginal education through expressing their beliefs and attitudes towards and about Indigenous people—especially in teacher education. For instance, BC teacher education programs and, most Education programs across Canada, require that “pre-service teachers take at least one course on First Nations, Métis, and Inuit histories, cultures, and education during their teacher education” (Hare, 2015, p. 102). Furthermore, educators are essentially helping their students develop in accordance to their individual potentials and talents by creating a classroom that is conducive to learning for every individual. Thus, by encouraging students to express their beliefs and values, educators are creating a learning opportunity for the students for the reason that each individual will take interest in their culture and embody it. This is in contrast to concealing their culture and heritage, and perhaps, being ashamed of it.

Cultural alliance is important for me as well, it is also important as we are trying to make changes and introducing different methods. For example, we try to make sure that students are matched with the right programs. We want our students to do well and not to be under too much pressure. We are fostering resilient learners for trauma sensitive classrooms. Working through poverty in trying to support the children and families.
(Principal)

Deer (2008) in recognizing the “abundance of different cultural groups [who] represent numerous set of divergent interests [will have] had a significant impact on how the goals of education, socialization, relational reality, and individuality” (p.73) stressed the importance of inclusion and diversity that is created within a classroom as well as the impact it can have on a student's learning journey. Furthermore, educators need to be aware of the “significant impact” that their instructional and assessment practices have on these students. As noted in a few sections, educators can use the *First Peoples Principles of Learning* to “identify common elements in the varied teaching and learning approaches that prevail within particular First Peoples societies” (Government of British Columbia, 2015, p.6).

I think we are on the right track. We have a language and culture teacher and a cultural coordinator. We are focusing on trying to encourage reading a book or doing novel study from an Aboriginal view point. (Principal)

Survey respondents spoke further about the work of the Aboriginal resource educators, and the value of having Elders and community members as part of the cultural programming

within their districts. Using Aboriginal novels, as the above quote mentions, is an example of how educators can incorporate Aboriginal education into their everyday practice. Some interviewees also spoke about how resources, such as those provided by the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC), First Peoples Principles of Learning. Additionally, educators are essentially demonstrating and exhibiting a responsibility to enhance one's knowledge and understanding not only in Aboriginal education but also in each student's distinct learning journey and demonstrating respect for First Nations people. Furthermore, the role of an educator as an ally is to utilize pedagogical strategies to incorporate relevant culture in the classroom, and to assist students to gain agency and voice (Olivier, 2014). One participant expressed a similar view:

The school itself is trying to create a sense of family so the children can find a safe place, and also making sure that the space is inclusive. The most difficult thing is to have children from many different reserves and not knowing how to represent them. Given that our district and children are diverse; I believe we are doing a good job at trying to make things better. I don't know how to do it any better. (Principal)

One of the AEEA's goals is to facilitate non-Aboriginal access to Indigenous knowledge. The survey participants, in evaluating how they felt their district addressed the ninth Ministry expectation: *Focus on increasing knowledge of and respect for Aboriginal culture, language and history, which enables a greater understanding for everyone about Aboriginal people* indicated for the most part were addressing this through a variety of initiatives in partnership with their Aboriginal rightsholders in the community and within the school districts (e.g., professional development, in-service days, curriculum resources, Aboriginal resource teachers, guest visitors, cultural programming).

We spend resources to do our best to educate all learners around Aboriginal issues - with a small Aboriginal population our work is as much or more about helping non-Aboriginals understand the key issues. (Superintendent)

It is important to develop and implement strategies that infuse Aboriginal perspectives throughout the K-12 school curriculum in content area courses like English, Social Studies,

INDIGENOUS INCLUSION

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History, Mathematics and Sciences. St. Denis (2010) reported that some argue against the inclusion of Aboriginal content with the claim that, “Aboriginal people are not the only people here,” (p. 29) suggesting that it would be wrong to privilege Aboriginal history, knowledge, and experience in the teaching of one high school course in Canadian history and Social Studies. She further explained that this comment conveys a recurring sentiment that defends public education as a neutral multicultural space but also effectively tempers Aboriginal educational initiatives.

However, there are also many challenges faced by non-Aboriginal teachers who choose to include Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives in their classrooms (Riley & Ungerleider, 2012). These challenges are often related to the difficulty of respectfully teaching traditional knowledge without personal lived experiences in Aboriginal culture (Madden, Higgins, & Korteweg, 2013). Ultimately, there exist several strategies that may be employed in order to best provide authentic and respectful experiences with traditional knowledge and perspectives. For example, teachers can work closely with Aboriginal education workers to liaise between community, Elders and the school as expressed by this interviewee:

I think it is really important not to ignore pieces and to integrate everything, and to go above and beyond. Some people are just too uncomfortable in these situations, but it forces us to make sure that we don't forget that there is a lot of history. (Principal)

Another interviewee discussed the importance of schools becoming aware of what the Aboriginal Education department of a school district can offer teachers and administrators:

Yeah, every year we do a presentation, every school, and it's about here is the Ab Ed, here is how we support you, here are our four roles, we have posters up. Every classroom has a version of that. Just to remind people what we are here for. (District Principal – Aboriginal Education)

This sentiment was reinforced as one teacher explained what they do in the school district to support teachers:

The teachers and educators are working on things so they need to see the role models, and that's how many refer to themselves, as role-models, they role-model the

ROLE MODELS

“The teachers and educators are working on things so they need to see the role models, and that's how many refer to themselves, as role-models, they role-model the Aboriginal family members. We also have four curriculum support teachers, myself being one of those four. We work across the district; we have one in elementary and two in secondary [and one in distance education]. This makes for some crazy days, I drive a lot, but you know, we get to go from school to school and encourage innovative tools.”
(Teacher)

Aboriginal family members. We also have four curriculum support teachers, myself being one of those four. We work across the district; we have one in elementary and two in secondary [and one in distance education]. This makes for some crazy days, I drive a lot, but you know, we get to go from school to school and encourage innovative tools. (Teacher)

Advocates also supported the conceptualization, development, and implementation of district-wide professional development relating to Indigenous Knowledge, with the recommendation that for districts that are not currently providing such opportunities, “School Districts should offer 1 day Pro-D in Ab.Ed. for all teachers, staff and administrators. This should be mandatory” (Advocate). The need for professional development across the districts also connects to the next theme of cultural alliances.

Cultural Alliances

Many participants discussed various aspects of cultural alliances and their importance in the Enhancement Agreements. It should equally be noted that being an ally includes addressing Aboriginal students’ learning needs. In other words, educators need to remember that “all educators, not just those in First Nations territories, must be alert to the presence of First Nations children in their classrooms” (Bainbridge & Haydon, 2013, p. 101) when reflecting on their practice. Therefore, educators need to be acutely aware of the diverse cultural differences between specific Aboriginal learners and mainstream cultures because these differences have the potential to lead to great misunderstandings. In fact, studies show that when teachers used a form of instructional dialogue that the First Nations children had difficulties understanding, the children were seen to answer questions less frequently and were considered to answer less appropriately than non-Aboriginal students (Bainbridge & Haydon, 2013). This study amplifies the stark contrast between the European culture and Indigenous conventions in regards to their view on communication and speaking. The differences, for example, are evident in the ways that different cultures tell stories. This is confirmed in the *First Peoples Principles of Learning* by stating, “Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story” (FNESC, 2015, “First Peoples Principles of Learning”). One interviewee believed cultural alliances support the cultural integrity of Aboriginal learners:

Over the years, I have seen some changes with trust in our school and students’ wanting to share culture. We have French in our school and we want people to understand that we do not want to turn Aboriginal students into French speakers. (Principal)

An interviewee from another school district pointed out that their school district had a very small percentage of students from her First Nation on whose traditional territory the district resided but the teachers met the needs of many Aboriginal cultures since they had “First Nations from all over BC and from what I hear ... [the teachers] don’t have the background [to accommodate so many cultures since] geographically the [First Nations] are in completely different places” (Aboriginal Rightsholder).

In discussing cultural alliances, many participants reinforced the notion that collaboration between and among the Ministry of Education school boards, superintendents, and Aboriginal leaders, parents, students, and communities was needed to “address obstacles to ensuring safe, non-racist, culturally relevant learning environments through teacher professional development, cultural awareness training, and strategies to hire the best people to work with Aboriginal students” (OAG, 2015, p. 8). Progress has been made in all areas but the journey to succeed is still progressing, as noted within this study and, as argued by the Castlemain Group (2013), relationship building with Aboriginal parents and learners within the AEEA process is critical for the educational system in BC to truly transform to holistically support Aboriginal student success. A superintendent who participated in the survey also highlighted the important balance in relationship building, trust, and knowledge differences, in working with Aboriginal communities and the dual responsibilities districts have to support success and become bridges of communication.

These are complex questions to complex solutions...I need to remind myself on a regular basis that when we work with our Aboriginal councils and community, most of the members are non-educators. It is a challenge to review key information when there is either no interest or interest with little patience with reviewing data. Most want their children to be successful, but the road to success is a long windy path at times...and some want the success now without understanding the challenges along the road. (Superintendent)

And, another focus group participant summed up (to all persons nodding emphatically) that “at the end of the day, it is all of us who have responsibilities” (Teacher). Another survey respondent, described how, through all of the district working together, they were working on supporting student success.

Our focus continues to be on having a support staff in each school; to continue collaborative practice whereby we emphasize a push in model versus a pull out model; staff training and supports which include a wide breadth of topics covering academic support to cultural support and to continue the commitment to a district team approach

STUDENT SUCCESS

Our focus continues to be on having a support staff in each school; to continue collaborative practice whereby we emphasize a push in model versus a pull out model; staff training and supports which include a wide breadth of topics covering academic support to cultural support and to continue the commitment to a district team approach whereby curriculum, Aboriginal Education and Student Services work closely together for the benefit of all students' successes.” (Senior Administrator – Aboriginal Education)

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In other words, through their collective comments, the participants supported the OAG's (2015) recommendation that the Ministry of Education should "collaborate with boards of education, superintendents, and Aboriginal leaders and communities to develop a system-wide strategy with accountabilities to close the gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student outcomes" (p. 8). The responsibility for the success of Aboriginal (and non-Aboriginal) students in BC school districts belongs to all educational stakeholders and rightsholders across the province.

In summary, the collective data from the online survey, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups/sharing circles revealed that AEEAs have been developed, implemented, and monitored with varying degrees of collaboration and cooperation.

Our analysis showed that **trust and relationship building** continues to be an asset and a liability in the success of the AEEAs since many discussed the importance of respecting the rights of all stakeholders including the Ministry of Education, school district personnel, and Aboriginal partners; however, some participants identified some degree of **mistrust** or trust still unearned so that mending fences and building bridges are still necessary.

As well, we found that **academic success through Indigenous inclusion** was a necessity and a strength identified by our study participants. Two major tenets of this concept were **holistic learning** and **a sense of belonging**. The participants indicated that academic success through a Eurocentric lens was one type of learning indicator but that learning had to be approached from a holistic approach so that the whole learner was considered and that multiple ways of learning were evident. Equally, Aboriginal students needed a sense of belonging so that they believed that their presence was honoured in the schools which could vary from a physical space to a mental space.

Lastly, our analysis revealed that **cultural alliances** were needed to ensure or increase the success of AEEAs. Similar to what was explained in the physical documents (i.e., AEEAs and ARs) used in the QCA, the survey, interview, and focus group/sharing circle respondents stressed the importance of respecting cultures. Moreover, they also stressed that alliances are more people oriented and involve getting to know the students very well, in addition to the surrounding cultures and individual rightsholders, who could become strong **assets** in the development and implementation of present and future AEEAs.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Based on the survey conducted with Senior Administrators and data collected from focus groups and interviews, the general consensus among all participants seemed to support progressive Aboriginal Education initiatives. The challenges in implementing the goals for the

AEEAs were identified also as areas requiring action, such as improvements relating to trust deficiencies, budget transparency, and the need to capitalize on the reciprocity of the new BC curriculum as it relates to Indigenous Knowledge.

Representation, Transparency, and Trust

Overall, the school district personnel who included responses outlined some difficulties or challenges with the development of the AEEAs. Several commented on the difficulty with having “unified representation” such as mentioned by this District Principal – Aboriginal Education:

The current Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement ... was created with an ad hoc parent committee that was not consistent over time. The school district did not have a committee that represented the Aboriginal Communities and the relationship with the First Nation community in the district was a strained one. The current AEEA in [this district], in my view, was not developed in a way that was sufficiently consultative and inclusive.

An Assistant Superintendent echoed this view with the comments

[In our large school district], it is very difficult to have "unified representation" with the authority to speak for the Aboriginal community. We have extensive representation from a variety of Aboriginal organizations around the [District], and they all attend our committee meetings regularly, but they are not always in agreement with each other as to how best to represent the Aboriginal community.

In other words, respondents indicated that there were challenges with coming to an overall agreement on the development of the Enhancement Agreements but there were clear attempts at far-reaching consultation but geography, attendance, and knowledge were perceived as barriers.

