



# Honouring the Voices of Indigenous Teachers and School Leaders in Alberta School Communities





## The Alberta Teachers' Association

© Copyright 2022

ISBN 978-1-990696-00-8

*Unauthorized use or duplication without prior approval is strictly prohibited.*

*Alberta Teachers' Association*

*11010 142 Street NW, Edmonton AB T5N 2R1*

*Telephone 780-447-9400 or 1-800-232-7208*

*[www.teachers.ab.ca](http://www.teachers.ab.ca)*

*Further information about the Association's research is available from Dr Philip McRae  
at the Alberta Teachers' Association; e-mail [research@ata.ab.ca](mailto:research@ata.ab.ca).*

# Honouring the Voices of Indigenous Teachers and School Leaders in Alberta School Communities

---





## Acknowledgement

---

The Alberta Teachers' Association acknowledges Treaty 4, 6, 7, 8 and 10 territories within Alberta. We acknowledge the many First Nations, Métis and Inuit whose footsteps have marked these lands for generations. We are grateful for the traditional Knowledge Keepers and Elders who are still with us today and those who have gone before us. We recognize the land as an act of reconciliation and gratitude to those whose territory we reside on or are visiting.

The research activity in this project was funded and supported in the following ways:

- The Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) fully funded the research for Indigenous teachers and school leaders and retained the academic expertise of Dwayne Donald, PhD, to analyze and comment on the Indigenous teacher and school leader data.
- The Association also contributed its research platform and expertise, along with the talented Document Production staff, to design and publish this report to completion.



# Table of Contents

---

Preface.....	vii
Background and Context .....	1
Executive Summary .....	3
Methodology and Methods.....	5
Summary of Teacher and School Leader Focus Group Data .....	6
Conclusion .....	18
Appendix A: Survey Results from Teachers and School Leaders .....	21
Appendix B: Standing Positions from the Alberta Teachers' Association for Alberta's Education System in Relation to Indigenous Education.....	29
Appendix C: Excerpt from Renewal: A Twenty-Year Commitment .....	31
Appendix D: Survey Questions .....	32





## Preface

---

Teachers in Alberta and the Alberta Teachers' Association recognize the critical role and responsibility we have in advancing the goals of Indigenous education and in contributing to truth and reconciliation.

We understand that our profession bears an obligation first to admit the responsibility it bears for the multigenerational injury done to Indigenous children, their families and communities and then to strive to make amends by ensuring that our collective and individual practice honours the history, lived experience, knowledge and aspirations of Indigenous peoples. We must do better for the sake of our children and the betterment of future generations.

Reconciliation involves having non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples walk alongside each other, creating spaces and opportunities for authentic and respectful relationships, and working to develop and advance a shared agenda that reflects the conclusions of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action,<sup>1</sup> the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples<sup>2</sup> and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls for Justice.<sup>3</sup> We are called upon, then, to ensure that through ongoing reflection, commitment and action, we are creating welcoming schools and communities where each and every child is valued, feels safe and is cared for. Wherever they may live in this province, Indigenous peoples, including Indigenous teachers, should expect to feel welcomed, safe and cared for in our classrooms and schools.

The Association has an extensive history of advancing progressive policy positions related to Indigenous teachers and recognizing the critical importance of the role they occupy within Alberta's public education system. As it continues to evolve, Association policy supports increasing the number of Indigenous teachers in Alberta's public education system, providing mentoring supports for Indigenous teachers who are beginning their careers, actively monitoring progress made to increase the numbers of Indigenous teachers, and ensuring that Indigenous teachers feel valued, respected and supported.

To this end, the Association acknowledges the importance of nurturing Indigenous teachers and school leaders within the teaching profession. Listening, supporting and learning from Indigenous teachers will contribute to the advancing truth and reconciliation within classrooms, schools and communities across the province.

---

1. [https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls\\_to\\_Action\\_English2.pdf](https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf)

2. [www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html](http://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html)

3. [www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Calls\\_for\\_Justice.pdf](http://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Calls_for_Justice.pdf)

**viii**

We must strive, then, to create spaces where we might come together to learn in the spirit of truth and reconciliation through education. There are many pathways for contributing to truth and reconciliation. Ultimately, we need to move forward in the same direction with open hearts and minds, continuously seeking and learning truths from Indigenous teachers within the profession and from Elders, Knowledge Keepers and leaders in the larger community.

On behalf of my colleagues who worked so diligently on this project, I want to express my profound gratitude to the many Indigenous teachers that contributed to this research report; we have listened to your voices and promise to honour the guidance you have provided as we journey forward together. A special note of thanks is due also to the researchers at the University of Alberta; to ATA executive staff officer Melissa Purcell, who led the Indigenous teachers and school leaders' dimensions of this report; and most especially to the Indigenous teachers who contributed their many voices through completing the survey and participating in the focus groups.

Thank you.

*Dennis Theobald*  
*Executive Secretary*  
*Alberta Teachers' Association*

## PRIMARY RESEARCHER

Dwayne Donald, PhD, is a descendent of the amiskwaciyiniwak (Beaver Hills people) and the Papaschase Cree. He was a teacher at Kainai High School for 10 years and currently works as an associate professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta. His research focuses on the ways in which Indigenous wisdom traditions can expand and enhance current educational understandings of knowledge, knowing and what it means to live a good life.





## Background and Context

---

Canadians have recently engaged in an intensified confrontation with colonial history and the systemic oppression of Indigenous peoples perpetrated by the Canadian state. In the past decade, Canadian government officials and Canadian citizens have slowly begun to realize the extent to which colonizing government policies and practices have severely disrupted the lives of Indigenous peoples. As promised in the numbered Treaties, Indigenous peoples of the prairies were supposed to receive necessary supports to make the transition from the traditional hunting and gathering lifestyle to a more settled agricultural lifestyle. However, it is now understood that these Treaty commitments have not been honoured to the extent to which they were promised, and Indigenous peoples and their communities have suffered as a result.

For many people, the most egregious dishonouring of the Treaty commitments came in the form of Indian Residential Schools. It is well known that during the Treaty negotiations the Chiefs specifically asked that their children be educated in the ways of the newcomers because they understood that their people needed to make the transition to a different way of living. However, the schools they got were not at all like the ones that they had in mind. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada held meetings across Canada from 2010 to 2015 and provided opportunities for former students at Indian Residential Schools to share stories of their experiences while attending these schools. The stories tell of multiple forms of abuse, neglect and trauma that continue to trouble the victims, their families and their communities.

While the TRC process has instigated processes of healing for some First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples and communities, questions remain regarding the extent to which Canadians see themselves implicated in the oppressive colonial relations that made the Indian Residential Schools possible. For many generations, Canadians have been taught to ignore the oppression of Indigenous peoples. In theory, the TRC process should have caused Canadians to confront colonial culture and its ongoing detrimental effects on the well-being of Indigenous people and communities.

However, the conclusion of the TRC process in Canada seems to have been followed by a consensus among Canadians to “move on.” In order to more fully understand this desire to “move on” among many Canadians, it is important to remember that Canada as a nation has been founded on a dream of freedom, equality, progress and opportunity for all. When Canadians learn that Indigenous people have not been treated fairly or equitably, the truth of this dream is troubled for a little while until they come to believe that the mistreatments have ended, that such injustices were in the past and that the people are treated much better today. The reason that this belief is so important to understand is that it maintains the integrity of the dream of the Canadian nation and nationality. The dream remains

untroubled because the acknowledgement of past harms and violence is effectively separated from the present and gives citizens the false impression that the difficulty is resolved.

The ability of the nation and nationality to continue to view itself as legitimate is produced through its willingness to learn from past mistakes and overcome its troubling colonial history (Blackburn 2007, 622). Canadian citizens desire closure on the issue—to “move on,” based on the self-produced moral congratulation that Canada as a nation is better because of its willingness to undertake the TRC process and learn from the mistakes of the past. So, while the TRC process has been framed as a nationwide reckoning with Canada’s difficult colonial past, the process seems to have given Canadians the mistaken impression that the work of truth and reconciliation is complete and the nation has earned a unique kind of institutionalized absolution. A subsequent assumption is that Canadians now have a reconciled and repaired relationship with Indigenous peoples.

This framing fails to acknowledge that the TRC process has been a qualitatively different experience for Indigenous peoples. While Canadians may be engaging in self-congratulation in the wake of the TRC process, Indigenous peoples are confronted with the problem of how to heal themselves from the intergenerational traumas that continue to vex their families and communities. Research has shown that the intergenerational trauma resulting from Indian residential school abuses is complex and has enduring negative effects on individual and community well-being (Bombay, Matheson and Anisman 2014).

However, it is also important to acknowledge that Indigenous peoples experience ongoing traumas through their daily interactions with Canadians in the form of systemic racism, prejudice, discrimination and institutionalized practices of exclusion. Colonial oppression has been so traumatizing to Indigenous peoples that some have accepted the view that their languages, cultures and identities lack value and have become irrelevant. The strength and unity of the people has been systematically undermined by the imposition of colonial logics that seek to erase ancestral traditions and replace them with Euroheritage values, knowledges and ways of being. These negative experiences have accumulated over the years and continue to undermine the well-being of Indigenous peoples and their communities.

