

## **School District No. 8 (Kootenay Lake)**

### **Indigenous Education External Program Review Report**

### **Staffing Model Analysis and Indigenous Student Success Outcomes**

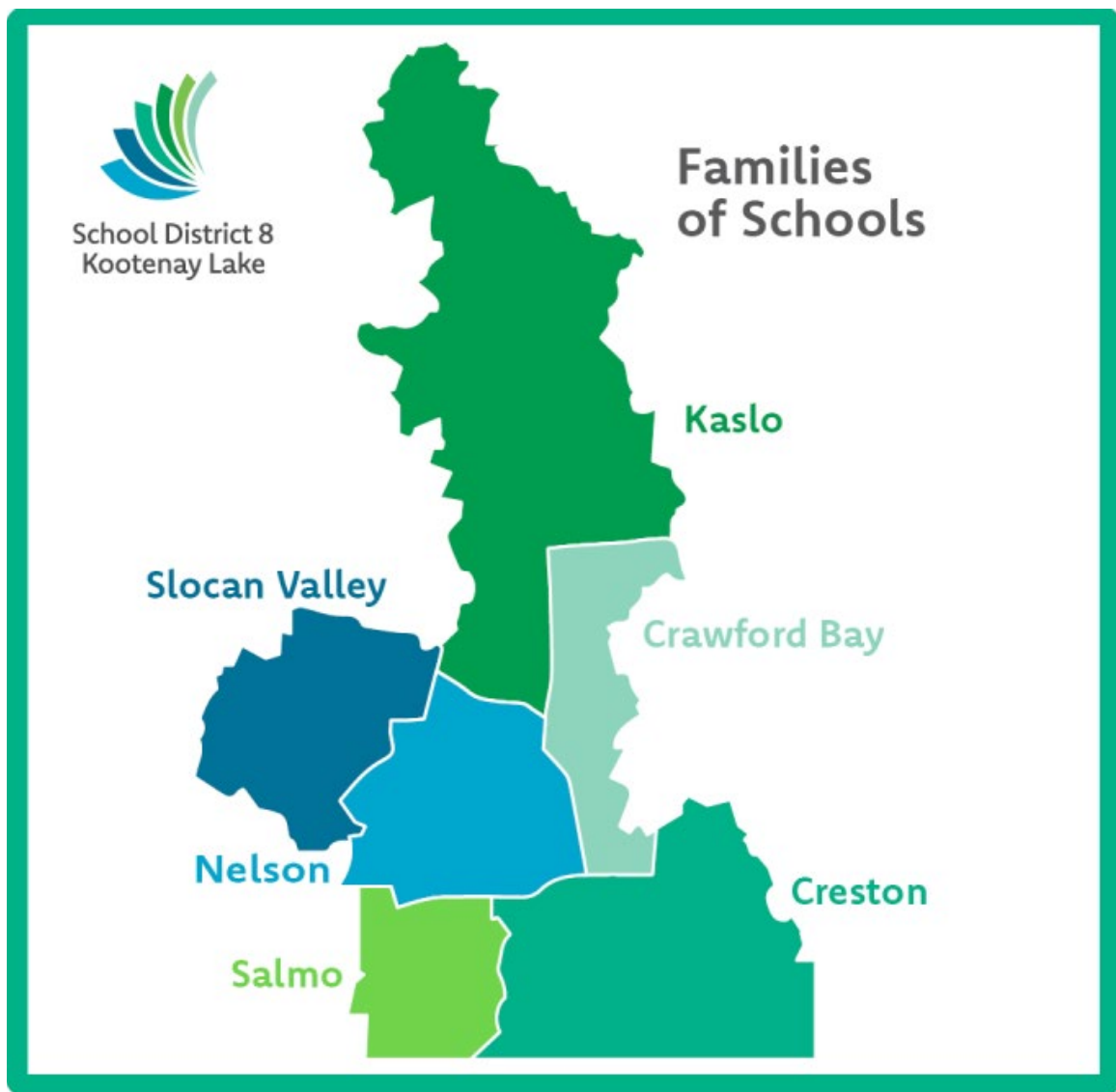
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## **1. Executive Summary**

### **Purpose of the Review**

School District No. 8 (Kootenay Lake) engaged in an Indigenous Education program review to assess the current effectiveness of its Indigenous Education model and staffing structure, with particular attention to how well the district is meeting the priorities and expectations of the Indigenous Education Council (IEC). The review sought to examine both academic success outcomes and broader Indigenous-defined measures of success, such as cultural safety, belonging, language revitalization, cultural continuity, and community connection.

A key intention of the review was to determine whether SD8's current teacher-heavy staffing model is contributing to strong academic outcomes, and to identify what structural adjustments may be required to ensure the Indigenous Education program aligns with Nation priorities and Indigenous definitions of student success.

### **Methodology and Data Sources**

Findings in this report are based on a mixed-methods approach, including:

- Indigenous Education staff survey responses (**n=10**)
- Interviews with Indigenous Education Council (IEC) members representing Nations
- Interviews with district leadership
- Interviews with school-based and district-based staff supporting Indigenization and Indigenous Education implementation
- Thematic analysis and triangulation of stakeholder perspectives and survey findings

Survey data were analyzed through descriptive review and thematic coding. Interview data was analyzed thematically and triangulated to identify key areas of alignment, divergence, and systemic constraint.

### **Key Findings**

The review identified that SD8 has significant strengths in staffing stability and academic success outcomes for Indigenous learners. However, the review also identified consistent concerns related to uneven implementation of cultural safety, inconsistent access to Nation-based cultural programming, limited language capacity, and geographic constraints affecting equity of access across communities.

### **Key Finding 1: SD8 Demonstrates Strong Academic Outcomes and Staffing Stability**

Stakeholder perspectives consistently identified SD8's staffing stability as a strength, particularly within a provincial environment where rural recruitment and retention remain challenging. The district's teacher-heavy academic success model is perceived as contributing to strong graduation, credit completion, and HAWD-aligned outcomes.

### **Key Finding 2: Indigenous Education Roles Are Carrying Expanding Responsibilities**

Staff survey findings indicate that Indigenous Education roles often involve expanded responsibilities beyond formal job descriptions, including emotional labour, crisis response, advocacy, family engagement, and culturally responsive supports. This creates sustainability concerns and increases reliance on individual staff capacity rather than system design.

### **Key Finding 3: Cultural Safety and Indigenization Are Unevenly Implemented Across Schools**

A dominant theme across staff and stakeholder perspectives is inconsistency in the implementation of cultural safety and Indigenization. Cultural safety appears dependent on individual staff readiness, teacher confidence, and administrative expectations rather than embedded district-wide structures.

### **Key Finding 4: Language and Cultural Continuity Remain Key Gaps Relative to IEC Priorities**

IEC perspectives consistently identified language revitalization, cultural continuity, and local Nation-based programming as priority shortfalls. While SD8 demonstrates strengths in academic supports, stakeholders identified that language and culture are not yet structurally embedded across schools in consistent ways.

### **Key Finding 5: Geography is a Primary System Design Constraint**

Survey and interview findings reinforce that SD8's geography significantly impacts staffing efficiency, student-facing service time, collaboration, and access to cultural resources. Geographic barriers contribute to variability in programming and create challenges in delivering consistent Indigenous Education supports across dispersed communities.

### **Central Comparative Finding: Different Definitions of Student Success**

One of the most significant findings of this review is that stakeholder groups define student success through different but equally valid accountability lenses.

District leadership perspectives primarily define success through measurable academic indicators such as graduation rates, credit completion, and HAWD reporting measures. IEC perspectives define success through holistic and intergenerational outcomes, including belonging, identity development, cultural safety, language revitalization, and connection to Nation, family, and land.

This divergence is central to understanding why staffing priorities may be perceived differently. The district may interpret the current model as successful due to strong academic outcomes, while the IEC may interpret the model as incomplete because cultural and relational outcomes remain uneven and insufficiently embedded.

The review concludes that SD8's next phase of improvement requires a model that bridges these definitions of success rather than prioritizing one over the other.

### **Summary of Staffing Analysis**

The current staffing model in SD8 appears effective in supporting academic outcomes and is strengthened by staff continuity and a teacher-heavy academic success infrastructure. However, stakeholder perspectives suggest that the model is less structurally designed to deliver consistent outcomes in language, cultural continuity, cultural safety, and community connection across all communities.

The review identified that staffing effectiveness is strongly influenced by local context and that increasing staffing does not automatically lead to improved outcomes unless roles are clearly aligned, locally grounded, and integrated into school-based teams.

### **Recommended Staffing Model Approach**

This review recommends that SD8 pursue a **Hybrid Capacity-Building Model** that maintains the strengths of the teacher-heavy academic success structure while strengthening Indigenous language and cultural capacity through targeted, community-specific strategies.

This approach recognizes SD8's strong academic outcomes while responding to IEC priorities and Indigenous definitions of student success. It also reflects the feasibility realities of rural hiring, unionized staffing environments, and long-term sustainability considerations.

### **Priority Recommendations (Phased)**

#### **Immediate Recommendations (0–6 Months)**

1. Conduct a role alignment and capacity evaluation of Indigenous Education support staff to assess role clarity, workload sustainability, integration, and community-specific effectiveness.
2. Establish district-wide expectations for cultural safety and Indigenization, reducing reliance on optional professional learning and individual initiative.

3. Develop an IEC monitoring dashboard that includes both academic success indicators and Indigenous-defined success indicators (belonging, cultural safety, language and cultural programming access, community connection).

#### Short-Term Recommendations (6–18 Months)

4. Increase time and presence in communities where local cultural expertise exists, prioritizing depth and continuity of support rather than uniform expansion.
5. Develop community-specific Indigenous Education approaches that reflect local Nation priorities and reduce the risk of generalized Indigenization.
6. