



University of Calgary | WERKLUND SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

How can school systems weave together Indigenous ways of knowing and response-
tointervention to reduce chronic absenteeism in Alberta?

Final Report

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Abstract

It is well documented that students who demonstrate high levels of absenteeism are at an increased risk for a number of negative outcomes (e.g., see Fuhs et al., 2018). What is becoming increasingly evident, however, is that students who experience chronic stressors, such as socioeconomic disadvantage, mental health challenges, or cultural marginalization are at an increased risk for school absenteeism and represent specific populations who would greatly benefit from innovative proactive and reactive intervention techniques (Wimmer, 2013). Current Rocky View Schools (RVS) data suggests that of the nearly 800 students who identify as Indigenous within the district, 30% can be considered chronically absent. Data analyzed from September 2017 to April 2018 revealed that on-reserve students who attend an RVS school demonstrated the highest percentage of chronic absenteeism – an alarming 80%. Additionally, these on-reserve students have missed an average of 32 days of school to date this year (representing close to 23% of the school year). Based on the results of the internal data analysis, this study examines the experiences in a public school of First Nations students, who reside on reserve. Interviews were conducted with parents and students and surveys were responded to by staff and what was revealed as a barrier to attendance was a form of cross-cultural anxiety.

Keywords: Attendance, Indigenous, Cross-Cultural Anxiety

Table of Contents

Abstract 2

 Research report..... 4

Overview..... 4

Literature Review..... 7

Methodology..... 12

 Participants..... 13

 Methods..... 14

Results..... 15

 Community Leaders..... 15

 Parents and Children..... 17

 Special Education Data..... 20

Discussion..... 21

Conclusion 25

References..... 26

Appendix A: Parent and Student Questions..... 29

Appendix B: Community Leaders Survey Questions..... 30

Appendix C: Case Studies for Professional Development 31

Appendix D: Knowledge Dissemination Plan 42

Appendix E: Budget/Timeline 43

How can school systems weave together Indigenous ways of knowing and response-tointervention to reduce chronic absenteeism in Alberta?

This research report was prepared for Alberta Education and Rocky View School district. The research project was done in partnership with the University of Calgary, Partner Research Schools Initiative at Werklund school of Education and Rocky View Schools. The Attendance Innovation Campaign (AIC), initiated by Rocky View Schools (RVS) to promote a divisional approach to supporting students was launched four years ago. Through this initiative it was realized that Indigenous students living on-reserve were not responding to the strategies used to support all students with similar gains. Thus, Alberta Education funded this study to enquire into why there were gains in other demographics but not within this community. The following report builds on the work undertaken with the AIC and looks specifically at what barriers this unique community has with respect to attending off-reserve schools. First, a summary on the work of the AIC, literature review, methodology used for this study, results, discussion, and recommendations for school districts to best meet the needs of this community. The appendix also includes case studies based on data from participants school districts may use for professional learning.

Overview

It is well documented that attending school on a regular basis is critical to the positive development of children into contributing members of society (Tanner-Smith & Wilson, 2013; Christenson & Thurlow, 2004). Recent empirical literature showcases that students who are chronically absent, defined as missing more than 10% of instructional days, are at an increased risk for a number of negative outcomes, including academic underachievement, underdeveloped social skills, difficulty with executive functioning, school disengagement, mental health challenges, and high school dropout (Fuhs, Nesbitt, & Jackson, 2018; Gottfried, 2014; London, Sanchez, & Castrechini, 2016). Encouragingly, research has found that it is possible to improve student outcomes by increasing student attendance (Epstein & Sheldon, 2002; Ready, 2010). Recent data collected within the RVS indicates that approximately 21% of students demonstrate problematic absenteeism rates. Translating this percentage to a provincial context suggests that over 130,000 students in Alberta may be at risk of chronic absenteeism and the associated risk factors. To understand this issue in more depth, RVS launched an internal study to evaluate attendance patterns within the district in an effort to improve student attendance division wide.

Given the initial success of the project within RVS, the proposed extension of the attendance intervention and research project endeavours to implement a culturally responsive model of attendance prevention and intervention to support all students in Alberta, with a unique emphasis on supporting Indigenous students and families.

Students who demonstrate high levels of absenteeism are at an increased risk for a number of negative outcomes (e.g., see Fuhs et al., 2018). What is becoming increasingly evident, however, is that students who experience chronic stressors, such as socioeconomic disadvantage, mental health challenges, or cultural marginalization are at an increased risk for school absenteeism and represent specific populations who would greatly benefit from innovative proactive and preventative intervention techniques (Wimmer, 2013). Current RVS data suggests that of the nearly 800 students who identify as Indigenous within the district, 30% can be considered chronically absent. Data analyzed from September 2017 to April 2018 revealed that on-reserve students who attend an RVS school demonstrated the highest percentage of chronic absenteeism – an alarming 80%. Additionally, these on-reserve students have missed an average of 32 days of school to date this year (representing close to 23% of the school year). Students who identify as status Indian/First Nation currently demonstrate a 32% chronic absenteeism rate, missing on average 16 days of school. Encouragingly, students who identify as Non-Status Indian, First Nation, Métis, or Inuit demonstrate similar patterns of absenteeism as students who do not identify as Indigenous (see Table 1).

Table 1. Attendance data from RVS, September 2017 – April 2018.

	Current RVS Enrollment	Chronically Absent (number)	Chronically Absent (percentage)
Non-Indigenous	23114	4913	21%
On-Reserve	72	58	80%
Off Reserve	795	238	30%

Recognizing the prevalence of absenteeism in Rocky View Schools and its potential negative impact on student development, RVS launched a funded research and intervention

initiative in 2016 to improve student attendance division-wide by June 2018. The first year of the initiative focused on standardizing attendance collection and tracking practices and the definition of chronic absenteeism across the district; additionally, a system was developed that could identify students at risk of being chronically absent as early as possible. The second year of the initiative saw the implementation of a system-level Response-to-Intervention (RtI) strategy across four RVS pilot schools to address absenteeism and possible associated barriers at the universal, targeted, and specialized levels of need. This system-level approach was being implemented district wide within RVS. Utilizing a standardized, cohesive, and clearly outlined referral process, the attendance initiative seeks to support most students within the universal and targeted framework. It is estimated that no more than 3-5% of students will require specialized services through the attendance campaign.

To the researchers' knowledge, RVS is the only school jurisdiction in Alberta taking a systems-level approach to improving student attendance. Data from the project's pilot year suggests that a tiered system-level approach to attendance is effective in significantly reducing rates of chronic absenteeism. Specifically, of the 392 students who were considered chronically absent during the 2015-2016 school year in the four pilot schools, only 193 continued to demonstrate problematic absenteeism during the 2016-2017 school year – representing a staggering 50% improvement. Additionally, the rate of students with good attendance also improved from 83% to 93%. Given the initial success of the project within RVS, it is likely that a similar system-level approach would be of benefit to all students and school jurisdictions in the province.