Thus, this report begins with an acknowledgement of the struggle of Indigenous peoples and communities to heal from the multigenerational trauma of colonial oppressions while simultaneously working within educational systems that often disregard such traumas and oppressions as historical side notes. Based on this acknowledgement, then, it seems clear that the experiences of Indigenous peoples who work as teachers, school leaders and system leaders in Alberta schools provide significant insight into the current state of Indigenous–Canadian relations being enacted daily in school settings across the province.

## Executive Summary

---

I want to honour my parents and ensure that I am doing the best for them. I want to help create a school system where my nephews can be openly proud to be Métis, where my brothers and sisters are not scared to self-identify their children for fear of discrimination.

In 2021, the Alberta Teachers' Association, in coordination with Dwayne Donald, a researcher from the University of Alberta, conducted an evaluation of the experience of Indigenous teachers, school leaders and central office leaders within Alberta's public education system. The Association's research activity was gathered through listening and learning from Indigenous teachers, school leaders and central office leaders through a survey and online focus group conversations.

This Association research activity was part of a broader partnership with the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) that further gathered superintendent perspectives and expanded the perspectives beyond the Association's members, all of whom are Alberta certificated teachers, school leaders and central office staff.

The following key areas are explored within this research activity:

- Conditions of practice and philosophy
- Recruitment, hiring and retention process and conditions
- Discrimination and racism in education

Alberta's public education system needs to do more than simply increasing the number of Indigenous staff within classrooms and school communities. As Dwayne Donald shared at the wícihtotân (nêhiyawêwin/Cree—let's help each other) gathering for Indigenous teachers, school leaders and central office leaders on March 21, 2022, "There will be no cultural change without system change." Indigenous teachers, school leaders and central office leaders need to feel wholeheartedly valued and respected physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually.

Actively increasing the number of Indigenous teachers, school leaders and central office leaders within school communities, along with providing the required supports, resources and opportunities in Indigenous education, is a positive pathway forward. Alberta's public education system needs to create the conditions for Indigenous teachers and leaders, including Indigenous students, staff, families and community members, to feel respected, valued, safe and supported. Increasing the availability of mentorship and leadership opportunities for Indigenous teachers and school leaders throughout the progression of their careers may increase the retention of Indigenous teachers and leaders in the teaching and leadership profession.

Representation matters. In order to feel a sense of belonging, Indigenous students need to see themselves reflected in resources, learning experiences and staff, including teachers and school leaders, within their school communities. Indigenous teachers and school leaders are role models for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, school staff and families, and can work toward dismantling anti-Indigenous racism that continues to happen within classrooms, schools and communities across Alberta's public education system. Students, school staff, families and communities have much to learn from the lived and learned experiences of Indigenous teachers and school leaders.

Supporting Indigenous teachers, school leaders and central office leaders throughout the progression of their careers can contribute to healing and reconciliation within Alberta's public education system. The voices and contributions of Indigenous teachers and school leaders must be listened to, respected and valued with open hearts and open minds. We have a collective responsibility to do better within Alberta's public education system as part of our individual and collective efforts to advance reconciliation.



## Methodology and Methods

---

In 2021, the Alberta Teachers' Association, in coordination with researchers from the University of Alberta, conducted an evaluation of the experience of Indigenous teachers and school leaders within Alberta's public school system. The evaluation consisted of an online survey and focus groups. The results of these evaluation activities are outlined in this report.

This study used a mixed-methods research approach to capture the experiences of self-identified Indigenous teachers and school leaders across the province.

An online survey took place in winter of 2021, in which self-identified Indigenous teachers (n = 63) and school leaders (n = 36) were invited to complete the survey. In total, three online focus groups were completed. Participants who completed the survey were invited to express interest in participating in an online focus group facilitated by the primary researcher, Dwayne Donald, PhD, from the University of Alberta. Three focus groups included teachers and school leaders (n = 13).

Participation in the study was voluntary; teachers, school leaders and system leaders were free to skip questions or withdraw at any time until they clicked the submit button. The survey comprised a number of scale questions, in addition to several qualitative questions intended to gather more in-depth comments from respondents.

Dwayne Donald collected and summarized the focus group data, and Melissa Purcell, of the ATA, summarized the online survey data. Descriptive statistics for all scale questions were computed. Additionally, a thematic qualitative analysis was performed on open-ended responses.

## Summary of Teacher and School Leader Focus Group Data

---

### FOCUS GROUP CONVERSATIONS: KEY INSIGHTS FROM INDIGENOUS TEACHERS AND SCHOOL LEADERS

Participants in the focus group conversations were invited to share their thoughts, feelings and experiences in a virtual sharing circle context. Participants were given opportunities to contribute to the conversation according to their own preferences. While the general purpose of the virtual sharing circles was to gain better understanding of the experiences of Indigenous educators working in the provincial school system, the participants were provided with several focus question prompts to respond to if they wished to do so. These questions are as follows:

1. Based on your experiences, tell us about recruitment and retention, mentorship and leadership opportunities, racism and discrimination.
2. What are one or two changes that could be made that would make a difference in the work that you do?
3. What could the Association do to assist you in the work that you do?

Below are key thematic insights derived from the focus group conversations. Each theme is detailed with context and interpretation.

#### Sharing a Love for Teaching

Numerous focus group participants expressed passionate and heartfelt commitment to their roles as educators. Many shared that they derive much personal meaning and satisfaction from their involvement in the teaching profession. One participant expressed these sentiments poignantly:

I do love teaching. I've always wanted to be a teacher. Always. The students are the reason that I am where I am. They make my day. They always have and they always will ... They are the reason that I am there.

A significant number of the research participants were engaged in leadership roles in support of Indigenous education for their schools or divisions at the time of our focus group conversations. The character of these leadership roles is varied and seems to be dependent on the experience of each educator as well as the internal politics at play in each school or division. The majority of the research participants had been or are currently serving as First Nations, Métis and Inuit lead teachers for their school or division. There were also a significant number of participants who had been or were currently in an Indigenous graduation coach or liaison role. Many of the participants reported that they had served in various Indigenous education roles over the course of their teaching careers. There

were also a few participants who are or have been serving in leadership roles as principal, curriculum coordinator, or Indigenous education consultant or strategist within their school divisions. All participants expressed pride in their Indigenous roots and clear commitment to serve the needs and interests of Indigenous students, parents and the wider community in the varied roles that they have accepted. Among them, they share a clear sense of responsibility to do what they can to improve the educational experiences of Indigenous students. However, and importantly, the participants recognize that they work in public school settings, and so helping non-Indigenous students and teachers better understand Indigenous histories, cultures, experiences and foundational knowledges is a key priority for them as well. As one participant expressed it, the focus is on improving relationships:

To always connect with kids, Indigenous and non-Indigenous kids, because I think that's where the real work is—with everybody. Just trying to share our culture, share our knowledge, share our history ... That's where leadership came in. Having the opportunity to be a principal and looking at a different context. Still supporting kids, still supporting families. But how can I do that with a truth and reconciliation lens? And really get the people who need to have that soft heart and where First Nations people are at. And so that is why I chose a non-Indigenous community. To be able to share that. One, to be a role model. Two, to bring that to the forefront. Have those hard conversations.

Throughout these focus group conversations, the participants made it clear that they were very willing to take on the responsibilities associated with serving in the difficult roles that they do as Indigenous educators. They do not shy away from such challenges. However, many wished that they were better supported and encouraged by their system leaders when willingly taking on such responsibilities and commitments.

### Toeing the Line

Many focus group participants expressed frustration with systemic structures and practices that position Indigenous education initiatives as second-rate in comparison to other educational concerns. They noted that existing institutional practices do not promote Indigenous education as a stand-alone educational priority. It is most often framed as a special interest topic subsumed beneath broader educational initiatives such as diversity or religious education. There was a shared view that the integrity of the work of Indigenous educators is consistently undermined when they are required to operate under the constraints of someone else's agenda. Participants reported that they regularly feel marginalized, disregarded and dismissed by supervisors and colleagues in the work that they do. They feel the need to “toe the line,” or conform to problematic expectations in order to maintain their positions and continue to do the work that they know needs to be done. One participant expressed this “toeing the line” necessity in this way:

I've always felt since I have been in the education field, no matter where I am at, I've always had to accommodate. I've always had to toe the line. I had to learn how to play the game. I had to learn when to put my mask on. But most of all, I've had to learn when to change my shoes. When do I put my shopping shoes on, my church shoes on or my ceremony shoes on ... It's so subtle sometimes; it's not overt. But it's these little pins and needles that get thrown at you. I've always felt that I'm not worthy enough because I am who I am. Because of my skin colour, basically. Because I am visibly Aboriginal. I've always felt that it's a barrier, a wall.

