



EQUITY IN ACTION: SUPPORTING INDIGENOUS STUDENT SUCCESS

In August 2016, the BC Ministry of Education and six pilot school districts created a project to help ensure equitable experiences and educational activities for all Indigenous learners. Now in its third year, the Equity in Action Project is proving to be a very powerful tool in supporting Indigenous learners across the province.

Background

In response to the Office of the Auditor General report on Aboriginal Education (2015), the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action, the Ministry of Education has developed an Equity Scan to support school districts in identifying promising practices as well as barriers that are impacting Indigenous student achievement and success.

Equity Scan creates conditions for success

Central to the Equity in Action Project is a framework based on a five-stage process for assessing the educational experiences of Indigenous learners in school districts. The process aims to go deeply into the culture and norms of each district to identify areas of strength and areas for improvement and enables districts to respond strategically.

In the equity scan process, each school district: (1) assembles an Equity Scan Team; (2) conducts an Equity Scan; (3) develops a District Equity Profile; (4) constructs a Theory of Change; and (5) creates an Equity Action Plan that meets the needs of Indigenous learners, families and communities.



Stage 1: Assembling an Equity Scan Team

Each school district begins by assembling an Equity Scan Team. This team is made up of individuals who are collectively responsible for Indigenous student achievement in the district. Equity Teams may include the following:

- Superintendent of Schools
- School District Senior Leadership members - Assistant Superintendent, Director(s) of Instruction
- Trustee(s)
- District Principal/Administrator Indigenous Programs
- Member(s) of Indigenous Education Council
- Principal(s)
- Teacher(s)
- Indigenous Support Workers and Support Staff
- Other Community partners in Equity, i.e. Friendship Centre, First Nations Health, Post-Secondary, etc.

Stage 2: Conducting an Equity Scan

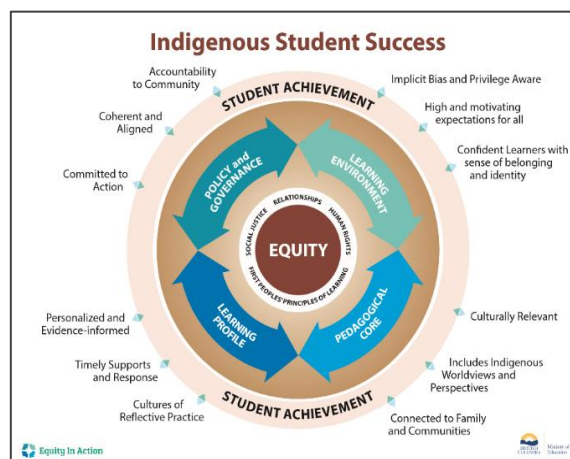
In Stage 2, Equity Scanning Teams engage district staff, Indigenous rightsholders and partner groups in a series of guided questions in four strategic areas.

Area 1: Policy and Governance

School District Equity Scanning Teams reflect on the policy and governance in their district and how it might impact results for Indigenous learners. Sample questions the team may ask include: *Is there accountability to the community?* *Does your district have an Indigenous parent, family and community engagement policy or strategy?* and *Is there a commitment to action policies and decision-making practices that support equity?*

Area 2: Learning Environment

Teams conduct a review of the learning environment for implicit bias and awareness of privilege. Teams look for evidence that educators have high and motivating expectations for all learners and that learners are confident with a strong sense of belonging and identity. Sample questions they will ask include: *Does the learning environment readily reflect the First Peoples Principles of Learning?* and *How do the students, families, and communities served by the district have input into the learning environment for their students?*





Area 3: Pedagogical Core

Teams look at the pedagogical core, considering if the curriculum is culturally relevant, includes Indigenous worldviews and perspectives, and is connected to family and community. Sample questions include: *Describe the ways in which equity and opportunity gaps facing Indigenous learners are being addressed in professional growth plans for the district, school and classroom?* and *Are there opportunities in place for developing skills and deepening understanding of Indigenous worldviews, perspectives and pedagogies?*

Area 4: Learning Profile

School District Equity Scanning Teams are provided access to a range of student achievement data made available to districts by the Ministry of Education on a secure SharePoint site. This site includes a range of data showing where learners are at and identifies parity targets for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Achievement data profiles help to identify areas for analysis and action to address the systemic inequities impacting student achievement. Some sample questions the team may ask include: *Are student learning trajectories toward graduation (6-year completion rate) considered by the classroom, school, and district on an annual basis?* and *Are multiple points of data considered when assessing the abilities and learning needs of Indigenous learners, e.g. are Ministry, district, school and classroom assessments considered together?*

For a full list of all questions in the four strategic areas, please see the Equity Scan Workbook 2019-20 in the *Learn More* section of this article.

Stage 3: Equity Profile

The Equity Scan provides district teams a holistic view of their areas of strength and areas of concern. This information is consolidated into the District Equity Profile – an inventory that forms the baseline for future action.

Stage 4: Constructing a Theory of Change

In this stage district teams construct a Theory of Change, which articulates the intentional strategies and actions they will take to address identified systemic barriers. The Theory of Change identifies what is working, what needs to be done and what will lead to success. Each district's Theory of Change will be unique and specific to their particular context.



Stage 5: Creating an Equity Action Plan

The Equity Action Plan will be the result of the collective focus of the scanning process, and will include short, medium and long term goals for equity and transformation. 21 Equity Action Plans have been received from the participating districts in the first two years of the project, indicating a maturing practice of taking greater responsibility towards improving outcomes and equity of opportunity for Indigenous learners.



Equity in Action is making a difference

Change will not happen overnight, but the early results and intentions of the Equity in Action Project show that practices and achievement outcomes are moving in the right direction.

For example, School District 68 (Nanaimo-Ladysmith), one of the six districts involved in the field trial in 2017/2018, has seen its six-year completion rate for Indigenous students reach 69.2%. This is a 17% increase over the previous two years. The district writes: “With access to the Learning Profile dashboard, the district was able to focus attention on specific students in specific schools and keep them on a path to graduation. This dashboard has also resulted in a broader system-wide look at data, where we store it and how we use it. The result of this has been the first increase in Indigenous student graduation rates in four years.”

Many districts are integrating intentional equity targets for Indigenous learners into their school growth plans, as is the case in School District 73 (Kamloops/Thompson). The district conducted its Equity Scan in 2018/2019 and has seen its six-year completion rate for Indigenous students increase 6%, up to 84%. “For the initial introduction of the 2018/2019 Equity in Action Project we were intentional in focusing on starting with school-



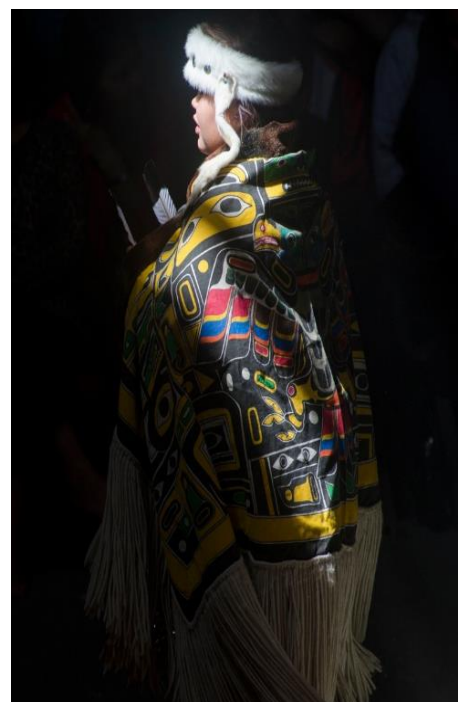
based action plans. This approach has created engagement and ownership in individual schools and is also resulting in a broader engagement in the district. Now all schools have Equity and Inclusion goals in all School Growth Plans for 2019/2020.”

Districts have hired academic success counsellors who work with Grade 11 and 12 students to ensure they have the academic and socio-emotional supports needed to remain on track for graduation. Other districts say that the Equity Scan spurred them to discuss the racism of low expectations that have been held for Indigenous learners in the system, for the first time at senior management meetings. Many districts have dedicated professional development days to explore ways to build capacity and nurture equity.

Factors that support success

Reflecting on the past three years of the Equity in Action project, key project leads have identified the following ‘equity boosts’ that support Indigenous student success:

1. A deep sense of professional responsibility exists to serve each learner and lead from truth.
2. Deficit narratives and the “racism of low expectations” are systematically addressed in policy and through intentional actions and behavior.
3. Ethical and intentional steps are being taken to de-colonize learning.
4. Authentic Indigenous ways of knowing, culture and language learning are responsive to student and community voices.
5. The organization looks both inward and outward for evidence, promising practices and innovation in service to learners, their families, and their communities.
6. Sophisticated systems are in place for gathering and analyzing information about student learning.
7. High quality professional learning is supported and resourced; and specifically targeted toward achievement and improved outcomes.
8. A demonstrated understanding of the role of the individual and the organization in relation to Truth and Reconciliation, Social Justice, and service to learning.





Building a better future for B.C. Education

The Equity in Action Project is a true commitment to investigating where equity exists and where it is lacking within our districts, schools and classrooms. Through courageous conversations, evidence-informed decisions and the passionate commitment of collaborative teams, the project reflects a commitment by education partners to work together to continuously improve learning systems in service to all Indigenous learners.

Learn More

- › Watch a video about the [Equity in Action Project](#), which includes interviews with participants from the first six trial districts in 2017/2018.
- › See the [Equity Scan Workbook](#) for the guiding questions and rubrics used by School District Equity Scan Teams.
- › Contact [Kaleb Child](#), Director of Indigenous Education, or [Joe Heslip](#), Indigenous Education Seconded, for more information on the Equity in Action Project.