REPRESENTATION

For instance, one Superintendent indicated that “Our educators do not have the cultural expertise to support cultural education for students from all the nations our students represent” while another senior management person said that “our District is situated on completely urbanized lands with no reserve lands within [our] boundaries. We do our best to manifest relationships with the [local First Nation] on whose territories we are located ..., but interest in the EA process is minimal. We have attempted other formal groups with our parent community to varying degrees of success”.

Balancing World Views and Expectations

There were evident tensions among rightsholders on how to address academic achievement in the ways some district rightsholders (e.g., board members, teachers) perceived the core goals of the AEEAs, compared to other rightsholders (e.g., teachers, principals, parents) who viewed success more holistically. One particular person focussed on the tensions between balancing Aboriginal language instruction and also providing Aboriginal children the “basics” in his comment during an interview:

We have targeted dollars for the [the local First Nations] language and cultural teacher, and it is really hard to make sure that the classroom is supporting the kids. I remember that one year, we were trying to use the dollars, and people were saying that it has to be all about language and culture, and we are saying, well yes, but it is really just an introduction to it for the kids to function. We need them to balance both. I know at a political level, the bands would prefer that we focus on culture, and we can't do that because we have to give the kids support with their basic schools as well.” (Principal)

In addition, the Canada Council on Learning and others have argued that Aboriginal language reflects the unique culture and worldviews of the speakers, and also contributes to the academic success of Aboriginal learners (Castlemain Group, 2013; Kitchenham, 2013).

School Districts need to maintain accurate records/data about graduation rates, and completion of courses, and what type of courses are being completed: Math, English, Physics, and Chemistry? (Community member)

Using the example of mathematics, Stanton (1994) criticized one specific “technique” in math curriculum in relation to Aboriginal culture. According to this researcher, focusing on drilling and measurement cannot help children understand or develop meanings of mathematical concept. It is especially notable among Aboriginal children who came from “a culture that does not place high value on quantification of the world compared with relational” (Stanton, 1994, p. 18). Therefore, Stanton concludes that this kind of math curriculum cannot educate Aboriginal children. In fact, one participant singled out subject area learning for Aboriginal students as he indicated that “math courses based on Aboriginal perspectives would be highly beneficial and do a lot to increase engagement and success for Aboriginal students and others, also Biology, Chemistry, and Physics” (Teacher).

In other words, the aforementioned researchers argue that Aboriginal children learn differently; therefore, teachers are encouraged to use an approach that is culturally sensitive. One participant reinforced this idea:

I taught First Nations when I first came to this school and I saw the willingness to integrate as much culture needed, but some teachers were very focused on trying to get

through the curriculum to meet the standards. Anything out of boundaries was a bit challenging for the teachers to reach out to First Nations' communities. (Vice Principal).

Additionally, Battiste (2013) pointed out that

Indigenous knowledge is what directly links knowledge to place and to the relationships within that place. It thus refers to the complex set of knowledge and technologies existing and developed around specific conditions of populations and communities Indigenous to a particular geographic area (p. 160).

These arguments have valid points. It is important to respect and protect children's cultural heritages, but at the same time, children have to be able to participate in the modern society after they graduate; it is this principle of walking in two worlds that upholds Indigenous understandings of success about which many rightsholders spoke throughout their interviews and focus groups. In fact, this participant provides a perspective as an Aboriginal learner and educator:

We have a lot of autonomy including myself as a First Nations. Our principal is very encouraging and he realizes there are many challenges, but he wants to make sure we are paddling to the same destination as a collective. We come to work early to debrief about our Aboriginal learners. We have conversations with our teachers and support staff as well, takes care of the little things that need attention. We give feedback to them as a form of building trust and relationships. (Vice Principal)

One interviewee discussed the **challenges** around self-identifying:

It's tough enough for Aboriginal kids in the school to identify as Aboriginal. We want to honour their culture, and learn about the culture. So same with kids in care, you know, is there a need for the Ministry to ensure they are providing support for them? I mean I have asked the Ministry to work with and [give advice or guidance] and I think they answered. I don't go to those meetings. I think if it was an issue, I know they have a lot of children in care in the province and I know they have a lot of in other districts but it doesn't mean we know [at the department level]. They are going through some trauma. Very complex. (District Principal – Aboriginal Education).

One focus group participant pointed out that the school has very little information on students in care or on students who come from other reserves to this school district:

So, it's really hard and the cultural norms of those [other reserves] are very different from this side. You know, and there is a lot of other socioeconomic factors that that child experiences as difficult here. So we are struggling trying to figure out what this student needs. And sometimes the student will go back to visit and they are gone for two weeks and now they are extra beyond, because they were behind when they came and now they are further behind. So communication is a challenge. (Teacher)

A colleague of that person outlined one approach for dealing with children in care who are taught by that person:

One of the [good] things that we have a predeveloped relationship with probation officers; we meet them and so I have been able to send my family worker to that but often the education piece, or my piece is a written document. I have gone to some but it's really, sometimes we get a room full of people and there is nothing positive going on. (Teacher)

Specifically, AEEAs have provided a collaborative and generative platform where the school district and Aboriginal communities, including students and families, come together to co-create and co-design cultural and pedagogical initiatives. For example, Aboriginal Education Councils (AECs) provide a forum where all gather to discuss and decide. At issue is the demographic representation of these councils. Educational advocates decry their lack of presence on this council, as well as their lack of participation in administrative decisions made for their students and their families. Further, advocates were adamant about deconstructing some of the nine elements by identifying specific partners in the school district. For instance, sample questions included whether teachers, vice-principals, principals should be involved and who would be represented in the collective term, *school district*.

Recommendations from Rightsholders

In the interviews and focus groups/sharing circles, rightsholders were asked specifically what recommendations they had regarding the AEEAs and survey respondents included some recommendations as part of the open-ended response section. The following are from an analysis of their feedback.

WORLD VIEWS

“So, it's really hard and the cultural norms of those [other reserves] are very different from this side. You know, and there is a lot of other socioeconomic factors that that child experiences as difficult here. So we are struggling trying to figure out what this student needs. And sometimes the student will go back to visit and they are gone for two weeks and now they are extra beyond, because they were behind when they came and now they are further behind. So communication is a challenge.” (Teacher)

1. Accountability and transparency. Senior Administration at the Board and School levels needs to be accountable for the development, implementation, and review of the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement. This includes transparency and open communication regarding budgetary decisions. For example, Ministry staff could gather and share information about how other School Districts are managing their budgets, collecting graduation data and implementing the AEEAs so that all districts learn from each other.