This project includes elements of several of the research priorities identified by the Research Partnership Program. Specifically, the attendance campaign aims to support diversity, as many students who have poor attendance have an identified disability, or are from cultural or sexually diverse backgrounds. Further, many of the intervention practices utilized through this project to improve student attendance are in line with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) (2017) recent publication, *Promising Practices in Supporting Success for Indigenous Students*, including Quality and Effectiveness of Teaching, Engaging Families, and Direct Support for Students. There is also close alignment with the *Alberta Education Supporting Practices* (Alberta Education, 2018a), including Mentoring, Restorative Practices, Student Advisories, GSAs, and Trauma-Informed Practices. Additionally,

utilizing attendance data together with other school data (e.g., grades, demographic information, special education status, engagement, etc.) allows RVS to utilize the RtI framework more effectively to improve outcomes for all students, while targeting groups or individual students for support. The unique three-pronged approach in the RtI—Educate, Empower, Eliminate—works to educate the community about the importance of good attendance, and some of the ways students are alienated from school by everyday practices. Intervening at the system level using an ecological approach allows us to create more safe and caring schools for each and every student, especially those in marginalized groups.

Literature Review

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) issued its report to support Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous people to reconcile through engaging in the truth of genocide and experiences of oppression by the former during colonization. Importantly, these truths and experiences continue with impacts still manifesting today. The TRC approached their work through a lens of truth before reconciliation can begin, and with the 94 Calls to Action (TRC, 2015) school divisions and post-secondary institutions began to do the work of supporting educators with learning the truth and how this impacts learners in our classrooms. This shift in how educators work within an era of reconciliation is grounded with the understanding that “reconciliation is not an Aboriginal problem; it is a Canadian one” (p. vi). This includes problematizing attendance initiatives in schools where Indigenous students attend, specifically for this study of on-reserve First Nations students.

The OECD’s (2017) report outlines strategies for educators and schools to better supporting Indigenous students including:

- Care about them and who they are as Indigenous people;
- Expect them to succeed in education; and
- Help them to learn about their cultures, histories, and languages.

(OECD, 2017, p. 1)

As mentioned previously, the report also outlines suggestions to support students, engage with families, and monitor and report to assist families with their children’s progress. Recommendations from the report also suggest that principals and school leaders adopt promising practices for Indigenous Peoples, school staff need to develop their understandings of Indigenous People’s, that there is a focus on relationship building between communities, sharing

information regularly with families to monitor progress on their children with a focus in the early years to set students up for success, and persistence. This work is not a cultural tick box, but must be a sustainable, ongoing, and concerted effort by schools to meet the needs of Indigenous children in an era of reconciliation. These recommendations for promising practices by the OECD (2017) align with Alberta's Teaching (2018b) and Leadership Quality Standards (2018c) which govern educator practice in Alberta.

The new Teaching Quality Standards (TQS) (2018b) which govern teaching practice in Alberta including:

- Fostering Effective Relationships;
- Engaging in Career-Long Learning;
- Demonstration a Professional Body of Knowledge;
- Establishing Inclusive Learning Environments;
- Applying Foundational Knowledge about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit; and
- Adhering to Legal Frameworks.

The Leadership Quality Standards (LQS) (2018c) include:

- Fostering Effective Relationships;
- Modeling Commitment to Professional Learning;
- Embodying Visionary Leadership;
- Leading a Learning Community;
- Supporting the Application of Foundational Knowledge about First Métis, and Inuit;
- Providing Instructional Leadership;
- Developing Leadership Capacity;
- Managing School Operations and Resources; and
- Understanding and Responding to the Larger Societal Context.

These standards support educators and leaders in adopting promising practices for Indigenous education and RVS's uptake of professional learning to support Indigenous learners reflects a movement toward reconciliation, however the gap in attendance for students residing on-reserve needs to be a call to action to for educators and leaders who work with students residing in an on-reserve community.

Consideration needs to continue to include understandings of the legacy of Indian Residential School system, and additional forms of oppression Indigenous peoples experience in their day to day lives. Racism is not a thing of the past nor something that is exclusive to the United States. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) measures the quality of life within countries based on social determinants of health based on three dimensions including long and healthy life, knowledge, and a decent standard of living (2019) to which Canada ranks 13th of 189 developing countries, however within Canada, National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations states that the same HDI measures applied to First Nations Peoples would see an HDI of 63 (Mackrael, 2018; Williams, 2012). Social and structural inequalities are not a new reality for First Nations Peoples (see work by scholars' Cindy Blackstock, Marie Batiste, Jacquelyn Ottman, Eve Tuck) as well the disparity in educational outcomes has been staggeringly consistent. In Alberta, the high school completion rate for non-Indigenous students has remained fairly consistent at approximately 70% for a 3-year completion and 80% for a 5-year completion (Alberta Education, 2018d) whereas for Indigenous students the average completion rate for 3-year completion is approximately 50% (Alberta Education 2018d, 2019). RVS has better than provincial average for Indigenous students, however there are factors which need to be considered when looking at these completion results.

Data tracking does not begin until grade 10 for Annual Education Results Reports (AERR) and research demonstrates that the “dropout” zone is between grades 7 – 9, (see, Sabates, Akyeamong, Westbrook, & Frances, 2010) therefore the above numbers do not reflect the reality for many students. Furthermore, while enrollment for RVS is continually growing, enrollment for Indigenous off-reserve students has remained fairly consistent but not for on-reserve students which has dropped significantly (see table 2). When data is used to inform directions for educational leaders, caution needs to be made and context needs to be considered. Absenteeism in itself does not have agreement with respect to a standard ceiling (Thomas & Hennem, 2020) and the problematic lack of ethnic, gender in a broad context, and other contextual data compounds having a standard ceiling for attendance. In addition, what is being measured with respect to attendance. Bums in seats does not always mean a student is attentive. Engagement in schools, while not a focus of this research, needs to be considered within the same scope as attendance. Disengagement does not always lead to dropping out of school but does have other implications that need to be considered to fully address chronic absenteeism.

Table 2. Enrollment statistics for RVS, 2014 – 2020. (*Service agreement permits 100 students to be registered during the school year.)

	Total Enrollment	Off-Reserve Indigenous Students	On-Reserve Students*
2014 - 2015	20598	812	98
2015 - 2016	21567	846	100
2016 - 2017	22706	885	87
2017 - 2018	23777	921	76
2018 - 2019	24703	892	68
2019 - 2020	25415	887	61

The data depicts not only an opportunity gap between Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students, but also between off-reserve students and on-reserve students. Factors that may be contributing to this include different structural factors including governing bodies (federal vs. provincial legislations) and transportation. For families living on-reserve who choose to register their children in off-reserve schools inherently understand these factors and yet, are still choosing to enroll their children outside of their home communities. The HDI gap indicates that there may be better opportunities for Indigenous Peoples off-reserve. The over representation of Indigenous Peoples in the justice and welfare system also indicate that the HDI for quality of life is more aligned with Chief Bellegarde's ranking. Statistics Canada (2017) indicate that although Indigenous Peoples make up 4% of Canada's population, they account for 26% of provincial/territorial custody admissions and 25% of the in custody federal offender population. The proportion of Indigenous adults in custody was about 9 times higher than their representation in the adult population (3%). Indigenous youth (aged 12-17) accounted for 37% of provincial/territorial custody admissions and the proportion of Indigenous youth in provincial/territorial custody was about 5 times higher than their representation in the youth population (7%). In addition to convictions, 28% of Indigenous people (aged 15+) reported being victimized in the previous 12 months, compared to 18% of non-Indigenous people. Indigenous females had an overall rate of violent victimization that was double that of Indigenous males and close to triple that of non-Indigenous females.

Indigenous Peoples are also more likely to experience household food insecurity than the non-Aboriginal population (Statistics Canada, 2017). The rates were 27% of Inuit, 22% of First Nations people and 15% of Métis compared with 7% of non-Aboriginal people. And while Indigenous children make up only seven per cent of the population in Canada, they represent 48 per cent of all children in foster care. In Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, Indigenous children represent a shocking 73 per cent, 85 per cent and 87 per cent of all children in care respectively. Indigenous children in Ontario are 168 per cent more likely to be taken into care than White children and most Indigenous children are taken into care for reasons of neglect and structural factors beyond the parents' control, like conditions of poverty and poor housing. Further, they are less likely than non-Indigenous children to be taken into care for reasons of physical or sexual abuse. While educators have a duty to report when a child's welfare is concerned, recent research has revealed the tension between understanding the structural forces of oppression with colonial ideals of how to raise children do not align with a lens on reconciliation (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2020). In addition, many First Nation families view receiving social supports as a means to attract "unwanted attention" (p. 47) or "being targeting by schools and teachers" (p. 47). Despite the push in Alberta for inclusion and safe and caring schools, without a reconciliation lens, this means something different for First Nations students.

Many First Nations schools receive less funding per student than provincial and territorial schools, and zero dollars for things like libraries, computers, languages or extracurricular activities. This does not lead to a safe and appropriate learning environment, and may pose serious health concerns, including mold contamination, high carbon dioxide levels, rodent infestations, sewage, and inadequate or lack of heating. Shannen Koostachin sparked a movement in 2007, advocating for schools for First Nations students and she was named one of 150 greatest Canadians and nominated for an International Peace Children's Peace prize in 2009 before her death in 2010. She was killed attending an off-reserve school because her home community did not have a high school. Shannen's dream marked a strong youth movement in Canadian history which witnessed children advocating federal and provincial leaders to provide safe schools for them to learn in. Students in RVS' area who reside on-reserve do not share the same physical conditions of the schools in Attawapiskat, however parents are choosing to send their children to RVS despite the lowering enrollment and chronic attendance issues.

In order to understand the subtleties between cultures, professional development within Alberta has moved to align with creating safe and caring schools, with an emphasis on supporting teachers engaging with acts of reconciliation to support their TQS and LQS requirements. However, even with a focus on reconciliation, schooling remains a “settler colonial society encumbered by racialized exclusion and racist discourses” (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2020, p. 35). Policies within education systems remain focused on a blanket, all for one, one for all, approach that continues to culturally marginalize First Nations Peoples. Relationships between differing cultures need to be understood organically and relationally, with trust as a commonality between all. However, when trust is not a focus within a legacy of IRS and schooling still operates from a White settler colonial identity, there needs to be a more concerted effort put forth by the latter. First Nations families have a great attunement to matters of trust between them and colonial identities and a lack of trust or engagement with recommendations from the TRC hinders this relationship (Milne & Wotherspoon, 2020). Culture, or people within a specific culture, are “located within a bounded world, which defines them and differentiates them from others” (Grillo, 2003, p. 158) and it needs to be explicitly stated that First Nations Peoples are not one culture, but a mosaic of cultures within one colonial label.

Western society however has localized an identity of First Nations people within an historical context, not a contemporary one and these “mental pictures have little correspondence to the reality of the world we live in today” (Williams, 2012, p. 220). This cultural confusion (Freire, 2013), emerges as a fear of the Other, but also as a cultural anxiety experienced by those who may fear that their own cultural capital could be displaced (Cavalcant, 2015; Grillo, 2003; Williams, 2012; Yang, et al., 2015). Cultural anxiety emerges when there is a social transition, an epoch shift in the way we see others (Yang, et al., 2015). During the process of engaging in reconciliation in Alberta, there has been little consideration of a displacement of the anxiety felt by a settler identity when faced with the implications of Canada’s history of genocide of Indigenous Peoples. Educators working within a colonial settler institution, need to not only become aware of the legacies of colonization within Canada, but also to have an epistemological break with their own learning and understandings of Indigeneity rather than displace their own fear onto First Nations Peoples.

Methodology

A challenge that presents RVS with this project are the different worldviews between Indigenous and Western approaches to educational interventions. The Response to Intervention supports that have been implemented do not seem to be having an impact with Indigenous students, therefore this year in the project, the research with RVS' on-Reserve Indigenous communities will shed light on the attendance gap and lack of improvement in attendance despite the work of the AIC. Recognizing that the research process represents a Western dominated ideology, for this project, engaging with a methodology that offers a decolonized approach to research with our Indigenous community is crucial (Simonds & Christopher, 2013). As such, a mixed-methods approach was used to meet the needs and embody the sensibilities of both communities and the overarching research question is:

What type of culturally responsive top-tier supports do Indigenous students, Indigenous parents, Elders, and staff report would support attendance at school?

With support of the Partner Research Schools Initiative at Werklund School of Education, ethics was sought through the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (CFREB) at the University of Calgary as well as a modification for the study to access quantitative data from RVS including enrollment data and special education data based on our initial findings from the data. A discrepancy between perceptions of anxiety prompted us to request the enrollment and special education data to enquire if this perception translates into praxis.

Participants

Participants for this study were on-reserve families that have chosen to attend RVS rather than their reserve school and/or students/parents that have chosen to self-identify as Indigenous. For the on-reserve Indigenous students, these families have chosen to attend a provincial school over the federally run reserve school in their community. The children are transported into one of RVS schools in the Cochrane and Springbank areas. RVS and the Stoney-Nakoda First Nation have a long standing relationship with a formal education agreement in place that supports families choice in attending RVS. This relationship is informing the inclusion/exclusion criteria as this division wants to ensure they are meeting the needs of this select group of individuals facing challenges at a higher rate than other students in the division.

Recruitment of families included three schools in RVS sending out information packages to families, as well as information posted in school newsletters and a poster displayed at the

school offices. The three schools were chosen as the agreement between RVS and Stoney-Nakoda First Nations include attendance at these schools. Four families responded to the recruitment and in total five parents who had students currently registered in the three schools (or who had left RVS through graduation or dropping out) participated. All five parents also gave permission for their children to participate in the research study and we interviewed three children, two who had since left RVS and one currently registered in elementary school. Participants also included community leaders – staff from RVS and Renfrew Educational Services who work with Stoney-Nakoda families and in total 38 people participated in an online survey, see table 3. Recruitment for staff was done through staff communication newsletter, emails to administrators, guidance counsellors, and community partners.

Table 3. Breakdown of Staff Participants.

	Out of School Supports (Speech Language Specialists, Psychologist)	In School Supports (Guidance Counselor, Child Development, Central Office Staff)	School Based Educator	School Based Administrator
Renfrew Education Services	3			
Rocky View Schools		16	2	17

Methods

Families participated in semi-structured interviews which were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. The interviews were various in length but ranged from 45 minutes to two hours. Two parents would only be interviewed together, with the remaining three interviews being one-on-one and interviews took place in settings away from the schools as families reported a deep sense of distrust for RVS and wanted to ensure their participation was anonymous. Two interviews (including the double interview) took place at a coffee shop, and the remaining two interviews occurred via the telephone. Staff engaged with an online survey using Google

Forms™ and had the option of contacting researchers to elaborate on their survey responses. Research questions and interview protocols are attached as Appendix A and B.