This participant's reference to a barrier or wall connotes images of the fort as an ongoing social-spatial organizer of Indigenous-Canadian relations (Donald 2013). For many generations, Canadians have been told that their country originated with fur trading forts. In seeming tribute to this genesis, forts have been resurrected and maintained as national symbols. You cannot travel far in Canada without encountering a community that began as a fur-trading post or fort, a town or city that has the word fort in its name, or a historic site or fort recreated as a museum. These celebrations of the history of the nation have fostered the development of a colonial frontier logic—delineated by the fort walls—of insiders (Canadians) and outsiders (Indigenous peoples). A significant teaching of this creation story is that Indigenous peoples and Canadians live in separate realities and that the racial and cultural divides of the frontier are natural and necessary. This highly influential creation story of Canada continues to haunt contemporary Canadian society by defining the terms according to which Indigenous people and Canadians speak to each other about history, memory and society. Colonial frontier logics continue to manifest themselves in educational settings and create forts of a different kind. Some of the focus group participants expressed their awareness of these inherited divides and the institutional expectation that they would submit and conform to them in their roles.

Another focus participant expressed frustration with this systemic problem this way:

My experiences are very political ... A lot of it is fear based and there's power and there's hierarchy. You gotta be willing to jump through hoops and say the right things to the right people. I'm not that person. That's not real to me ... I feel frustrated with a system that can't handle criticism ... I can tell you the communities that I serve, the two schools that I work in, those kids that come in the door—it's life or death. I don't have time to assuage people's egos, that's not what my role—that's not what my work is about. And yet I feel, especially as an Indigenous person in this work, we have to toe the line, we have to stroke people's egos because there is so much at stake all the time.

This participant draws attention to the difficult realities that Indigenous educators can confront when working with Indigenous students and their parents. When students and parents are living amid poverty, trauma, crisis and violence, the pettiness of having to “jump through hoops” or “stroke people's egos” can feel like a betrayal of the very people these educators are trying to serve. It was very clear that several of the focus group participants felt that their supervisors do not understand the dire lived experiences of some Indigenous students and parents. System leaders seem unwilling to accept

that their insistent reinforcement of existing institutional structures and practices does little to help with these difficult situations. In truth, the focus group participants expressed the view that such approaches make their work more complicated and stressful.

Along with colonial frontier logics and the institutional perpetuation of social–spatial separations of Indigenous peoples and Canadians, there is also the persistence of a relational psychosis that troubles the work of these focus group participants. Relational psychosis refers to the aftermath of a decades-long curricular project dedicated to the telling of a particular kind of Canadian national narrative that actively excluded the memories, experiences and knowledges of Indigenous peoples. The legitimacy of Canadian identity can be troubled when there is acknowledgement that Indigenous peoples have deep roots and ancient ancestry in connection to the land. For some Canadians, such acknowledgements imply that they are newcomers and thus foreign to Canada. Since this is a contradiction too difficult for many Canadians to face, the institutionalized solution is to exclude and disregard Indigenous contributions, categorize them as just another part of the multicultural mix, and thereby limit the chance that Indigenous contributions might actually matter in educational settings. Thus, this relational psychosis can be characterized as a refusal to acknowledge Indigenous presence and participation on their own terms. Two focus group participants poignantly articulated examples of this relational psychosis present in the context of their own work:

There is a real shyness to really delve into local history and culture. It's always "Let's learn about the Iroquois, let's learn about every other Indigenous group, but let's not really talk too much about Blackfoot. It's nice that you're Blackfoot, but let's not really talk about that. Let's learn about every other culture." If we talk about cancelling culture, I see that that's there. But as soon as you want to talk about cancel culture from the other side—if I can call it sides—there's this big "Whoa, what's happening?"

Just yesterday we had a staff meeting where people came from our division office and the superintendent came to our school to talk to us. I asked a question about each school having its own Indigenous support because our school does have a liaison that works between three schools. But because she works between three schools we rarely see her because she is so busy ... Basically, I was told that all cultures matter, not just FNMI culture ... I explained Indigenous culture has a different history and shouldn't be just lumped in. And I was told that I was wrong ... We have a long way to go.

Many focus group participants reported feeling the negative effects of this exclusionary logic on their daily work as Indigenous educators. As St Denis (2011) argues, many Canadians regard efforts to address issues of diversity and inequity as a threat to the perceived virtuousness of the Canadian nation and nationality, and so the resentment of and resistance to the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges and histories is considered justified on these grounds.

### Getting Stuck in Roles

While the focus group participants consistently expressed feelings of pride associated with their work as Indigenous educators, many noted that they have felt stuck in roles as well. Participants used the term *pigeonholed* to describe their feelings on this. Being pigeonholed refers to a situation in which a human being is categorized in ways that fail to reflect the complexities of his or her actual lived realities. Participants reflected on their shared experience of being assigned responsibility for all the Indigenous “stuff” once their Indigenous identity was made known. Indigenous educators are in short supply, and school systems take advantage of Indigenous staff by placing the burden of Indigenous “stuff” squarely on their shoulders. Participants consistently reported that it is difficult to extricate themselves from a particular role once their school or division has identified them as the person best suited for that role, even if their own training and expertise is in another field of study. The participants stated that this experience with being stuck in a role seems to be connected to the desire of school or division leaders to have Indigenous matters covered so that they can check boxes and give the impression that Indigenous programming needs are being effectively met. Some participants expressed the view that their own career opportunities are being negatively affected by such systemic practices:

My recruitment was based on that I had Cree language and culture. I feel like because I was hired as the Cree language/culture teacher there was a lot of discrimination there. To me, it feels like I'm not good enough to be a teacher of any other subject ... I'm really not happy because I feel that I was hired to fill that totemic role ... I would love to teach English, I would love to teach Aboriginal studies, but I never got the chance ... There should be opportunities for teachers to be where they want to be.

When I came to the school division I'm in now and I worked at central office, those three years actually burnt me out because I had to share my story through the blanket activity. That's when it was really big where we had to share it with all our schools, all our classes, all our teachers to give them that knowledge. It burnt me out. I had to share my story every week, feel that pain, feel that discrimination that I felt as a young person.

These participants express well the complexities associated with being identified as an Indigenous educator working within the Alberta provincial school system. While there is clear expectation that school or division leaders would draw on the experiences and expertise of their Indigenous staff members to provide necessary programming, it becomes problematic when such staff become stuck in unbidden roles. In part, such pigeonholing implies that Indigenous educators are not considered qualified to serve in any other roles. The other implication of this concern contained within this pigeonholing practice is that there is a problematic assumption that only Indigenous educators are qualified to teach Indigenous content. The pedagogical logic implied here is that teachers are allowed to teach only about their own cultures—a logic that the field of education has never upheld (Donald 2009, 32). Among other policy documents and directives, the TRC's 94 Calls to Action, the

Teaching Quality Standard (TQS), the Leadership Quality Standard (LQS), and the Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard (SLQS) very clearly state that *all* educators are expected to provide leadership concerning Indigenous peoples and their foundational knowledges for the benefit of *all* students. Focus group participants want their school and division leaders to take seriously these policy directives and expect all educators to address them so that Indigenous educators are not overburdened or stuck in roles they might not want.

### Vicarious Trauma

*Vicarious trauma* refers to the harmful effects resulting from consistent exposure to the traumatic experiences of others. In the context of this research initiative, some focus group participants reported that they suffer the effects of vicarious trauma brought on when witnessing systemic racism experienced by Indigenous students, their parents and even their Indigenous colleagues with whom they work. As already noted in this report, trauma needs to be understood as accumulated intergenerationally among Indigenous peoples, but it is important to acknowledge that Indigenous peoples experience ongoing traumas through their daily interactions with Canadians in the form of systemic racism, prejudice, discrimination and institutionalized practices of exclusion. Some Indigenous students and their families experience schools as unwelcoming and assimilatory places that do not value their traditions or cultural practices. Schools are perceived as places where Canadian colonial culture is imposed on Indigenous students and families without their consent, consultation or concern for their well-being. Indigenous educators who advocate for the rights of Indigenous students and parents can often feel caught between their roles as school-based educators and their concerns over the institutionalized mistreatment of Indigenous peoples:

I suffer from vicarious trauma. When I watch others who are being oppressed—I can take the oppression, I can speak out—when I watch others, either students or other staff members, it's really hard to take that. So, I feel like I'm carrying that a lot of times. That's a big reason why I won't leave where I am.

As one participant noted, institutional racism experienced by Indigenous peoples is often lost in the overwhelming busyness of doing “everything else” deemed more important than addressing the needs of Indigenous peoples to feel safe, accepted and respected in school settings:

I feel like we have been so busy building foundational knowledge, and trying to educate people and dispelling myths and stereotypes, that people have forgotten that Indigenous people also face racism ... When people are looking at antiracism, the Indigenous story seems to be absent ... Everything else just seems to be more important ... Carrying others people's trauma is a huge thing I feel very deeply with my students, but also with people that I have worked with that also encounter institutional racism.