2. Enhance Professional Development and Learning Opportunities. The Ministry of Education and school districts could enhance collaboration efforts and **build capacity** for all members of the school district (custodial staff, support staff, teachers, and advocates as well as Senior Administrators) by informing and making all aware of how the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement relates to their work within the district. This can be accomplished during regular school, staff, and board meetings and also through professional development opportunities throughout the school year. Further to this was the recognition that there are currently not enough Aboriginal teachers within the BC school system; some suggested that in supporting the professional development of current Aboriginal support workers in their districts the school district could encourage and provide pathways for their **teacher certification**. Others, especially those who act as tutors at the Middle Years, are requesting professional development in the **content areas** of numeracy, literacy, and technology to better support Aboriginal learners. Additionally, within the theme of learning opportunities, and connected to culturally-relevant practices, it was suggested that school districts, along with community members, co-create protocols for entering the traditional territory or territories. To acknowledge the presence of diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis in the host territory, each school within the district should formulate their own 4Rs (e.g., respect – relationship – responsibility – reciprocity). In this manner, the cultural safety of the school district rights- and stakeholders can be respected.

3. Enhance Relationship Building: The Ministry of Education and school districts should foster and build upon existing relationships between and among the school district, Aboriginal communities, including community partnerships with organizations (e.g., post-secondary institutions) and groups (e.g., non-profit organizations or service organizations) that would help **support the implementation** of the AEEA.

It was recognized in the AEEAs and in the data collected in this project that Aboriginal student success is interconnected to their sense of belonging, safety, and trust, and being

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Accountability and transparency
2. Enhance professional development and learning opportunities
3. Enhance relationship building
4. Communication, access, and awareness
5. Collective responsibility and engagement
6. Culturally-relevant pedagogy, resources, and practices

engaged as learners through relevant curriculum. In speaking of the needs of Aboriginal youth in care, or those coming from reserves, participants were clear that more needs to be done to support these learners. A suggestion put forward was the expansion of current partnerships in the districts to include more opportunities for Aboriginal community organizations (e.g., Aboriginal Health) and other resources (e.g., BC Housing) by inviting them to join the Advisory Board of the Aboriginal Education committee.

4. Communication, Access, and Awareness. Communication of goals and results is critical for AEEAs to have an impact. It was reported by some participants that simply finding the AEEA on the district website was not clear; therefore, they recommended school districts should include copies of their AEEAs in all schools and on district and school websites to increase the AEEA profile and awareness. Other possible venues of communication could include (but are not limited to): PAC meetings, newsletters, school events, social media, Aboriginal events/gatherings, and through classroom resources. For example, copies of the AEEA could also be shared with parents of Aboriginal children to encourage and invite their involvement within district AEEA activities. Further, the document should be required contextual reading during initial hiring procedures and for all new hires to the school districts.

From data collected in this study, it was evident that student voices also need to be part of the AEEA since it is about their success. The Ministry of Education and school districts should perform site visits in schools at various stages of AEEA completion and discuss the impact of the Agreements with students as well as other stakeholders.

5. Collective Responsibility and Engagement: The Ministry of Education and school districts should include parents and students as signatories and members of the AEEAs. This builds upon the recommendation made by the Castlemain Group (2013) where they noted the need for increased involvement of parents and teachers in the development and implementation of the EAs. As one interviewee participant aptly stated “If their document is to be collectively owned and implemented by all parties, I would recommend that representatives from PVPs, Teacher associations, and CUPE also sign the document.”

6. Culturally-Relevant Pedagogy, Resources, and Practices: Clearly, AEEAs goals are to support the success of Aboriginal learners and participants saw the new BC curriculum, *Building Student Success*, as prime opportunities to further align the integration of Indigenous knowledge with the holistic vision and six core competencies promoted by the new curriculum. It was also suggested by others that more curriculum, particularly in Math and in Sciences, should follow the lead established by English First Peoples 10 focusing on culturally-relevant pedagogy and on experiential, as well as outdoor learning.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research report has provided a topical and timely representation of the uniqueness, the challenges, and the benefits of the BC provincial AEEAs. It is anticipated that this analysis will lead to better understanding of the needs and issues of the AEEAs, and as such, also provides insight into future research directions that allow the Ministry, the districts, and all other rights- and stakeholders to progress along a continuum which prioritizes Indigenous knowledge and Aboriginal education.

It has been recognized by this research team and previous groups examining AEEAs in the province that a limitation that cannot continue is the absence of Aboriginal students' voices and participation in the development and implementation of the AEEAs in their districts. Therefore, an important study to be undertaken across all age groups in the K-12 system is a comprehensive collection of those voices and stories to further support the work of the AEEAs and to ensure they are truly relevant and meaningful to Aboriginal peoples' understandings and values of success.

Another research project is to further the understanding of how the AEEA, the new curriculum, and the changes in teacher education in BC, will impact Aboriginal student experiences in K-12 and non-Aboriginal students' understandings of Aboriginal peoples. A longitudinal, multiple-case study approach may be the best way to explore such a project.

Lessons Learned

The Ministry of Education and the school districts need to consider a longer period of time for researchers to conduct this type of research so as to respect the time and energy needed to meaningfully consult and co-investigate with rightsholders, respecting the school calendar, and to analyze data and report back to rightsholders to present the information to effect change. The interviews and sharing circles provided more insight into what was occurring in the districts, and as eluded to in the previous sections, such in-depth data collection methods require not only time, but also intentional relationship building with rightsholders, including parents and students.

As we learned from this project, the importance of relationship building within districts to develop and implement AEEAs is critical. To this end, there are lessons shared within this report that speak to the need to. First, there needs to be an improvement in relationships, specifically transparency of decision making and communication, between and among the Ministry, districts, schools, and Aboriginal communities. Second, to undertake the work within the AEEAs, all rightsholders from the Ministry, district, schools, and Aboriginal communities need to be involved. Lastly, the Ministry of Education and the school districts will need to revisit the nine statements or expectations for the AEEAs to examine specifically which are concentrated on the most and which are addressed the least across the province.

We raise our hands

We raise our hands in deep appreciation to each and every rightsholder who shared with us their successes, challenges, and dreams for improving Aboriginal education through their AEEAs. The work that is undertaken in our province to improve the schooling experiences of Aboriginal children and youth are promising and the future generations will benefit from all the work that you do.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Listing of 22 Districts in Phase 1 and 2 of Study

The following school districts were part of this study

Vernon (SD 22)
Central Okanagan (SD 23)*
Williams Lake (SD 27)
Quesnel (SD 28)*
Chilliwack (SD 33)
Surrey (SD 36)
Delta (SD 37)
Vancouver (SD 39)
Burnaby (SD 41)
West Vancouver (SD 45)
Prince Rupert (SD 52)*
Okanagan Similkameen (SD 53)
Bulkley Valley (SD 54)
Prince George (SD 57)*
Greater Victoria (SD 61)
Saanich (SD 63)*
Okanagan Skaha (SD 67)
Nanaimo Ladysmith (SD 68)
Comox Valley (SD 71)
Campbell River (SD 72)
North Okanagan-Shuswap (SD 83)
Nechako Lakes (SD 91)
Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique (93)
Arrow Lake (10)

- *Denotes Districts who participated in previous AEEA evaluation projects (Castlemain, 2013; McGregor, 2013)
 - Castlemain Group (2013) interviews also included: Kamloops/Thompson (SD 73), North Vancouver (SD 44); it was not shared in their report what districts participated in their broader survey.

Appendix B: Table 1

Table 1

THEMES FROM ABORIGINAL EDUCATION ENHANCEMENT AGREEMENTS

| Theme | Sample Code | SD | Key Quotes by School District | |
|-------|--|--|--|--|
| Trust | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Honouring partnership Forming trust Role model Developing relationships Collaboration Shared ownership and responsibility Families Community Leadership Respect and understanding | <p>23</p> <p>33</p> <p>41</p> <p>47</p> <p>67</p> <p>72</p> <p>83</p> <p>93</p> | <p>“This Aboriginal Education EA proudly acknowledges a formal relationship of trust and shared responsibility focused on attaining success for all Aboriginal students” (72).</p> <p>“(P)articipation of Aboriginal community in education matters that affects students, at every level in the district organization” (33)</p> <p>“To nurture and foster relationships between the [school district] and Aboriginal families, communities, and organizations” (67)</p> | |
| | Cultural Alliances | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acknowledging traditional teachings Enhanced learning environment Honouring traditional territory Elder and community involvement Culturally-grounded framework Improving cultural awareness Cultural identity Cultural protocols Role model | <p>27</p> <p>36</p> <p>37</p> <p>39</p> <p>41</p> <p>45</p> <p>61</p> <p>71</p> | <p>“Our vision for Aboriginal students is to have a balance between academic performance and Aboriginal culture and identity that will foster the value of lifelong learning” (71).</p> <p>“We are grateful that many adults and Elders from our Aboriginal community are directly involved with learning activities and celebrations at our schools; often providing leadership for these events” (45)</p> <p>“Focus must be centred on the development of the whole individual. Cultural development, social emotional development, and academics must be interwoven to ensure the success of all students of Aboriginal ancestry in Burnaby schools” (41)</p> <p>“Increase the knowledge and understanding of the culture and traditions of Okanagan people and Aboriginal peoples for all students, parents, community members, and School District 22 employees” (22)</p> |

| | | | | |
|------------------------------|---|--|---|--|
| Academic Success | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing positive relationships • Aboriginal Health and Wellness • Sense of belonging and culture • Learning opportunities • Success as goal • Resources and programs | <p>22 23 28 33 36 37 41 45 52 53 54 67 83 93</p> | <p>“This Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement will provide direction for parties, as they work together to provide the finest possible learning opportunities for our students” (45)</p> | |
| | | | <p>Increased graduation rate with Dogwood completion with qualifications for post-secondary entrance requirements (23)</p> | |
| | | | | <p>“The goals of our program are to assist Delta students with Aboriginal ancestry to be successful in school and to learn about Aboriginal culture.” (37)</p> |
| | | | | <p>“[We are] committed to providing resources and programs to promote student success, depending upon monies and resources being made available by entities other than the Board of Education and Aboriginal communities. If such monies and resources are not made available, the Board of Education or Aboriginal community partner shall not be obligated to carry out the terms of this agreement that require such monies and resources” (33)</p> |
| | | | | <p>)</p> |
| | | | | <p>“</p> |
| Collective Responsibility | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inquiry-based learning • Building success • Developing a holistic approach: spirit, mind, body, emotion | <p>23 28 63 68 91</p> | <p>“We believe that each of us has a role to play in implementing strategies and measures that respond to the goals/inquiries in the Enhancement Agreement. In the spirit of this Enhancement Agreement we believe that Aboriginal learner success matters to us all” (68).</p> | |
| | | | <p>The District Principal will collaborate with District staff to strategize further</p> | |
| | | | | |

and to determine where ongoing support as
required (23)

Appendix C: Table 2

Table 2:

Qualitative Content Analysis Annual Report Summary Table by Theme, Sample Code, School District (SD), and Key Quotes by School District (number in parentheses)

| Theme | Sample Code | SD | Key Quote (SD) |
|------------------|--|------------------------------------|---|
| Sense of Place | | | “Throughout our journey we will keep our goals in sight as families, communities and school district staff focus on creating a strong sense of place and belonging to provide students with an optimal learning environment” (61). Our community input tells us that Aboriginal students and families need to feel connected in order to thrive in the school environment” (23) |
| | • Safety | 23 | |
| | • Belonging | 27 | |
| | • Cultural connection | 28 36 | |
| | • Increasing success | 39 41 | |
| | • Cultural language kits | 61 91 | |
| Ways of Teaching | | | “Providing educators with culturally appropriate and culturally relevant curriculum and resources that reflect and include the history and culture of first nation people” (27). |
| | • Inquiry-based learning | 27 | |
| | • Honouring Aboriginal student achievement | 28 36 39 | |
| | • Honouring student needs and diversity | 41 45 52 68 | |
| | • Strengthening resources for learning | 91 | |
| | | | “NLPS is moving towards a collective ownership regarding Aboriginal student achievement, perspectives, knowledge, beliefs and attitudes” (68). |
| | | | “Learning through the journey of the canoe” (45): the gift of each enriches all; we all pull and support each other; the journal is what we enjoy; a good teacher allows the student to learn. |
| | | “The ability of our children to be | |

| | | | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|----|--|---|
| Aboriginal Epistemology | | | competent in their traditional realm as well as the urbanized realm” (41) | |
| | | | “Together we built understanding of and respect for Indigenous people working with the Key People at all schools” (63) | |
| | • Respecting diversity | 23 | After extensive dialogue with our communities, the goals will continue to reflect the teachings of the Medicine Wheel and will also support the 40 Developmental Assets®” (23) | |
| | • Personal difference | 37 | | |
| | • Cultural integration | 41 | | |
| | • Ways of knowing | 52 | | |
| | • Celebrating diversity | 56 | 63 | “Our partnership is a shared responsibility dedicated to creating a community which values, respects and appreciates Aboriginal languages, cultures, histories, knowledge, skills and people” (56). |

Appendix D: Table 3

Table 3

School District Rating of Agreement for the Development of the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement by Number of Responses (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree) with Mean (\bar{x}) and Median (Md) Reported

| | Statement | SD (1) | D (2) | A (3) | SA (4) | \bar{x}/Md |
|---|---|-------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 | The Aboriginal communities must be represented by a unified body whose authority to speak for the Aboriginal communities is accepted by the Aboriginal communities. | 2 | 1 | 10 | 13 | 3.31/4.0 |
| 2 | Shared decision making by the Aboriginal communities and the school district must be an established practice. | 2 | 0 | 10 | 14 | 3.38/4.0 |
| 3 | Both the Aboriginal communities and the school district must support participation in the Enhancement Agreement. | 2 | 0 | 4 | 20 | 3.62/4.0 |
| 4 | Joint consultation and collaboration between the Aboriginal communities and the school districts will enable vision and goal setting in all areas of education for all Aboriginal learners. | 2 | 0 | 8 | 16 | 3.46/4.0 |
| 5 | The Aboriginal communities and the school district track key performance indicators at the student level. | 2 | 2 | 13 | 9 | 3.12/3.0 |
| 6 | The Aboriginal communities and the school district must be committed to regular reporting of results. This would include an evaluation and reporting process on the outcomes of the Enhancement Agreements. | 1 | 1 | 11 | 13 | 3.38/4.0 |
| 7 | The scope of the Aboriginal Education program must include a focus on continuous improvement in the academic performance of all Aboriginal students. | 2 | 0 | 5 | 19 | 3.57/4.0 |
| 8 | Meeting the cultural needs of Aboriginal students in all aspects of learning. This includes resources, strategies and assessment. | 2 | 1 | 5 | 19 | 3.54/4.0 |
| 9 | Focus on increasing knowledge of and respect for Aboriginal culture, language and history, which enables a greater understanding for everyone about Aboriginal people. | 2 | 0 | 2 | 22 | 3.69/4.0 |

Appendix E: Table 4

Table 4

School District Rating of Agreement for the Operation of the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement by Number of Responses (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree) with Mean (\bar{x}) and Median (Md) Reported

| | Statement | SD (1) | D (2) | A (3) | SA (4) | \bar{x}/Md |
|---|---|-------------------|------------------|------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 | The Aboriginal communities must be represented by a unified body whose authority to speak for the Aboriginal communities is accepted by the Aboriginal communities. | 1 | 2 | 11 | 12 | 3.31/4.0 |
| 2 | Shared decision making by the Aboriginal communities and the school district must be an established practice. | 1 | 2 | 11 | 12 | 3.31/4.0 |
| 3 | Both the Aboriginal communities and the school district must support participation in the Enhancement Agreement. | 1 | 1 | 8 | 16 | 3.50/4.0 |
| 4 | Joint consultation and collaboration between the Aboriginal communities and the school districts will enable vision and goal setting in all areas of education for all Aboriginal learners. | 1 | 1 | 12 | 12 | 3.35/3.0 |
| 5 | The Aboriginal communities and the school district track key performance indicators at the student level. | 1 | 4 | 15 | 6 | 3.00/3.0 |
| 6 | The Aboriginal communities and the school district must be committed to regular reporting of results. This would include an evaluation and reporting process on the outcomes of the Enhancement Agreements. | 1 | 1 | 15 | 9 | 3.23/3.0 |
| 7 | The scope of the Aboriginal Education program must include a focus on continuous improvement in the academic performance of all Aboriginal students. | 1 | 0 | 7 | 18 | 3.62/4.0 |
| 8 | Meeting the cultural needs of Aboriginal students in all aspects of learning. This includes resources, strategies and assessment. | 1 | 3 | 9 | 13 | 3.31/3.5 |
| 9 | Focus on increasing knowledge of and respect for Aboriginal culture, language and history, which enables a greater understanding for everyone about Aboriginal people. | 1 | 1 | 7 | 17 | 3.54/4.0 |

Appendix F: Table 5

Table 5

School District Indication of Stage Completion of the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement by Number of Responses (Accomplished, In Progress, Year End, Not Accomplished by Year End) with Mean (\bar{x}) and Median (Md) Reported

| | Statement | A (1) | IP (2) | YE (3) | NYA (4) | \bar{x}/Md |
|---|---|------------------|-------------------|-------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 | The Aboriginal communities must be represented by a unified body whose authority to speak for the Aboriginal communities is accepted by the Aboriginal communities. | 16 | 5 | 2 | 3 | 1.69/1.0 |
| 2 | Shared decision making by the Aboriginal communities and the school district must be an established practice. | 17 | 4 | 2 | 3 | 1.65/1.0 |
| 3 | Both the Aboriginal communities and the school district must support participation in the Enhancement Agreement. | 19 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 1.57/1.0 |
| 4 | Joint consultation and collaboration between the Aboriginal communities and the school districts will enable vision and goal setting in all areas of education for all Aboriginal learners. | 14 | 6 | 5 | 1 | 1.73/2.0 |
| 5 | The Aboriginal communities and the school district track key performance indicators at the student level. | 10 | 9 | 2 | 5 | 2.02/2.0 |
| 6 | The Aboriginal communities and the school district must be committed to regular reporting of results. This would include an evaluation and reporting process on the outcomes of the Enhancement Agreements. | 8 | 9 | 6 | 3 | 2.15/2.0 |
| 7 | The scope of the Aboriginal Education program must include a focus on continuous improvement in the academic performance of all Aboriginal students. | 13 | 8 | 3 | 2 | 1.76/1.5 |
| 8 | Meeting the cultural needs of Aboriginal students in all aspects of learning. This includes resources, strategies and assessment. | 10 | 9 | 3 | 4 | 2.00/2.0 |
| 9 | Focus on increasing knowledge of and respect for Aboriginal culture, language and history, which enables a greater understanding for everyone about Aboriginal people. | 11 | 11 | 2 | 2 | 1.81/2.0 |

Appendix G: Table 6

Table 6

Thematic Analysis of Focus Group and Interview Data Summary Table by Theme and Key Quotes by Participant (in parentheses)

| Theme | Key Quotes by Participant |
|--------------------|--|
| Trust | <p>It's important to build relationships and trust with everyone around the table (AEC member)</p> |
| | <p>Building trust between families and the schools is a very important element of the Advocates job, having consistency and continuity in my role in the school helps build trust in many ways: helps maintain confidentiality, builds communication, removes need for students/families to tell their story over and over again. It provides a safe bridge, helps with discipline issues, provides a sense of safety for students to have a safe person at the school, increases relationships between families (parents, students) and schools (administrators, teachers), builds greater cultural understanding in the school (Advocate)</p> |
| | <p>Prior to the AEEAs there was a lot of mistrust, signing the agreement has promoted trust (everyone can see themselves within the agreement) (Senior Administrator)</p> <p>There is a lot of historical mistrust (residential schools; loss of history and languages; past projects) (Community Member)</p> <p>"I think that we develop trust if other districts will learn to do this and engage in this process. To get that trust, we are going to have to listen first and get as many stakeholders or parents, students, and community groups, and give everyone a form and a time to speak and with their worries, soon being valued. I think that is why, you know we are with two agreements, our goals are very much the same, we really want to see changes" (Teacher)</p> |
| Cultural Alliances | <p>"(B)ut I think one of the tensions was strong desire from some families at least to have a, a rich cultural component to the Enhancement Agreement and there was an equally strong, perhaps more-so strong, that was part of the tension, to ensure that the Enhancement Agreement included a cultural growth" (Community Partner)</p> |

“The host nation needs to be respected. Other perspectives are important, too but it is important to acknowledge the local traditional culture, while also having respect for different cultures and ways” (AEC member)

“It’s important to recognize the diversity of First Nations, Inuit and Métis in the schools . Acknowledging differences builds pride and culture in everyone..including non-Aboriginal students” (Advocate)

“These groups don’t always play nice, right? Sometimes there is a lot of hostility. And that is set up because the non-profits, how they are funded and they are competing for the same batch of funds, therefore, these groups are not sharing information, they are not working nicely, and we do have that, so, I think it’s a challenge” (Teacher)

“(M)aking sure Aboriginal students can participate in secondary or public education” (AEC member)

Academic Success

“I think for us, what I do is at the end of the year I do a year-end review and I write down all of the, not just the academic successes” (AEC member)

“That each school district is accountable, is responsible, is paying attention—has to pay attention to what is going on. So I think that is the benefit” (Teacher)

Collective Responsibility

“I think the other advantage about bringing around the way it has come up in the new curriculum, the onus is on all teachers now—it’s not, as I said at the first, it was my sense it was in pockets, it is now spread across and its, you don’t have to pull kids out, you don’t have to disrupt them. It’s a move forward in the totally right direction and that’s been huge” (School Trustee)

“(E)xactly where and for whom resources are directed needs to be decided” (AEC member)

“The removal of the Evergreen diploma important step in addressing academic success for Aboriginal students” (Community Member)

“Aboriginal communities and school districts support participation in the enhancement agreements, to me it’s more so its support for the creation of it and the education of it. I think that comes in many forms that comes in whether it is supporting the resources, collectively, co-presenting” (Superintendent)

Appendix H: Survey

Thank you for agreeing to complete this survey after reading the informed consent form. Please respond as honestly as possible and understand that all response will remain confidential.

1. Please state your school district # in the textbox.
2. Please state your title in the textbox. (pulldown choices: Teacher; Support Worker; Principal; Vice-Principal; Superintendent; Assistant Superintendent; District Principal; Other)
3. The following nine expectations for all Aboriginal learners have been outlined by the Ministry of Education and participating school districts. For each expectation, please indicate your level of agreement in relation to your school district's Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement in terms of how it was developed (Strongly Agree = SA; Agree = A; Disagree = D; Strongly Disagree = SD). Please include any additional comments in the textbox below.

| Statement | Agreement | | | |
|---|-----------|---|---|----|
| | SD | D | A | SA |
| The Aboriginal communities must be represented by a unified body whose authority to speak for the Aboriginal communities is accepted by the Aboriginal communities. | SD | D | A | SA |
| Shared decision making by the Aboriginal communities and the school district must be an established practice. | SD | D | A | SA |
| Both the Aboriginal communities and the school district must support participation in the Enhancement Agreement. | SD | D | A | SA |
| Joint consultation and collaboration between the Aboriginal communities and the school districts will enable vision and goal setting in all areas of education for all Aboriginal learners. | SD | D | A | SA |
| The Aboriginal communities and the school district track key performance indicators at the student level. | SD | D | A | SA |
| The Aboriginal communities and the school district must be committed to regular reporting of results. This would include an evaluation and reporting process on the outcomes of the Enhancement Agreements. | SD | D | A | SA |
| The scope of the Aboriginal Education program must include a focus on continuous improvement in the academic performance of all Aboriginal students. | SD | D | A | SA |
| Meeting the cultural needs of Aboriginal students in all aspects of learning. This includes resources, strategies and assessment. | SD | D | A | SA |
| Focus on increasing knowledge of and respect for Aboriginal | SD | D | A | SA |

AEEA: Complicated Conversations as Pathways to Success

| | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|
| culture, language and history, which enables a greater understanding for everyone about Aboriginal people. | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|

Additional Comments:

4. The following nine expectations for all Aboriginal learners have been outlined by the Ministry of Education and participating school districts. For each expectation, please indicate your level of agreement in relation to your school district's Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement in terms of how it is currently operating (Strongly Agree = SA; Agree = A; Disagree = D; Strongly Disagree = SD). Please include any additional comments in the textbox below.

| Statement | Agreement | | | |
|---|-----------|---|---|----|
| The Aboriginal communities must be represented by a unified body whose authority to speak for the Aboriginal communities is accepted by the Aboriginal communities. | SD | D | A | SA |
| Shared decision making by the Aboriginal communities and the school district must be an established practice. | SD | D | A | SA |
| Both the Aboriginal communities and the school district must support participation in the Enhancement Agreement. | SD | D | A | SA |
| Joint consultation and collaboration between the Aboriginal communities and the school districts will enable vision and goal setting in all areas of education for all Aboriginal learners. | SD | D | A | SA |
| The Aboriginal communities and the school district track key performance indicators at the student level. | SD | D | A | SA |
| The Aboriginal communities and the school district must be committed to regular reporting of results. This would include an evaluation and reporting process on the outcomes of the Enhancement Agreements. | SD | D | A | SA |
| The scope of the Aboriginal Education program must include a focus on continuous improvement in the academic performance of all Aboriginal students. | SD | D | A | SA |
| Meeting the cultural needs of Aboriginal students in all aspects of learning. This includes resources, strategies and assessment. | SD | D | A | SA |
| Focus on increasing knowledge of and respect for Aboriginal culture, language and history, which enables a greater understanding for everyone about Aboriginal people. | SD | D | A | SA |

Additional Comments:

5. For the following nine expectations for all Aboriginal learners, please indicate whether you believe that within this school year (2015-2016) the expectation has been accomplished (A), is in progress and will be accomplished in the next 1-3 months (IP), will be accomplished by year end (YE), or will not be accomplished by year end (NYE) in relation to your school district’s Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement.

| Statement | Accomplishment | | | |
|---|----------------|----|----|-----|
| The Aboriginal communities must be represented by a unified body whose authority to speak for the Aboriginal communities is accepted by the Aboriginal communities. | A | IP | YE | NYE |
| Shared decision making by the Aboriginal communities and the school district must be an established practice. | A | IP | YE | NYE |
| Both the Aboriginal communities and the school district must support participation in the Enhancement Agreement. | A | IP | YE | NYE |
| Joint consultation and collaboration between the Aboriginal communities and the school districts will enable vision and goal setting in all areas of education for all Aboriginal learners. | A | IP | YE | NYE |
| The Aboriginal communities and the school district track key performance indicators at the student level. | A | IP | YE | NYE |
| The Aboriginal communities and the school district must be committed to regular reporting of results. This would include an evaluation and reporting process on the outcomes of the Enhancement Agreements. | A | IP | YE | NYE |
| The scope of the Aboriginal Education program must include a focus on continuous improvement in the academic performance of all Aboriginal students. | A | IP | YE | NYE |
| Meeting the cultural needs of Aboriginal students in all aspects of learning. This includes resources, strategies and assessment. | A | IP | YE | NYE |
| Focus on increasing knowledge of and respect for Aboriginal culture, language and history, which enables a greater understanding for everyone about Aboriginal people. | A | IP | YE | NYE |

Additional Comments:

6. For the following nine expectations for all Aboriginal learners, please indicate how your school district accomplished or will accomplish the expectation in relation to your school district's Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement. If you have not or believe that the school district will not complete it by year end, leave the space blank.

| Statement | Accomplishment Methods 2015-2016 |
|---|---|
| The Aboriginal communities must be represented by a unified body whose authority to speak for the Aboriginal communities is accepted by the Aboriginal communities. | |
| Shared decision making by the Aboriginal communities and the school district must be an established practice. | |
| Both the Aboriginal communities and the school district must support participation in the Enhancement Agreement. | |
| Joint consultation and collaboration between the Aboriginal communities and the school districts will enable vision and goal setting in all areas of education for all Aboriginal learners. | |
| The Aboriginal communities and the school district track key performance indicators at the student level. | |
| The Aboriginal communities and the school district must be committed to regular reporting of results. This would include an evaluation and reporting process on the outcomes of the Enhancement Agreements. | |
| The scope of the Aboriginal Education program must include a focus on continuous improvement in the academic performance of all Aboriginal students. | |
| Meeting the cultural needs of Aboriginal students in all aspects of learning. This includes resources, strategies and assessment. | |
| Focus on increasing knowledge of and respect for Aboriginal culture, language and history, which enables a greater understanding for everyone about Aboriginal people. | |

Additional Comments:

Thank you for completing this brief survey. Any questions or requests for a copy of the summary survey results and/or final report can be directed to the Principal Investigator, Dr. Andrew Kitchenham at andrew.kitchenham@unbc.ca or 250 960 6707 (office).

Appendix I: Interview Questions

1. When you think back to your school district's Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement, what are the greatest current challenges? What were past challenges?
2. What do you see as the strengths of your Agreement?
3. What do you believe is unique to your school district when you consider your Enhancement Agreement?
4. If you see benefits from the Agreement, what are they?
5. When we analyzed the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreements for targeted school districts, we discovered four dominant themes. For each of these themes, tell me whatever you believe the research team members need to know.
 - a. Trust
 - b. Cultural Alliances
 - c. Collective Responsibilities
 - d. Academic Success
6. Similarly, when we analyzed the Annual Reports for targeted school districts, we discovered three dominant themes. For each of these themes, tell me whatever you believe the research team members need to know.
 - a. Sense of Place
 - b. Student Learning
 - c. Aboriginal Epistemologies/Aboriginal Ways of Knowing
7. I have distributed the nine expectations for all Aboriginal learners as outlined by the Ministry of Education and participating school districts³. Reading through those nine statements, give me an example or two of how your school district met this expectation.
8. Looking at the same nine statements, give me an example of one that was not successful the first time and what the school district did to meet that expectation at a later date.
9. If you could add to those nine expectations as a _____ (role of participant such as teacher or principal or stakeholder), what would you add?
10. If you could revise any of the nine expectations as a _____ (role of participant such as teacher or principal or stakeholder), what would change? Why?
11. If you could remove any of the nine expectations as a _____ (role of participant such as teacher or principal or stakeholder), which would it be? Why?
12. When considering the Enhancement Agreements, tell us any comments related to:
 - a. The needs of status children on reserve
 - b. The needs of children in care
 - c. What happens in this district outside of targeted funding
13. Is there any pertinent information that you would like to add that I have not uncovered in this interview? If so, what is it?

³ See the nine statements represented in the survey.

Appendix J: Focus Group/Sharing Circle Questions

1. Describe the history and current state of EAs in your school district.
2. Discuss any challenges.
3. Discuss any benefits.
4. Have the EAs changed the current state of teaching and learning in your school district? Please give examples.
5. Have you noticed any improvements in the following:
 - a. Aboriginal student performance
 - b. Innovative and interdisciplinary practices
 - c. School district-community relationships
6. When we analyzed the Aboriginal Enhancement Agreements for targeted school districts, we discovered four dominant themes. For each of these themes, tell me whatever you believe the research team members need to know.
 - a. Trust
 - b. Cultural Alliances
 - c. Collective Responsibilities
 - d. Academic Success
7. Similarly, when we analyzed the Annual Reports for targeted school districts, we discovered three dominant themes. For each of these themes, tell me whatever you believe the research team members need to know.
 - a. Sense of Place
 - b. Student Learning
 - c. Aboriginal Epistemologies/Aboriginal Ways of Knowing
8. I have distributed the nine expectations for all Aboriginal learners as outlined by the Ministry of Education and participating school districts⁴. Reading through those nine statements, tell me which ones stand out as challenging. Either challenging in theory or in practice. Tell me why.
9. Looking at the same nine statements, tell me which ones stood out as ones that your school district addressed rather well. Tell me why.
10. When considering the Enhancement Agreements, tell us any comments related to:
 - a. The needs of status children on reserve
 - b. The needs of children in care
 - c. What happens in this district outside of targeted funding
11. Is there any pertinent information that you would like to add that I have not uncovered in this focus group (sharing circle)?

⁴ See the nine statements represented in the survey.