Results

Staff

All of the staff (n= 38) reported that attendance was a concern at their school, either directly affecting student learning or having implications through not being able to enact services as children were not at school. Chronic non-attendance presented staff with more challenges in that they felt that students were missing out on building relationships at school, there is a lack of consistency and routine at school, and when students are away, the impact extends to the domains of academic and social engagement. Staff also stated that because of chronic absenteeism there is difficulty with accurate assessment of learning and formal assessments by support staff. School staff also expressed frustration with their implementation of strategies that do not seem to influence reducing chronic absenteeism resulting in a sense of giving up. One staff reported that “[I] cannot help if they are not here” and another stated that it is “difficult to reduce anxiety related to school when attendance is inconsistent.” Another staff participant stated that it is hard to “facilitate change when they are not attending” and one suggested that these families should “look into other options for them such as home schooling.”

To address chronic attendance, staff consistently stated that following a standard attendance protocol was an improvement to what was used previously but also building relationships was seen as a key component to encourage students to attending school. Relationship building was reported to be done by a schools Child Development Advisor or Guidance Counsellor or a “delegated” administrator. By having a centralized adult in the building, the intention is to have a sole contact to address issues or concerns, specifically with respect to anxiety or mental wellness. Staff also outline that they are following the procedures developed by the AIC in the first two years: pull attendance data each week, encourage classroom teachers to reach out to students and families, monitoring “at-risk” students, and referring for additional supports if needed including central office staff.

When staff were asked about their perception of why students do not attend school responses drew attention to specific barriers faced by on-reserve First Nations students, see table 4.

Table 4. Staff Perceptions of Chronic Attendance.

Physical Barriers	Cognitive Barriers	Emotional Barriers
Transportation	Parents lack skills to support their children	Impact of Indian Residential Schools
Money for gas	Low priority for parents	Bullying
Health	Academic challenges	Colonialization
Children stay home to babysit siblings	Learning disabilities	Relationships with school staff
Extended vacations	Lack of sleep due to “gaming” all night	Parent issues with mental wellness
Financial crises	School is “useless”	Anxiety
Poverty	Undiagnosed medical/learning needs	Mental wellness
Lack of childcare	Lack of familial understanding of the importance of attending school	Addictions
		Trauma
		Racism
		Shame
		Familial issues
		Poor parenting
		Family structure
		Family crises
		Lack of parent involvement
		Families do not prioritize school
		Parent anxiety

The barriers identified fell into three categories: physical, cognitive, and emotional with a perception of emotional barriers being the top factor impacting chronic attendance issues.

With the new TQS and LQS, staff were asked if they felt it was important to learn about their local Indigenous community. Surprisingly, three respondents stated that they did not need to learn about their local Indigenous community and one stated that they do not “understand this question as it relates to the question of attendance.” Remaining respondents unanimously agreed that professional learning about their local Indigenous community was central for building empathy, understanding of cultural dynamics, reducing “ignorance,” as well as learning about how racism impacts families and one respondent stated that this is an “ethical imperative” for educators. Regarding the type of learning that would be most beneficial staff stated that understanding life on-reserve is important, as well as “empathetic exercises” were needed. Understanding of a perceived notion that parents do not value school, strategies to use Indigenous ways of knowing, factors getting in the way of attendance, and many respondents were interested in “site visits” to the reserve and learning/collaborating with Indigenous academics in order to be more responsive to the local community.

Other suggestions to improve attendance included more representation of Indigeneity in the school including visual representations of Indigenous culture, access to Indigenous resources, and accountability regarding allocations of funding. Staff also stated that having a liaison person to bridge the two communities is an extreme value to improving attendance. Structural changes, including adjusting the school start times, flexibility with scheduling classes, and having content available on and off line would be helpful. Additionally, translating materials into the languages used on-reserve may contribute to more parent engagement. Addressing mental health concerns was a primary need across the staff to address core issues within the familial structure including trauma, anxiety, mental wellness, and supporting families in crisis. School staff also would like to see more “in school resources” and less “consultation” from central office staff as the needs of the local school are not understood by most central office staff.

Parents and Children

Families (Adults n=5; Children n=3) unanimously stated there was a deep mistrust between their community and RVS that has been building for many years and one parent stated that RVS “treats them like a problem to be solved.” Parents feel that RVS does not address their concerns and they expressed frustration that this research study was a means to “look like they are doing something.” Trust between First Nations communities and Western communities remains trapped in the historical and ongoing impacts of colonization, and one parent also added that this research

study “is going about it the wrong way. RVS is looking for more information about THEM rather than learning with THEM so you can do things better.” One parent stated that the only reason they engaged with the study was because the researchers were “not with RVS.”

Parents also reported a consistent lack of communication between communities through issues with examples of RVS “double billing” families for funds covered by the tuition agreement, changing bus times without informing Stoney Education Authority, and cancelling programs that gave space for their children to be immersed in their culture. The program Roots and Wings¹ came up as a misunderstanding of how to provide cultural specific programming to their children and that this program was planned with good intentions, however the Western ideology that governed the program caused conflicts with community and eventual termination of the program. Parents did state that there was a noticeable presence of their culture at the elementary school and this made them feel more welcome and included however, they also pointed out that this was unique to this school and did not reflect RVS as a whole causing them to feel that this was a “tokenization” of their culture rather than a system-wide engagement in reconciliation. Parents also spoke with great unease about the land acknowledgement in RVS and why the trustees took out “the one thing that mattered to their community” which was a section acknowledging them – the First Peoples and their land.

In speaking about their culture, there was again more misrecognition by educators regarding Indigenous culture. One parent said that her son stopped attending physical education classes because he did not want to get changed in the locker room with the other students: “our people are humble and getting changed in PE in groups does not align with our values.” Staff did not respond to the students’ concern, causing the student to stop attending class resulting in their child “fulfilling stereotypes.” The lack of understanding of their localized culture was clear from parents and one stated that “they need to be more educated about us” rather than the histories of our peoples. One child also stated that they wished their teacher knew more about them rather than people they did not know (First Nations People broadly). Another parent believes that teachers need to learn more about how to reach their children through better understanding of

¹ Roots and Wings was a program run at Glenbow school specifically for children from Stoney-Nakoda and was facilitated one day a week with mixed grade groupings. Curriculum included Indigenous ways of knowing and doing led by a non-Indigenous staff.

their culture including their “oral culture” and their children are “audio learners” who don’t do well with written assignments or working online.

Regarding academics, parents stated that learning needs got in the way of their children attending school. One parent said her child struggled with reading and this was causing them to be behind in their work resulting in the child not wanting to go to school. Another parent brought up an alarming concern in that her child has an Individual Program Plan (IPP) for a learning disability and Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD) and yet the parent has “never signed an IPP” and that her child “had no accommodations” and asked “why didn’t anyone notice?” Regarding homework, parents stated that the work needs to be done in school as the evenings are for family time and activities and wondered “what is happening at school if no work is being done?”