### Feeling Isolated, Vulnerable and Unsupported by Leaders

Many of the focus group participants wished that their school and division leaders better understood the difficulty of the jobs they do and the vulnerability they feel as Indigenous educators. In many educational settings across the province, the efforts of Indigenous educators to support student and teacher engagement with First Nations, Métis and Inuit foundational knowledges (as mandated by TQS number 5) are still unwelcome. Indigenous–Canadian relations remain contentious in many Alberta communities, and schools are places where lingering misunderstandings can generate conflict and discontent. The focus group participants reported that sometimes they feel as though their educational roles and responsibilities position them at the centre of such contentiousness, and that their school and system leaders do not comprehend the unique difficulties that they experience within such contentiousness. Such positioning can sometimes result in feelings of isolation, marginalization and vulnerability in Indigenous educators when they do not receive the clear support of their leaders:

I was in one of the schools and I was teaching Aboriginal studies. A non-Indigenous family, mom and dad, came in to talk to me myself about being racist against non-First Nations kids. I had never met these parents before. My administration sat with me in this situation and agreed with them ... What they had on me, evidence I guess, wasn't strong.

I really understand how important I am as a Cree person ... and I am a qualified teacher. I went to school for five years to become a teacher. It seems like I am always being alienated, isolated from the rest of the teachers because I am the Cree teacher ... I would really like those things to change. To be recognized as a teacher is what I really need.

One participant expressed these feelings of isolation and marginalization somewhat differently:

My school division likes to say they communicate and listen and everything else. But they'll send us a survey in a google forms—yes or no, agree, very much agree, disagree. But [we're not] able to put in our input or our explanations or our ideas as to why or what we could do. Or they'll bring in different programming for the students, but we don't get an input as to what they talk about or what they could talk about in the future, what worked, what didn't work with our kids. Because we know them. We know our students ... I often feel like I'm not heard. I don't have a chance to really express my opinions without coming across as annoyed and angry.

This participant voices concerns over the lack of opportunity for Indigenous educators to provide meaningful guidance on student programming to school and division leaders. Several participants noted a similar dynamic in their own work context wherein non-Indigenous school and system leaders seem to think that they know what is best for Indigenous students and fail to draw on the experience and expertise of Indigenous educators to inform their decisions. This problem of institutional leaders unilaterally deciding what is best for Indigenous peoples has been a normalized characteristic of Canadian colonial culture for many generations.



### Career Opportunities, Recruitment and Retention

Focus group participants stated that they were not aware of any formal efforts to recruit or retain Indigenous educators to join their particular school divisions. A few participants noted that their school divisions seem to avoid recruiting from the local area, and instead look as far as the Maritime provinces to recruit educators for their schools. It is important to add that participants seemed to share the view that their opportunities to serve in Indigenous education leadership roles came mostly as a result of the support of an individual colleague who advocated on their behalf rather than any systemwide clear commitment to retain and promote Indigenous educators. These leadership opportunities came about informally in the sense that an individual in a leadership role provided discreet mentorship and encouragement to them as a friend and colleague.

One participant shared a quote from a division leader and then voiced concerns over the lack of Indigenous educators employed within the division:

Indigenous students need to see Indigenous leaders. They need to see the people in the school system who are doing well. They need to see the people that come from their community, having gone through the very same issues in their community, having had the very same background, leading in their schools and being successful in their lives. Yet our division has no Indigenous leaders. The number of Indigenous teachers in our division is very small.

By citing this specific example, this participant is drawing attention to an apparent mismatch between messages conveyed by system leaders and existing recruitment and retention practices. Within this apparent mismatch, there exists the potential for differing interpretations of the problem that can fuel further misunderstandings. System leaders may state that they have tried to recruit and retain more Indigenous educators to work in their schools, but have found that qualified Indigenous educators are in short supply and difficult to find. On the other hand, some of the focus group participants pointed out that there are increasing numbers of Indigenous educators graduating from faculties of education, but most of them are choosing to work in Indigenous community schools because they find such schools more welcoming and collaborative than Alberta provincial schools. According to this interpretation, a significant number of recently graduated Indigenous educators are actively choosing not to work in Alberta provincial schools. Some focus group participants expressed the view that it is incumbent upon their school leaders to address this situation so that Indigenous educators feel welcome and valued in the Alberta provincial schools. Since the majority of school-aged Indigenous children living in Alberta attend provincial schools, there is an urgent need for more Indigenous educators to be working in these schools. As stated in the quote above, Indigenous youth do indeed need to see their own people in key leadership roles in the schools that they attend.

However, as one participant pointed out, it is also important to acknowledge that many Indigenous people *are* currently serving key roles as educational assistants in public school settings. From the point of view of this participant, these educational assistants are providing critical supports in these

schools, and public school system leaders should be actively encouraging these people to complete their teaching degrees and become certified teachers in their division:

I do really want to see more Indigenous teachers in the school division. I work with seven support workers and, of those seven, probably three or four could be good candidates for teaching. But the school division doesn't really see the creativity around that ... I see the gifts that they have. They have to do teaching, they have to go into the classrooms, but they're not being recognized for the work that they're doing. They don't belong to any type of union. Their positions are so tenuous.

Finally, while participants recognized that there are sparse numbers of Indigenous educators working in Alberta provincial schools, and that Indigenous education initiatives are the responsibility of all educators in Alberta schools, a few participants expressed the view that key Indigenous education leadership roles should only be held by qualified Indigenous people. One participant explained this view in these terms:

A lot of positions [are] being filled within the school system by non-Indigenous people for Indigenous jobs. I'm talking about non-Indigenous people being Indigenous liaisons. Even though they did a great job, they were holding a space that didn't belong to them. And there were many people who could have been doing that job. It really actually hurt the work that all of the rest of us were doing ... High school completion coaches that were supposed to be for Indigenous students were also non-Indigenous. So, how could their narrative at all relate? How could they help them cross that finish line of graduating when you don't have a similar experience, when you cannot connect or understand historical trauma? This is still going on ... In the context of colonization, it's still acceptable.

From the standpoint of this participant, appointing non-Indigenous people to key Indigenous education leadership roles is an institutional practice that perpetuates the colonial view that Indigenous people are not qualified or competent enough to provide such leadership.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH AND IMPROVEMENT

The value of compiling insights from Indigenous educators currently working in Alberta provincial schools is that doing so provides contextual background on how they experience their work and its effects on all those associated with it. In summary, the overall impression gained from these consultations with the focus group participants is that the overwhelming majority are deeply committed to their work, see much value in connecting all students to Indigenous foundational knowledges and are hopeful that they can have a role in the work as it continues.

However, despite the strengths of these educators and their clear commitment to continue working for improvements, it is important to recognize that they have identified several difficult challenges in Alberta provincial schools that need to be addressed. Below is a summary of three key issues that the focus group participants identified as needing attention from their system leaders:

### **1. A Shared Vision That Unifies All Involved**

Educational change is a complex endeavour. Much of the research regarding educational change indicates that an essential aspect of such efforts—for their success as well as their sustainability—is a shared vision for the work. A shared vision brings unity regarding the purpose of the work and clarity concerning the overarching big-picture plan that all participants should be working to bring to fulfillment. It also helps clarify what is at stake in the work being done for all involved. A key consideration for the creation of a shared vision is that it cannot be borrowed from a different educational context. To be most helpful as an inspirational guide, the vision must be generated within the specific educational context under scrutiny by the people who will be most involved in making it come to fruition.

An excellent example of a specific shared vision for education in an Indigenous community comes from the Yirrkala community of the Yolngu people of Northern Australia. The Yolngu live in a unique ecosystem dominated by mangrove swamps in which salt water and fresh water mix together. Over many thousands of years, the Yolngu people have noted that most of the food in this ecosystem is located at the places where the salt water and fresh water mix. Thus, those places are considered to have life-giving properties and are integral part of the knowledge system of the Yolngu people. When the people were tasked with generating a shared vision for the kind of education that they want for their own children, it is not surprising that they used their own knowledge system in connection to their ancestral territory to articulate a metaphor called Ganma (Marika, Ngurruwutthun and White 1992). Ganma expresses an understanding that the salt water represents knowledge from another part of the world (mostly Europe) while fresh water represents the knowledge that the Yolngu people have of their own place in the world. Ganma expresses the vision that the Yolngu people want the education of their own children to be located right at the place where the salt water (knowledge from another place) and fresh water (their own ancestral knowledge) mix. Using the example of the ecosystem, this vision expresses the very local view that an education guided by the vision of Ganma will position the children at a location that has the most life-giving potential.

The focus group participants stated that the TRC's 94 Calls to Action, Teacher Quality Standard (TQS) number 5, Leadership Quality Standard (LQS) number 5 and Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard (SLQS) number 5 all provide clear visional direction on how Indigenous foundational knowledges are to be engaged in Alberta provincial school settings. Implied within this visional direction is the urgent educational commitment to repair Indigenous–Canadian relations and renew them on more ethical terms. Participants noted repeatedly that their educational leaders tend to make decisions that send a message to staff that they do not take this commitment very seriously. They want their educational leaders to be required to honour the visional direction expressed in the 94 Calls to Action, TQS number 5, LQS number 5 and SLQS number 5, and be held accountable if they fail to do so ([www.alberta.ca/professional-practice-standards.aspx](http://www.alberta.ca/professional-practice-standards.aspx)).

## **2. Creating Sustainable Cultural Changes in the Daily Workings of Schools Requires Meaningful Structural Changes**

After many years of service, most experienced educators understand that meaningful education system change is very difficult to effectuate. Veteran teachers will speak with some skepticism on the different programs and “fads” that have come and gone during their careers as teachers. What veteran teachers know is that the structures that govern schooling will resist any attempts at programmatic change and render them futile. This doubt that such programs will actually result in meaningful system change stems from an understanding that schools are places that are actually not very open to cultural change or innovation. Schools as institutions are indeed intensely cultural places, but the culture that typically governs schooling usually goes unnamed and is accepted as common sense. As is well understood, formal education as we have come to know and experience it today descends from the Industrial period in Europe and is founded on a factory system approach to educating young people. Although many educators have tried to reform formal education away from its industrial roots, the basic structural patterns and cultural assumptions that frame perceptions of how a “real school” should operate have proven to be very difficult to change.

These insights regarding education system change are very important to ponder. Over the years, many well-conceived Indigenous education program initiatives have not been sustained because the programs were attempted within existing Euroheritage educational structures that deformed them. Such initiatives become deformed when they are required to conform to Euroheritage structures and logics. These structures and logics undermine the integrity of Indigenous teachings and strip them of their potential to offer unique educational experiences for both students and educators. Thus, in sum, the key point here is that any educational reforms being attempted in response to the 94 Calls to Action, TQS number 5, LQS number 5, and SLQS number 5 will be sustained only if they are accompanied by significant structural changes in the daily operations of Alberta schools. If the different Indigenous education initiatives are simply inserted into existing schooling structures, the initiatives will not be sustained because the Euroheritage governing structure will hinder the cultural changes that are being attempted.

Of course, schools can and do change, but usually very slowly and seldom in ways that fundamentally alter the basic cultural assumptions that govern schooling. *In order for Indigenous educators working in Alberta provincial schools to do the work that their system leaders expect of them, structural changes need to be made.* Such systemic and structural changes need to be developed and implemented by individuals or small groups of Indigenous educators working in Alberta provincial schools who draw upon their own personal practical knowledge and experiences as well as their constantly deepening knowledge of their students and the communities in which they live. Such deliberations regarding structural changes need to be mindful of traditional schooling structures that shape classroom culture, notions of knowledge and knowing, teaching approaches, assessment, time, scheduling, and how the learner is conceptualized. At its most basic level, structural change begins with analyzing how the school day is planned, how time is used, the expertise of associated educators, and the

characters and identities of the students implied in those structures. While the details of these structural changes are constrained by the need to adhere to provincial curriculum standards, there are multiple opportunities to reconceptualize the structure of Alberta provincial schools so that they reflect the expertise of Indigenous educators and better support the vision contained within the 94 Calls to Action, TQS number 5, LQS number 5 and SLQS number 5.

### **3. Mentorship Program**

Focus group participants expressed unanimous support for the creation of a network of Indigenous educators working in Alberta provincial schools who could offer support, guidance and mentorship to each other. Participants desire to be part of a provincewide collaborative network of Indigenous educators who share resources, strategies, ideas and experiences. Many felt that the creation of such a network would enhance the quality of their work and help them feel less isolated, marginalized and vulnerable.

## Conclusion

---

Through the voices of Indigenous teachers, school leaders and central office leaders, the findings throughout the Association's research activity highlight the passion and dedication to the teaching and leadership profession. Supporting Indigenous teachers and leaders throughout the progression of their careers within Alberta's public education system is integral to the advancement of reconciliation within classrooms and school communities. Alberta's public education system needs to continue to foster and strengthen the conditions to learn from, and alongside Indigenous teachers and leaders for the benefit of non-Indigenous and Indigenous students, school staff, families and community. The Association's research activity is an opportunity to learn, listen and respond to truth-telling from Indigenous teachers and leaders in an effort to contribute to the advancement of healing and reconciliation.

[R]econciliation” is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between [Indigenous] and [non-Indigenous] peoples in this country. For that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour. We are not there yet. The relationship between [Indigenous] and [non-Indigenous] peoples is not a mutually respectful one. But we believe we can get there, and we believe we can maintain it. Our ambition is to show how we can do that.

—Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015, 6–7

Many Indigenous teacher and school leader respondents indicated that they have the necessary supports to do their work. Teacher respondents indicated that 48 per cent somewhat agreed and 20 per cent strongly agreed that their school district provides the necessary supports to do their work. Comparatively, school leader respondents indicated that 37 per cent somewhat agreed and 41 per cent strongly agreed that their school district provides the necessary supports to do their work. A majority of teacher and school leader respondents indicated that their school district makes it a priority to support Indigenous students and education, and have a plan that is addressing truth and reconciliation. Alberta's public education system has an opportunity to learn about the effective practices from these school districts, and most importantly, from the Indigenous teachers and school leaders that feel supported.

Teacher respondents (n = 50) indicated that 49 per cent somewhat agreed and 18 per cent strongly agreed that their school district values their perspective. Comparatively, school leader respondents (n = 27) indicated that 41 per cent somewhat agreed and 33 per cent strongly agreed that their school

district values their perspective. However, the narratives shared within the focus group conversations indicate that Indigenous teachers and school leaders feel undervalued and are lacking the supports and resources to do the necessary work. More work is required to strengthen relationships with Indigenous teachers and school leaders within Alberta's public education system and to establish a shared vision that unifies all involved.

Leadership opportunities within the school district was identified as an area of improvement by Indigenous teachers and school leaders. Teacher respondents indicated that 38 per cent are somewhat dissatisfied with leadership opportunities and 33 per cent are somewhat dissatisfied with mentorship opportunities for themselves. Comparatively, school leader respondents indicated that 38 per cent are somewhat dissatisfied with leadership opportunities and 33 per cent are somewhat dissatisfied with mentorship opportunities for themselves. Alberta's public education system has much to learn from Indigenous teachers, school leaders and central office leaders; collectively, we can work toward restoring, repairing and reclaiming balance within classroom, schools and communities by supporting each other.

You can go on one path on the railway track and try to walk ... you can go for a distance, but eventually you'll fall and try to get back on. But if your friend walks on the other rail, and you hold hands together, you can walk for miles without falling off, because you support each other.

—Chief Wilton Littlechild

The Alberta Teachers' Association has an extensive long-standing position related to supporting Indigenous teachers and leaders, as set out in Appendix B. These positions support the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (Canada 1996) in relation to Indigenous teachers within the education system (see Appendix C). The ATA is committed to bringing this research forward for discussions and action across our organization.

## Bibliography

---

- Blackburn, C. 2007. "Producing Legitimacy: Reconciliation and the Negotiation of Aboriginal Rights in Canada." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 13, no 3: 621–38. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2007.00447.x>
- Bombay, A, K Matheson and H Anisman. 2014. "The Intergenerational Effects of Indian Residential Schools: Implications for the Concept of Historical Trauma." *Transcultural Psychiatry* 51, no 3: 320–38. doi:10.1177/1363461513503380
- Canada. Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. 1996. *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Vol 5. Renewal: A Twenty-Year Commitment*. Ottawa: Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Available at <http://data2.archives.ca/e/e448/e011188230-05.pdf> (accessed November 30, 2021).
- Donald, D. 2013. "Teachers, Aboriginal Perspectives and the Logic of the Fort." *ATA Magazine* 93, no 4: 28–29.
- Donald, D T. 2009. "The Curricular Problem of Indigenism: Colonial Frontier Logics, Teacher Resistances, and the Acknowledgment of Ethical Space." In *Beyond 'Presentism'*, ed I Johnston and J Nahachewsky, 23–41. Leiden: Brill.
- Marika, R, D Ngurruwutthun and L White. 1992. "Always Together, Yaka Gäna: Participatory Research At Yirrkala as Part of the Development of a Yolngu Education." *Convergence* 25, no 1: 23–39.
- St Denis, V. 2011. "Silencing Aboriginal Curricular Content and Perspectives Through Multiculturalism: 'There Are Other Children Here.'" *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 33, no 4: 306–17.
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. 2015. *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. Ottawa: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Available at <https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.800288/publication.html> (accessed December 2, 2021)



# Appendix A

## SURVEY RESULTS FROM TEACHERS AND SCHOOL LEADERS

Participants were invited to self-identify as First Nations, Métis or Inuit. Most participants self-identified as Métis (68.3 per cent of teachers and 51.4 per cent of school leaders) or First Nations (23.8 per cent of teachers and 45.7 per cent of school leaders). See Figure 1 and Figure 2.