When asked why parents send their children to RVS responses varied with a consistent thread running through them in that parents wanted better opportunities for their children despite parents not “feeling welcome, it isn’t their school.” Better opportunities included consistent teachers, access to resources, extra-curricular programs, and curricular programs including Building Futures² and French Immersion. One parent stated that they enrolled their children in RVS to experience “life off the reserve” because there are little employment opportunities on reserve so their children needed to learn what life is like in a different community and “how to live in both worlds.” In addition, they wanted their children to “experience racism” and how to deal with this while their children can be supported by their family. Unpacking racism has become problematic for one parent whose 8-year-old child asked for sun screen on a family trip so that they “did not look more brown” when they returned to school. The parent stated that “they are not dark, why do they talk about being dark?” This parent felt that they had a better experience than other First Nations people because they look “White” and not dark reducing the racism they personally experienced but knew of others who were treated differently. Another parent stated that moving between on and off-reserve was like “travelling to another country daily” and to feel included in society rather than “segregated.”

Due to the overwhelming responses by staff regarding anxiety and the emotional barriers to attendance, an additional question was asked of the parents regarding their understanding of

² Building futures is a unique program for grade 10 students where the focus is learning curriculum through building a house.

anxiety as a barrier to attending school. One parent was visibly angry at this question and stated that this is a “blanket comment to push the issues aside. It is actually demeaning.” Another parent stated that there is a lot of anxiety in the community because of “stress in the homes, deaths in the community, and that school is not a safe space.” Students who reside on-reserve “work twice as hard as the White kids” and yet their children are over surveilled for learning disabilities and anxiety. In addition, some parents feel “frightened” to speak with school staff out of fear that their children will be referred for testing as well, parents feel that “RVS staff feel that they are better than us” causing parents to not communicate with the school. Parents recognize the importance of school and the need to receive a diploma from high school despite the “racism” and “microaggressions” their children deal with every day. One parent asked “whose success matters?” and that there are more obstacles in their way put up by RVS and “it hurts.”

The children interviewed spoke about how their academics were a barrier to attending school and that when they were struggling with their course work they tended to “act out” and exhibit bad behaviours. Attention was then focused on the behaviour rather than the academics which they found frustrating. Another barrier to attending school was being sick, family trips, or they just “don’t feel like it.” While children said they felt welcome at their school, when asked what their ideal school would look like one stated that at their school, “anybody can come. No one would be left out.”

Special Education Data

Based on the distinct differences between perceptions of anxiety as a barrier to attendance, RVS provided special education data specific to the overall population and Indigenous students (on and off reserve). The data can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5. RVS Enrollment and Special Education Code Data.

Year	Enrollment			Special Education Codes		
	Total Students	Indigenous Students Off-Reserve	Indigenous Students On-Reserve	Total Students	Indigenous Students Off-Reserve	Indigenous Students On-Reserve
2014 – 15	20598	812	98	4346	277	36
2015 - 16	21567	846	100	4418	269	37
2016 - 17	22706	885	87	4429	280	34
2017 - 18	23777	921	76	4373	269	33
2018 - 19	24703	892	68	4312	243	26
2019 - 20	25415	887	61	4110	223	24

Analysis of this data shows RVS remaining consistent with an overall average of special education codes of 18.7% with a noticeable consistency across the six years of data as well as a slow decline in special education codes. With respect to Indigenous off-reserve students, the overall average of special education codes is 29.8% and 38.8% for on-reserve students. There is a decrease in special education coding for Indigenous off-reserve students while for on-reserve students the percentage has remained fairly consistent, despite the decrease in enrollment. While it was not in the purview of this study to examine special education data, what does emerge is the potential for perceptions of First Nations Peoples by staff to be based on blanket narratives rather than individual learning needs. While ample research supports that historically, First Nations students have not been given access to special education services (see, Garrow, 2017) there is little information regarding off-reserve students and special education services.

First Nations parents make a choice for better educational opportunities by enrolling their children in off-reserve schools including access to special education services and we do not suggest that the overrepresentation of Indigenous on and specifically, off-reserve students is a bad practice but do question, is this good practice? Are students who are referred for special

education in need of supports or is this based on a perceived deficit view of First Nations' Peoples? Given one parent in this study reported that they never signed their child's IPP and another parent reported that her child was receiving supports for behaviour rather than academic needs, this creates room for internal work on how to best assess students, what is the maintenance of the supports, and why are children referred.

Discussion

Through analysis of the data, there was a clear and distinct line that continues to separate communities. RVS staff took a blanket approach when looking at First Nations families and the First Nations families held a deep and historical mistrust of the school division based on their personal experiences and historical trauma. While the AIC tightened up the process of tracking attendance, there was a concerning lack of attention to the social-cultural barriers presented with First Nations families. Despite the attention to the truth within reconciliation, the silence between these communities does not represent a pathway to reconciliation. When educators look at First Nations students as a "problem to be solved" (parent) through initiatives like AIC as well as other school-based attempts to have children present, does not begin to cut through the layers of oppression and discrimination First Nations people experience in RVS schools. The mandate by Alberta Education and recommendations from the TRC require a need for safe and caring schools, however First Nations families do not feel these mandates are being met. The intersections of the policies which govern and oversee the lives of educators and First Nations families within the public education system create room for misrecognition of whose responsibility attendance is. Families are working to support their students in attending schools off-reserve to improve their children's opportunities despite knowingly sending their children to sites which expose them to racism and microaggressions (Compton-Lilly, 2019). Staff however, heavily perceive attendance issues arise due to emotional barriers the families experience, rather than a reflection of a lack of cultural understandings.

The problem becomes one of cultural displacement and cultural anxiety meaning, the responsibility then shifts to the student and family away from the school. First Nations Peoples' experiences with racism and oppression have made them more aware and attuned to both systemic and personal forms of exclusionary practices (Milne & Wortherspoon, 2020). However, there remains a lack of awareness of how a settler colonial identity, to which many educators in Alberta identify as 70% White and female (Alberta Government, 2018), has desensitized them to

the same issues. Generally, most individuals are concerned about the reproduction of their own cultural capital and the infringement upon an autonomous culture in a multicultural society presents with a challenge to the status quo (Grillo, 2003). When one system is inherently following one strand of a cultural identity and Others are seeking acceptance into this cultural system, there needs to be a move towards the centre, rather than a polarized approach to looking at attendance. Indigeneity is inherently relational, and a response to address chronic attendance needs to be done relationally, with those involved. A relational approach ought to negate any cultural confusion or cultural anxiety felt by educators. This ought to also prevent blanket perceptions of emotional barriers as a factor of chronic absenteeism. While the AIC follows data from within and relied on OECD's (2017) *Promising Practices for Indigenous Peoples*, there still needs to be a place for Stoney-Nakoda families to have control, be included in their children's education in a public educational system, and this would build trust as they would be a part of the process rather than relying on other Indigenous communities to guide.

Building trust also needs to include accountability with respect to funding for First Nations students attending public off-reserve schools. Due to the intersections between a provincial and federal funding systems, more diligence needs to be made regarding transparency of allocations of dollars to support First Nations children and families. There also needs to be accountability regarding special education referrals and designations, including English Language Learning codes. Special education practices that operate from a deficit paradigm need to look more broadly at social-cultural implications of structural and systemic oppression. Are there learning needs or is there a lack of learning opportunities? Better pedagogical attentions also to the cultural practices of First Nations families also need to be addressed. When the cultural norms of a child does not permit them to undress outside of the familial unit, concessions need to be made rather than blame the child for not attending class. School systems also need to avoid tokenizing schools which have a high population of Indigenous students, but enter into engagement of reconciliation and representation. Leroy Little Bear (2000) eloquently states that "When jagged worldviews collide, objectivity is an illusion. The only things I know for sure are the things I experience, see, feel and so on. The rest of it is presumption and persuasion. I presume that you know what I know, what I see, what I feel" (p. 85). Instead of operating from perceptions and illusionary truths based on deficit paradigms, more intentional dialogue needs to bring together differing cultures, rather than leaving a displacement of cultural

anxiety. Families have initiated this dialogue by choosing to send their children to RVS and subjecting their children to a perceived unsafe schooling environment and RVS needs to play a key role in ensuring that the direction shifts to more inclusion rather than a displacement of cultural anxiety.

A key recommendation is to move professional learning for all RVS staff to incorporate and embed Indigenous ways of knowing throughout, rather than separate and optional learning. Weaving together Indigenous ways of knowing within a holistic approach offers preventative ways schools can respond broadly to concerns with attendance as well, provides educators with a pedagogic model of how to not tokenize Indigeneity. Shifting a colonial system to become entwined with Indigeneity offers an opportunity to redress attendance concerns for First Nations students to a relational approach of attendance with the acknowledgement that the system excludes some students over others. Alberta Education funded a project that brought together Indigenous scholars and a collaborative of educators and developed an introductory guide to a holistic approach of incorporation of Indigenous ways of knowing: *Weaving Ways: Indigenous Ways of Knowing in Classrooms and Schools* (ARPDC, 2018). This report developed by the Alberta Regional Professional Development Consortia (ARPDC) follows a medicine wheel format and looks at the areas: cultures of belonging, instructional design, pedagogy, and sharing through story. Guiding questions are seen in table 5.

Table 5. Adapted from *Weaving Ways: Indigenous Ways of Knowing in Classrooms and Schools* (ARPDC, 2018, p. 4)

QUADRANT	GUIDING QUESTIONS
Cultures of Belonging	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How can we embrace the Indigenous idea of wholeness in the classroom to support greater belonging for all learners? 2. How can I draw from the ways Indigenous peoples foster cultures of belonging to compliment the ways I create belonging in my classroom?
Instructional Design	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How might valuing Indigenous and other knowledge systems in our learning designs promote cultural appreciation and advance reconciliation? 2. In what way can Indigenous knowledge systems enhance how I design learning for my students?
Pedagogy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How can the Indigenous idea of Two-Eyed Seeing, or Etuaptmumk, support a blended experience in my classroom that authentically respects and builds on the strengths of both Indigenous and Western ways of knowing and learning? 2. What similarities does Indigenous pedagogy have to my own pedagogical beliefs and approaches?
Sharing Through Story	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How can we support deeper connection to learning outcomes for all students through storytelling? 2. Do my current teaching practices and approaches relate to sharing through story? Can I further incorporate this approach?

An intentional use of the Weaving Ways approach and with connections to the TQS and LQS, across the entire school district would offer a preventive approach to redressing attendance concerns as well as demonstrate to First Nations families that reconciliation is a meaningful and purposeful opportunity to build trust between cultures. A holistic, divisional approach would also reduce the tokenization of Indigeneity and enhance learning opportunities for all school staff. Professional development for staff also needs to extend beyond learning about First Nations Education, but extend to the self. Educators need to engage with professional development and

learning that takes a critically reflexive stance and unpacks how the world is perceived (Lowen-Trudeau, 2012; May & Perry, 2017). Critical reflexivity problematizes not only one's positionality within society, but how that positionality is structured by society. A more relational understanding of the self within a colonial settler social institution, ought to bring to light how this identity may work towards exclusion within a system that ought to be inclusive. The case studies attached in Appendix C, drawn from participant data, can be used to facilitate a critically reflexive approach to understanding how microaggressions and racism are causing First Nations students from being fully present in public education.

Conclusion

This study offers an opportunity for non-First Nations and First Nations cultures to come together and bridge a pathway to a reduction in chronic attendance faced by First Nations students living on-reserve and attending off-reserve schools. Chronic absenteeism causes many outcomes that could be prevented by a critically reflexive approach to understanding culture rather than a displacement of the anxiety caused when a culture is considered 'at-risk'. In this case, the cultural anxiety can be negated by a holistic divisional response to incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing into the culture of RVS, and an inward reflexive turn on the system and the self.

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Appendix A: Parent and Student Questions**Parent interview questions:**

- (1) What age/grade are your child/ren in and which school?
- (2) Can you share a positive experience your child has had at school?
- (3) Can you describe the challenges you and your child/ren have with attendance at school?
- (4) Do you and your child/ren feel welcome at school?
- (5) Open-ended discussion: Feedback opportunity and participant questions

Student interview questions:

- (1) What grade are you in and what school?
- (2) What kind of activities do you like to do?
- (3) Do you have a favourite subject at school?
- (4) Do you like school? Why or why not?
- (5) Can you describe the challenges you have with attendance at school?
- (6) Do you feel welcome at school?
- (7) What does an ideal school/classroom look and feel like for you?
- (8) Open-ended discussion: Feedback opportunity and participant questions

Appendix B: Staff Survey Questions

- (1) What is your organizations name?
- (2) What is your role with your organization?
- (3) Does your organization support students from the Stoney-Nakoda Nations?
- (4) Is school attendance a specific or focal concern for your role?
- (5) Is school attendance a problem for you and the families you work with?
- (6) How does chronic absenteeism impact your role?
- (7) What are you doing currently to address absenteeism in your role?
- (8) What are your thoughts on why students do not attend school?
- (9) Do you know who you can contact for support for your students? Please indicate who that person (e.g., role / title) is.
- (10) Do you feel that non-Indigenous community leaders would benefit from learning about your local Indigenous community? Explain.
- (11) What type of learning would be beneficial for non-Indigenous community leaders?
- (12) What could Rocky View Schools do differently to address chronic absenteeism (missed 18 days of more of school)?
- (13) Is there anything else you would like to share?

Appendix C: Case Studies for Professional Development

Case studies offer an excellent tool for educators to analyze their own professional pedagogic practice based on real scenarios (Gorski & Pothini, 2013). Educators can problematize and unpack theoretical ideas from the Weaving Ways document and consider their positionality and reflexively consider different perceptions of the situation. Case studies also offer safe ways in which educators can challenge their own biases and prejudices and find ways to work through structural barriers faced by First Nations Students and is a method used by scholars to promote deepening understandings of the impact of racism and discrimination within schooling (see, Paul Gorski, Nicole Bell).

The following anonymized cases are based on data gathered from this study, actual experiences of First Nations students and families within RVS to be used to enhance professional development and learning using the *Weaving Ways: Indigenous Ways of Knowing in Classrooms and Schools* (ARPDC, 2018) guide (Retrieved from <http://empoweringthespirit.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Weaving-Ways-Introductory-Document-10-09.pdf>). All information in these case studies have been adjusted to protect the identity of the participants including grade, ages, schools and roles.

C-1) A New School

Stacey and her family have recently moved to a new community from Northern Alberta and are looking to find a new school for their young family which includes a child in grade one and a child who will be attending Kindergarten the next school year. Stacey and her family are First Nations and value their children learning multiple languages so are looking for a school with a French Immersion program for their in school child to continue in FI. The community they settled in has a few options for them to choose from within the same district, so they make appointments with each schools' principal to learn more. Both schools are welcoming and both seem to have strong FI programs however the family felt more at home at the school which has more of an Indigenous visual presence. The other school had little notions of a 'welcoming' spirit and there were no representations of Indigeneity that could be seen. Representation matters for this family as they want their children to see positive representations of their culture and so decide to enroll in the school with more Indigenous representations.

The family follows up with another appointment with this school's principal to register their child and the parents ask the administrator a question the administrator was not prepared to answer. The family wondered why there were such stark differences between schools despite the schools being in the same district and town, and asked the principal if reconciliation matters only when Indigenous people are present?

Use the following guiding questions to discuss how you would respond to this family and what could be done to address this disparity from a divisional level (adapted from Weaving Ways).

Cultures of Belonging

1. How can we embrace the Indigenous idea of wholeness in the district to support greater belonging for all learners?
2. How can I draw from the ways Indigenous peoples foster cultures of belonging to compliment the ways I create belonging in our district?

Instructional Design

1. How might valuing Indigenous and other knowledge systems in our learning designs promote cultural appreciation and advance reconciliation?
2. In what way can Indigenous knowledge systems enhance how the district advances reconciliation?

C-2) Mom, I am too brown for grade 2

Recently, Paul and his wife Rita took their children out of school for a family vacation. The school did not support this absenteeism based on divisional policies, however for Paul and Rita, this was the only affordable time they could take their family on a vacation and thought the risk of absenteeism was worth it. They had been saving money and points for the past few years and told their 3 children that while on vacation, the children were to read books and write about their experiences in some way. One child was in grade 6, one in grade 2, and another in a preschool program. The family trip was to Florida and they had planned on going to Disney World, some beaches, and tour the Kennedy Space Center. After a busy day at Disney World, the children appeared to have some sun burn so Rita packed extra sun screen for the next day at the theme park then set to get everyone to sleep. Charlie, in grade 2 however was visibly upset after having his nightly shower and came running to Rita and Paul in tears. After Charlie had settled, Rita asked Charlie what was wrong, did he not enjoy the day?

Charlie said “my skin, it’s too brown!”

Rita and Paul looked perplexed at each other and Paul asked Charlie, “what do you mean your skin is too brown?”

“Kids at school will think I am a dirty Indian because I am brown now! Can you put on more sun screen on me?” Charlie said through tears.

Rita and Paul had hoped that their children would not experience racism as they did not ‘look brown’ and they were stunned that their child in grade 2 was afraid of looking like an Indian and asked each other after Charlie finally settled, “where is he learning this from?”

Upon return home, Rita and Paul make an appointment with the school principal to discuss Charlie’s statement, however the principal does not respond well and in fact, avoids this part of the discussion and instead, focuses on the families absences from school saying that Charlie cannot form relationships if they are not in school.

Use the following guiding questions to discuss how you would respond to this family and what could be done to address this disparity from a divisional level (adapted from Weaving Ways).

Cultures of Belonging	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How can we embrace the Indigenous idea of wholeness in parenting within a colonial school system? 2. How can I draw from the ways Indigenous peoples foster cultures of belonging to facilitate an open dialogue with parents?
Pedagogy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How can the Indigenous idea of Two-Eyed Seeing, or Etuaptmumk, support a blended experience when meeting with parents that authentically respects and builds on the strengths of both Indigenous and Western ways of knowing and learning? 2. What similarities does Indigenous pedagogy have to my own pedagogical beliefs and approaches?
Sharing Through Story	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How can we support a deeper connection to understanding individual experiences?

C-3) I am not everyone’s spokesperson!

You have been teaching grade 9 social studies at the same school for many years and have been working on authentically incorporating Indigenous histories into your curricula. One lesson that you have designed is focused on the local First Nations community as a means to reduce stereotypes and prejudice. Your lesson is focused on Canada’s federal political system and the role of Senators. Given Senator Lynn Beyak’s recent suspension from the Conservative caucus for her racist remarks, you thought this would be a good entry point for your First Nations students to openly talk about the micro-aggressions they experience. After presenting your lesson on Beyak’s remarks and the response from her colleagues, you ask Sara, a strong grade 9 student who currently lives on reserve what she thought of this?

Sara, shrugs and doesn’t respond to your question, instead asks to go to the washroom.

“Sure, but can you first tell me how your people feel about Beyak?”

Sara, “I don’t know, ask them.”

“I am asking you.”

Sara, “I have to pee.”

You are getting more perturbed, as you expected Sara to have a positive response based on her previous work she has submitted to you. “Sara, answer first, then go to the washroom.”

Sara yells, “you’re being racist” and then leaves the class.

Thankfully, the bell rings and the class uncomfortably leaves. The following week, you do not see Sara in the class and following the AIC protocols, you call home to check in on Sara but later, you find out that Sara has not been attending any of her other classes and now risks being suspended from school.

Use the following guiding questions to discuss how you would respond to this family and what could be done to address this disparity from a divisional level (adapted from Weaving Ways).

	1. How can I draw from the ways Indigenous peoples foster cultures of belonging to compliment the ways I create belonging in my classroom?
Instructional Design	1. How might valuing Indigenous and other knowledge systems in our learning designs promote cultural appreciation and advance reconciliation? 2. In what way can Indigenous knowledge systems enhance how I design learning for my students?
Pedagogy	1. What similarities does Indigenous pedagogy have to my own pedagogical beliefs and approaches?
Sharing Through Story	1. How can I support a deeper connection to learning outcomes for my students through storytelling? 2. Do my current teaching practices and approaches relate to sharing through story? Can I further incorporate this approach?

C-4) I.P.P Meeting

As a learning support teacher, your role in your high school is to ensure that all special education students are supported with an Individual Program Plan (I.P.P.) which has been expanding beyond what you can manage. Each year it seems that more and more First Nations students are getting coded but you struggle with connecting with families to ensure their children are meeting I.P.P. goals and most of these students do not graduate. So, given your workload, you decide to work on the regular students' first then focus on the First Nations students. As the school year progresses and the deadline for I.P.P. completions loom, you turn back to setting up meetings with the families however, as expected, your First Nations families have not contacted you so you file their I.P.P.'s without any signatures for most of these families.

Tommy, a grade 12 student comes to see you about the upcoming diploma exams as he is feeling really stressed about the English and Social exams. The guidance counsellor enrolled Tommy in both ENG and SOC 30-2 in the first semester as the guidance counsellor assumed Tommy would fail one or both and this way, Tommy could have a second chance in the 2nd semester however, having both in the same semester is causing Tommy to have elevated stress and anxiety. Also, his doctor has responded to Tommy's needs by increasing his medication for his generalized anxiety disorder and directed Tommy to talk to his teachers about getting accommodations for his diploma exams. When Tommy comes to see you, you have to first remind yourself of Tommy's needs and after going through his file, you see his last 4 years of I.P.P.'s have not been signed by any of Tommy's teachers or parents so you tell Tommy as he has not been using his accommodations he cannot have any for the diploma exam.

The next day, Tommy's parents are meeting with the principal and you are brought in as they are dismayed that they have never been contacted and despite them getting an assessment that the school directed them to do, Tommy has never had any special education supports nor have they ever had a meeting regarding Tommy and they are concerned that Tommy will not graduate and need to finish his grade 12 year elsewhere so he can get support.

After the family leaves, you begin to apologize to your principal who quickly stops you and states that “Tommy was never going to finish anyway, he has a job on reserve at the local convenience store so he will be fine.”

Use the following guiding questions to discuss how you would respond to this family and what could be done to address this disparity from a divisional level (adapted from Weaving Ways).

Cultures of Belonging	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How can special education services embrace the Indigenous idea of wholeness in the classroom to support greater belonging for all learners? 2. How can special education staff draw from the ways Indigenous peoples foster cultures of belonging to compliment belonging in my classroom?
Instructional Design	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How might valuing Indigenous and other knowledge systems in our special education services promote cultural appreciation and advance reconciliation? 2. In what way can Indigenous knowledge systems enhance how special education is designed for my students?
Pedagogy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How can the Indigenous idea of Two-Eyed Seeing, or Etuaptmumk, support a blended experience in my classroom that authentically respects and builds on the strengths of both Indigenous and Western ways of knowing and learning? 2. What similarities does Indigenous pedagogy have to my own pedagogical beliefs and approaches?
Sharing Through Story	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How can we support deeper connection to learning outcomes for all students through storytelling? 2. Do my current teaching practices and approaches relate to sharing through story? Can I further incorporate this approach?

C-5) Racist? There is no room for racism in inclusion.

During Parent/Teacher conferences one of your grade 5 families scheduled time to meet with you to talk about their daughter's recent string of absences. They have been scattered throughout the year, but totaling close to the 10% threshold and you have been trying to have the family come and talk with you for close to 3 months. Upon their arrival, they also brought their other 4 children with them, all in elementary school so you were a bit upset that you would not be able to have as an in-depth conversation that you would have liked. The family states that Tracey's poor attendance started shortly after she was not allowed to change privately for phys ed and that since that time, Tracey has been targeted by other students for not changing for phys ed and so she eventually stopped going to class which then led to her missing entire days. The parents have tried supporting her by telling her to put her gym clothes under her other clothes, or go change in a washroom but she refuses. You ask the parents if she was bullied in the change room and was that what precipitated this event?

"No, we are humble people and we do not undress in front of other people so Tracey was uncomfortable with getting changed with the other girls."

You ask the family "did you speak with the PE teacher?"

"Yes, multiple times but he said they cannot make exceptions for individuals and that Tracey needs to learn how to be in a community with others. When we told him this was against our familial beliefs, he ignored us and said the other native kids get changed so why is Tracy so special?"

After hearing this, you feel bad for Tracey but cannot think of any reasoning behind her not wanting to participate in gym and the subsequent number of absences need to be addressed. You suggest that Tracey receive an in-school suspension to get her caught up on her course work and that later you will address the PE issue. Despite your belief that this is a reasonable solution, the family gets visibly upset and begins to leave so you want to confirm that this is a plan they agree to moving forward.

The family however states that "you did not hear us. The problem is not with Tracey's work or getting caught up, the problem is this school is racist."

Use the following guiding questions to discuss how you would respond to this family and what could be done to address this disparity from a divisional level (adapted from Weaving Ways).

Cultures of Belonging	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How can schools embrace the Indigenous idea of wholeness in the classroom to support greater belonging for all learners? 2. How can school staff draw from the ways Indigenous peoples foster cultures of belonging to compliment belonging in our schools?
Instructional Design	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How might valuing Indigenous and other knowledge systems in our classroom spaces promote cultural appreciation and advance reconciliation? 2. In what way can Indigenous knowledge systems enhance how classroom spaces are designed for my students?
Pedagogy	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How can the Indigenous idea of Two-Eyed Seeing, or Etuaptmumk, support a blended experience in my classroom that authentically respects and builds on the strengths of both Indigenous and Western ways of knowing and learning? 2. What similarities does Indigenous pedagogy have to my own pedagogical beliefs and approaches?
Sharing Through Story	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How can we support deeper connection to learning outcomes for all students through storytelling? 2. Do my current teaching practices and approaches relate to sharing through story? Can I further incorporate this approach?

Appendix D: Knowledge Dissemination Plan

Current plan to disseminate knowledge will be as follows.

The following teachers' conventions for the 2021 school year:

- Pallisar District Teachers' Convention
- Calgary City Teachers' Convention
- Central Alberta Teachers' Convention
- Greater Edmonton Teachers' Convention
- North Central Teachers' Convention
- South Western Alberta Teachers' Convention

Other sites of presentation:

- Alberta Research Network
- Rocky View School District
- CASS
- ASBA
- Use as a resource for pre-service teachers
- We will address requests as needed

We will also plan to present this work at the Canadian Society for the Study of Education as well as prepare a paper to publish with the Alberta Teachers' Association in Educational Leadership. Also, we are looking at preparing a workshop development program that embeds findings from this study.

Appendix E: Budget/Timeline

\$50,000 to support the extension of the Attendance Innovation Campaign salary and benefits, and expenses from August 2018 until August 2019.

<i>Expense Category</i>	Projected	Actual
<i>AB ED Grant</i> Research Coordination	\$25,000	\$37,100
<i>(\$50,000)</i> Community Consultation	\$10,000	\$2,900
Data Analysis	\$10,000	\$10,000
Knowledge Translation	\$0	\$0
<i>In Kind from RVS</i>		
Research Coordination	\$50,000	\$2,933
Knowledge Translation	\$10,000	\$11,000
Intervention staff	\$80,000	\$80,000
Elder/Knowledge Keeper	\$5,000	\$4,600
Professional Learning	\$5,000	\$3,750
Substitute Costs	\$5,000	\$5,000
Office and Materials	\$2,000	\$2,000
Computer and technology	\$5,000	\$4,000
IT infrastructure	\$20,000	\$18,000
Development		
<i>Anonymous Donor</i>		
Direct Supports to Families- medical dental, transportation, living expenses supports, mental health supports	\$50,000	\$52,000

Timeline

October 2018 – May 2019	
Research plan sent to Alberta Education	Complete
Meet with Dr. Brown, Partner Research Schools Coordinator, University of Calgary	Complete
Begin ethics application (CFREB)	Complete
November 2018 – May 2019	
Complete/submit ethics application (CFREB)	Complete
Seek Rocky View Schools Ethics approval	Complete
Contact schools with high representation of Indigenous Students	Complete
Begin recruitment of participants	Complete
September – November 2019	
Begin interviews/surveys	Complete
October – December 2019	
Analyze/interpret data	Complete
Interim report to Alberta Education	Complete
December 2019 – March 2020	
Prepare research report	Complete
Begin to outline culturally responsive tiered model to address chronic attendance	Pending
April – June 2020	
Draft of report to Alberta Education	Complete
Disseminate results and model with Rocky View Schools Leadership, Alberta Education, and the University of Calgary	Plan in Appendix
Draft implementation plan for RVS schools for the 2019 – 2020 school year	Pending
2020-2021 School year	

Final report to Alberta Education	Sent
Implement Culturally Responsive tiered model	Pending
Gather feedback from school staff	Pending
Monitor attendance data	Ongoing
Generate report based on implementation of model	Pending