Figure 1. Self-Identification of Indigenous Teachers

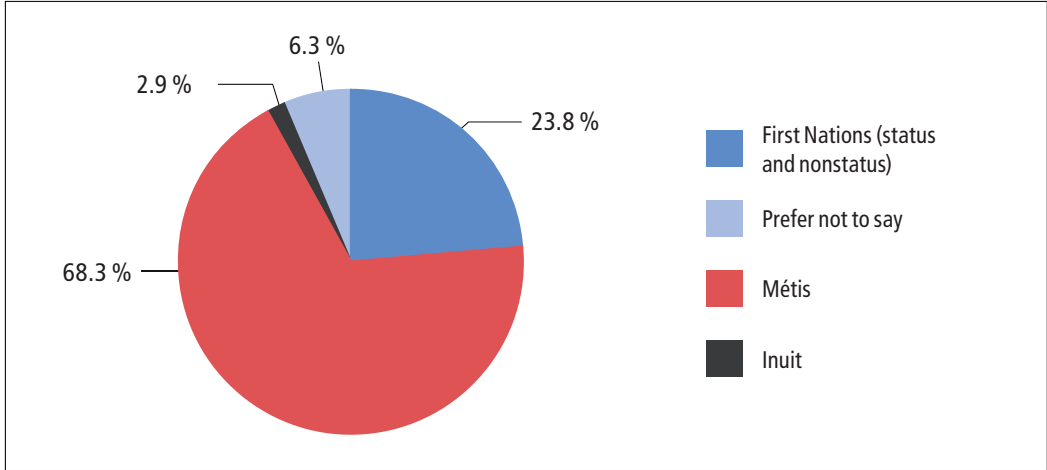
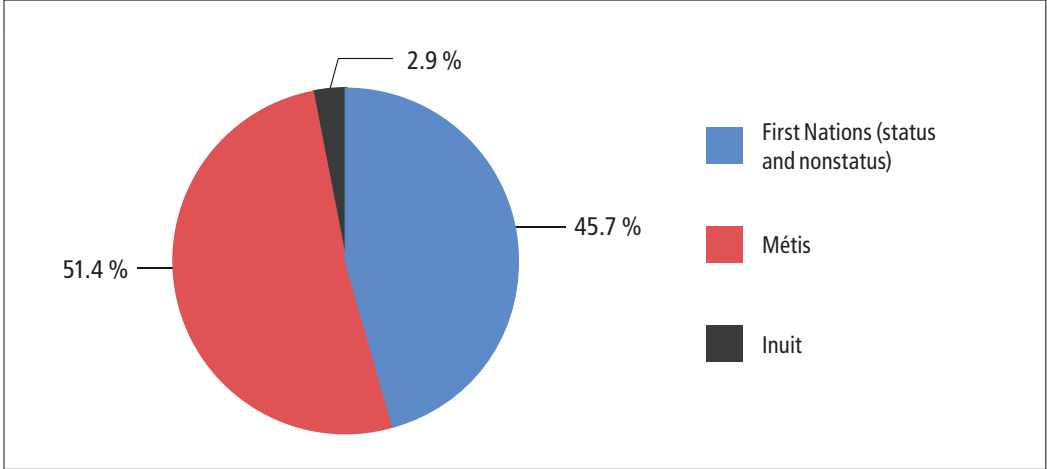


Figure 2. Self-Identification of Indigenous School Leaders



## TEACHER AND SCHOOL LEADER REFLECTIONS ON CONDITIONS OF PRACTICE AND PHILOSOPHY

Respondents were asked to indicate the degree to which their school district supported their work as a teacher and school leader. Most teacher and school leader respondents agreed or substantially agreed that their school district has a high level of trust in its teachers and school leaders. Many indicated that their school district values their perspective and that they feel supported.

Teacher respondents (n = 50) indicated that 50 per cent somewhat agreed and 32 per cent strongly agreed that their school district has a high level of trust in teachers and school leaders. Forty-eight per cent somewhat agreed that their school district values their perspective, and 48 per cent somewhat agreed they are provided with the support needed to do their work. See Figure 3.

*Figure 3. Indicate the extent of you how you feel your school district supports your work as a teacher.*

	Strongly Agree		Somewhat Agree		Somewhat Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Responses
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count
My school district has a high level of trust in its teachers.	16	32.0	25	50.0	5	10.0	4	8.0	50
My school district has a commitment to equity that ensures that the learning needs of all students are met.	16	31.4	21	41.2	12	23.5	2	3.9	51
My school district makes it a priority to support Indigenous students and education.	10	20.0	27	54.0	10	20.0	3	6.0	50
My school district has a plan that is addressing truth and reconciliation.	8	16.0	27	54.0	12	24.0	3	6.0	50
My school district values my perspectives.	9	18.0	24	48.0	10	20.0	7	14.0	50
My school district provides the support I need to do my work.	10	20.0	24	48.0	12	24.0	4	8.0	50

School leader respondents (n = 27) indicated that 44 per cent somewhat agreed and 44 per cent strongly agreed that their school district has a high level of trust in teachers and school leaders. Forty-one per cent somewhat agreed that their school district values their perspective, and 37 per cent somewhat agreed that they are provided with the support needed to do their work. See Figure 4.

Figure 4. Indicate the extent of you how you feel your school district supports your work as a school leader.

	Strongly Agree		Somewhat Agree		Somewhat Disagree		Strongly Disagree		Responses
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count
My school district has a high level of trust in its school leaders.	12	44.4	12	44.4	2	7.4	1	3.7	27
My school district has a commitment to equity that ensures that the learning needs of all students are met.	14	51.9	8	29.6	4	14.8	1	3.7	27
My school district makes it a priority to support Indigenous students and education.	10	37.0	11	40.7	5	18.5	1	3.7	27
My school district has a plan that is addressing truth and reconciliation.	7	25.9	14	51.9	5	18.5	1	3.7	27
My school district values my perspectives as a school leader.	9	33.3	11	40.7	5	18.5	2	7.4	27
My school district provides the support I need to do my work as a school leader.	11	40.7	10	37.0	5	18.5	1	3.7	27

## TEACHER AND SCHOOL LEADER REFLECTIONS ON RECRUITMENT, HIRING AND RETENTION PROCESS AND CONDITIONS

Teacher respondents indicated that 38 per cent are somewhat dissatisfied with leadership opportunities and 33 per cent are somewhat dissatisfied with mentorship opportunities for themselves (see Figure 5). Comparatively, school leader respondents indicated that 38 per cent are somewhat dissatisfied with leadership opportunities and 33 per cent are somewhat dissatisfied with mentorship opportunities from themselves (see Figure 6).

Figure 5. Indicate your degree of satisfaction with your employing board for Indigenous teachers.

	Very Satisfied		Somewhat Satisfied		Somewhat Dissatisfied		Very Dissatisfied		Responses
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count
Recruitment practices	4	8.9	20	44.4	9	20.0	12	26.7	45
Hiring process	3	6.7	20	44.4	11	24.4	11	24.4	45
Leadership opportunities	4	8.9	13	28.9	17	37.8	11	24.4	45
Mentorship opportunities for myself	7	15.6	12	26.7	15	33.3	11	24.4	45
Opportunities to mentor others	5	11.1	19	42.2	14	31.1	7	15.6	45
Teaching assignment	12	26.7	22	48.9	7	15.6	4	8.9	45
Ongoing feedback opportunities	5	11.4	21	47.7	11	25.0	7	15.9	44

Figure 6. Indicate your degree of satisfaction with your employing board for Indigenous teachers (as responded by school leaders).

	Very Satisfied		Somewhat Satisfied		Somewhat Dissatisfied		Very Dissatisfied		Responses
	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count
Recruitment practices	1	4.5	9	40.9	8	36.4	4	18.2	22
Hiring process	2	9.1	8	36.4	9	40.9	3	13.6	22
Leadership opportunities	3	13.6	10	45.5	6	27.3	3	13.6	22
Mentorship opportunities for myself	4	18.2	7	31.8	7	31.8	4	18.2	22
Opportunities to mentor others	5	22.7	9	40.9	3	13.6	5	22.7	22
Teaching assignment	6	27.3	10	45.5	6	27.3	0	0.0	22
Ongoing feedback opportunities	5	22.7	9	40.9	3	13.6	5	22.7	22

## OVERVIEW OF OPEN-ENDED SURVEY RESPONSES

The following is an overview of the common themes expressed by teacher and school leader respondents in the online survey.

### Good Teaching

Teacher and school leader respondents indicated that good teaching includes

Community  
 Respect Relationship  
 Support Parents  
**Student**  
 Understand  
 Positive

Good School and/or System Leadership

Teacher and school leader respondents indicated that good school and system leadership includes



Motivation to Continue in the Teaching Profession

Teacher and school leader respondents indicated their motivation to continue in the teaching profession:



### Barriers or Challenges to Leadership Opportunities

Teacher and school leader respondents indicated barriers or challenges to leadership opportunities:

Opportunity  
Leadership  
Masters  
Indigenous  
Want Time

### Discrimination and Racism Within the School and/or Division

Teacher and school respondents shared a wide spectrum of experiences of discrimination or racism within the school and/or division. Some respondents indicated not having experienced any discrimination or racism at all. Respondents who did share experiences of discrimination and racism included a variety of microaggressions, direct confrontations and daily occurrences.

I often feel that I am underrated and my opinions do not count because I am just a Cree teacher.

Some people are surprised when they learn about my background and connection to the community, but no discrimination or racism.

Teacher and school leader respondents indicated a variety of actions taken to deal with discrimination and/or racism in the school or division. Some respondents indicated examples of action, such as ongoing antiracism education, policies and procedures, and direct conversations.

## DEMOGRAPHICS

### Indigenous Teacher and School Leader Respondents

Table 1. Context and Grade Level of Survey Respondents

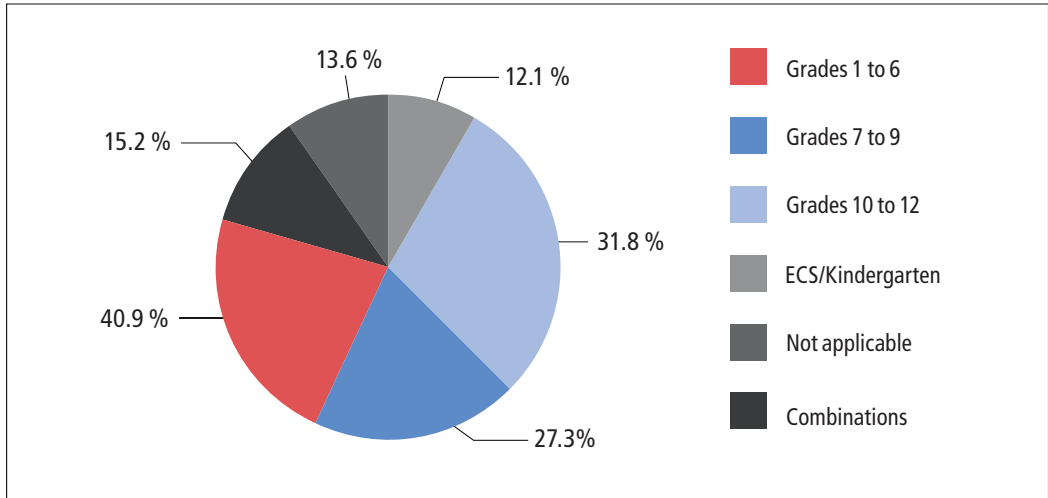


Table 2. Number of Years of Teaching Experience for Survey Respondents

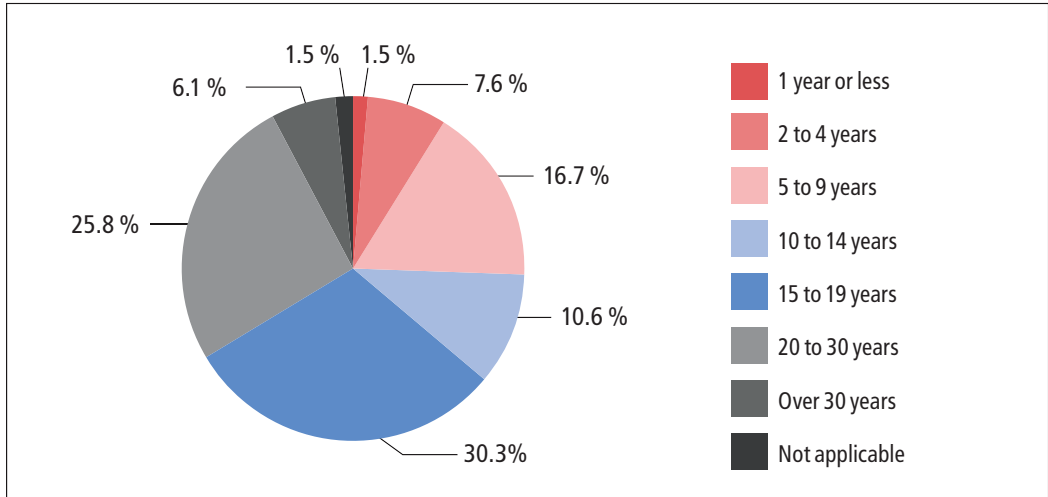


Table 3. Number of Years of Leadership Experience for Survey Respondents

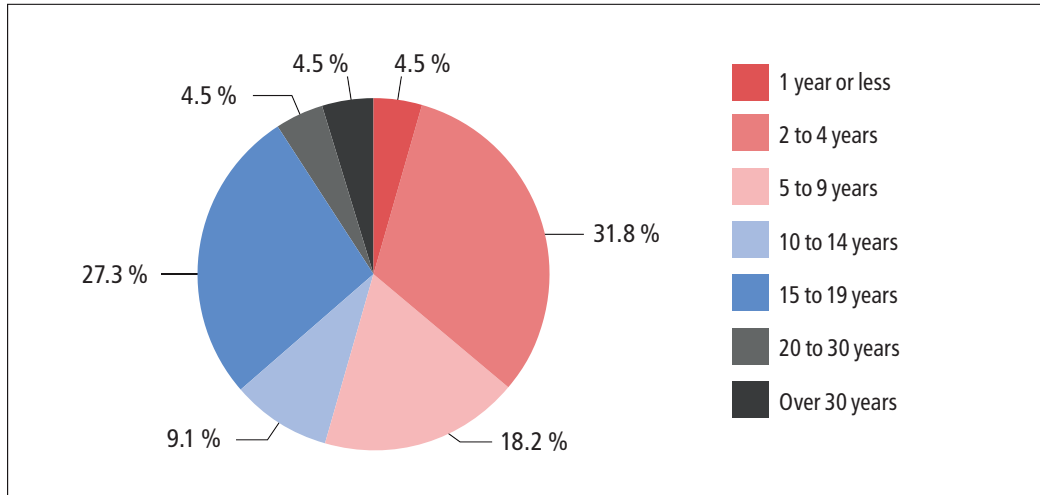
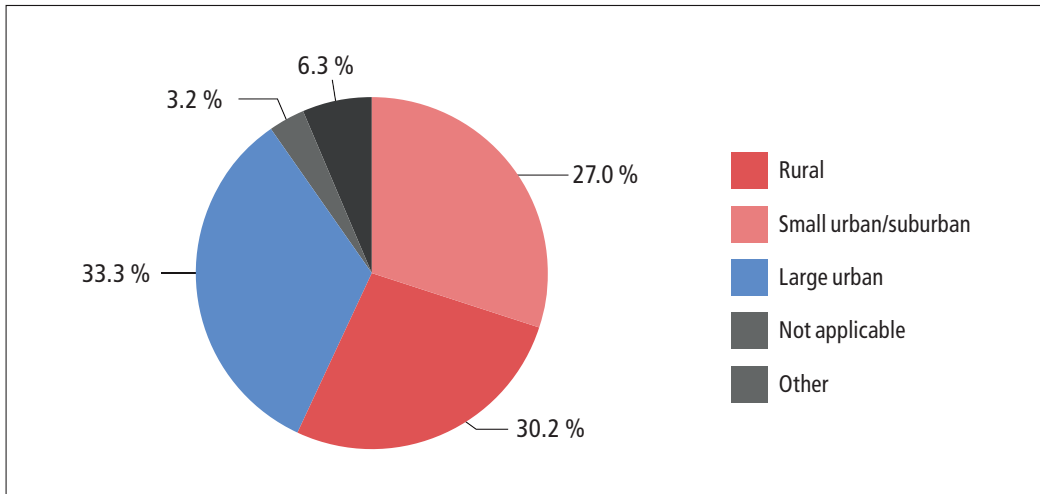


Table 4. Type of School Respondents Teach/Work In





## Appendix B

---

### STANDING POSITIONS FROM THE ALBERTA TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION FOR ALBERTA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM IN RELATION TO INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

The public education system is a cornerstone of democracy and must be founded on a commitment to educate all students well so that each can become a productive member of our society. There is no greater challenge facing public education than to realize this promise for those who both historically and in contemporary society have been marginalized and disadvantaged. For this reason, public education and the profession have a greater duty of care when providing for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students in Alberta.

While progress has been made, Indigenous peoples have not experienced the success they should expect in the public education system. Approximately 65 per cent of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students in Alberta currently graduate from high school. This is significantly below the provincial rate for high school completion and represents a cost in the form of forgone opportunities for Indigenous students individually, their communities and, indeed, all Albertans. Improving the educational outcomes of Indigenous students should therefore be a shared responsibility invoking shared commitment. The Association understands this and is committed to improving education for Indigenous peoples.

The Association believes that public education must foster and support the intellectual, social, physical, emotional and spiritual development of each child. This statement directly parallels the Aboriginal world view as reflected in medicine wheel teachings. The Association also believes that education for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students must be built on their Indigenous education practices, cultures and languages.

Furthermore, the Association recognizes the right of Indigenous peoples to selfgovernance, economic and cultural survival, and the control of education in their communities.

Current Association policy affirms the view that there must be an action plan to address the educational realities of the Indigenous peoples. An action plan is in place. The policy abandons the deficit model in favour of affirming the educational potential of Indigenous students and acknowledging and respecting the contribution to be made by their communities and culture. Improving the quality of education and educational outcomes for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students is of great importance. These students are an asset and are needed to help build a productive democracy from which everyone can benefit.

In the Aboriginal community, the formation and maintenance of relationships is of primary importance. The Association believes that we need to build effective relationships to support students. Through these relationships, teachers will be able to meet the need to incorporate culturally appropriate practices and gain knowledge and perspectives that reflect the community context (for example, involving community members to share expertise and provide traditional guidance to students and other teachers as required).

—Alberta Teachers' Association, *Position Paper on Indigenous Peoples' Education* [2013/16].

## Appendix C

---

### EXCERPT FROM *RENEWAL: A TWENTY-YEAR COMMITMENT, IN RELATION TO INDIGENOUS TEACHERS WITHIN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM*

The Commission recommends that

3.5.9 Provincial and territorial ministries require school boards serving Aboriginal students to implement a comprehensive Aboriginal education strategy, developed with Aboriginal parents, elders and educators, including

- (a) goals and objectives to be accomplished during the International Decade of Indigenous Peoples;
- (b) hiring of Aboriginal teachers at the elementary and secondary school level, with negotiated target levels, to teach in all areas of school programs, not just Aboriginal programs;
- (c) hiring of Aboriginal people in administrative and leadership positions;
- (d) hiring of Aboriginal support workers, such as counsellors, community liaison workers, psychologists and speech therapists;
- (e) curriculum, in all subject areas, that includes the perspectives, traditions, beliefs and world view of Aboriginal peoples;
- (f) involvement of Aboriginal elders in teaching Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students;
- (g) language classes in Aboriginal languages, as determined by the Aboriginal community;
- (h) family and community involvement mechanisms;
- (i) education programs that combat stereotypes, racism, prejudice and biases;
- (j) accountability indicators tied to board or district funding; and
- (k) public reports of results by the end of the International Decade of Indigenous Peoples in the year 2004.

—*Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. Vol 5, Renewal: A Twenty-Year Commitment* (1996), 210–11. Available at <http://data2.archives.ca/e/e448/e011188230-05.pdf>.

## Appendix D

---

### SURVEY QUESTIONS FOR INDIGENOUS TEACHERS, SCHOOL LEADERS AND SYSTEM LEADERS WITHIN ALBERTA

#### Identification

1. Do you self-identify as First Nations, Métis or Inuit?

- Yes  No

2. Voluntary First Nations, Métis or Inuit self-identification. If you wish to declare your First Nations, Métis or Inuit status, please specify.

- First Nations (status and non-status)  Métis  
 Inuit  Prefer not to say

#### Assignment

3. What is your current assignment? \*

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Classroom teacher  | <input type="checkbox"/> Combined classroom and school leadership duties | <input type="checkbox"/> Assistant superintendent |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Substitute teacher | <input type="checkbox"/> Central office (ATA Member)                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Associate superintendent |
| <input type="checkbox"/> School leader      | <input type="checkbox"/> Central office (CASS Member)                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Superintendent           |

Teacher Reflections on Conditions of Practice and Philosophy

4. The following questions assess the extent to which you feel your school district supports your work as a teacher:

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My school district has a high level of trust in its teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My school district has a commitment to equity that ensures that the learning needs of all students are met	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My school district makes it a priority to support Indigenous students and education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My school district has a plan that is addressing truth and reconciliation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My school district values my perspectives	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My school district provides the support I need to do my work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. Good teaching is ...

---



---



---



---



---

6. Good school and/or system leadership is ...

---



---



---



---



---

### School Leader Reflections on Conditions of Practice and Philosophy

7. The following questions assess the extent to which you feel your school district supports your work as a school leader:

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My school district has a high level of trust in its school leaders	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My school district has a commitment to equity that ensures that the learning needs of all students are met	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My school district makes it a priority to support Indigenous students and education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My school district has a plan that is addressing truth and reconciliation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My school district values my perspectives as a school leader	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My school district provides the support I need to do my work as a school leader	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. Good teaching is ...

---



---



---



---



---



---

9. Good school and/or system leadership is ...

---



---



---



---



---



---

**System Leader Reflections on Conditions of Practice and Philosophy**

10. The following questions assess the extent to which you feel your school district supports your work as a system leader:

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My school board has a high level of trust in its system leaders	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My school district has a commitment to equity that ensures that the learning needs of all students are met	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My school district makes it a priority to support Indigenous students and education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My school district has a plan that is addressing truth and reconciliation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My school board values my perspectives as a system leader	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My school board provides the support I need to do my work as a system leader	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. Good teaching is ...

---



---



---



---



---



---

12. Good school leadership is ...

---



---



---



---



---



---

13. Good system leadership is ...

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**Teacher Reflections—Recruitment/Hiring/Retention**

14. Please indicate your degree of satisfaction with your employing board for Indigenous teachers:

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Recruitment practices	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Hiring process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Leadership opportunities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mentorship opportunities for myself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opportunities to mentor others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching assignment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ongoing feedback opportunities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

15. I am motivated to remain in the teaching profession because ...

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



16. Why did you become a teacher?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

17. What motivates you to continue to be a teacher?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

18. What are the barriers or challenges to leadership opportunities for you?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

### School Leader Reflections—Recruitment/Hiring/Retention

19. Please indicate your degree of satisfaction with your employing board for Indigenous teachers:

	Very Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Somewhat Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied
Recruitment practices	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Hiring process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Leadership opportunities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Mentorship opportunities for myself	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Opportunities to mentor others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Teaching assignment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Ongoing feedback opportunities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

20. I am motivated to remain in the teaching profession because ...

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

21. Why did you become a school leader?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

22. What motivates you to continue to be a school leader?

Horizontal lines for writing response to question 22.

23. What are the barriers or challenges to leadership opportunities for you?

Horizontal lines for writing response to question 23.

System Leader Reflections—Recruitment/Hiring/Retention

24. Please indicate your degree of satisfaction with your employing board for Indigenous teachers:

Table with 5 columns: Recruitment practices, Hiring process, Leadership opportunities, Mentorship opportunities for myself, Opportunities to mentor others, Teaching assignment, Ongoing feedback opportunities. Columns: Very Satisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, Somewhat Dissatisfied, Very Dissatisfied.

25. I am motivated to remain in the teaching profession because ...

---

---

---

---

---

26. Why did you become a system leader?

---

---

---

---

---

27. What motivates you to continue to be a system leader?

---

---

---

---

---

28. What are the barriers or challenges to leadership opportunities for you?

---

---

---

---

---

**Recruitment, Hiring and Retention Process and Conditions**

29. Describe how you were recruited to your school district. What worked? What did not?  
Recommendations for improvement?

---

---

---

---

---

30. Describe the hiring process to your school district. What worked? What did not work?  
Recommendations for improvement?

---

---

---

---

---

31. Based on your current position, what do you like most? What is your biggest concern?  
What would improve your current position?

---

---

---

---

---

**Discrimination/Racism in Education**

\*Important Note: Individual names are not to be used when responding to the following questions

32. If you have experienced any discrimination or racism with your school and/or division context, please describe these incidents and/or practices.

---

---

---

---

33. What actions do you take when dealing with discrimination and/or racism within your school or division context?

---

---

---

---

34. How is discrimination and/or racism addressed within your school and/or division context?

---

---

---

---

35. Are there other experiences with and understandings about discrimination and/or racism within your school and/or division context that you would like to share?

---

---

---

---

### Demographics

36. Describe the context and subject grade level of your current assignment or what grade(s) you are currently teaching. Please check all that apply.

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> ECS/Kindergarten | <input type="checkbox"/> Grades 1 to 6 | <input type="checkbox"/> Grades 7 to 9  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grades 10 to 12  | <input type="checkbox"/> Combinations  | <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable |

37. Including the current year, how many years of teaching experience do you have?

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 year or less | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 to 4 years   | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 to 9 years   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 10 to 14 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 15 to 19 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 20 to 30 years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Over 30 years  | <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable |   |

38. Including the current year, how many years of leadership experience do you have?

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 year or less | <input type="checkbox"/> 2 to 4 years   | <input type="checkbox"/> 5 to 9 years   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 10 to 14 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 15 to 19 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 20 to 30 years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Over 30 years  | <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable |   |

39. Which teachers' convention do you attend?

- |   |  |                                       |
|---|--|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Calgary City     | <input type="checkbox"/> Central Alberta | <input type="checkbox"/> Central East |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Greater Edmonton | <input type="checkbox"/> Mighty Peace    | <input type="checkbox"/> North East   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> North Central    | <input type="checkbox"/> Palliser        | <input type="checkbox"/> South West   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> South East       |  |                                       |

40. If applicable, which CASS conferences do you attend? Please check all that apply.

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> CASS Fall Conference   | <input type="checkbox"/> CASS First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Education Gathering | <input type="checkbox"/> Not applicable |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CASS Annual Conference | <input type="checkbox"/> CASS Summer Conference                                   |   |

41. In what type of school do you usually teach/work?

- Rural                       Small urban/suburban       Large urban  
 Not applicable               Other

42. Enter the name of the institution that you attended for your teacher preparation (eg, bachelor of education).

43. Master's Degree

Do you have a master's degree?

Yes, completed. Please indicate the institution that you attended and field of study.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

44. A Yes, currently enrolled. Please indicate the institution that you are currently enrolled in and field of study.

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

No

Are you considering postgraduate study in the next five years? If so, why? If not, why not?

---

---

---

---







The Alberta  
Teachers' Association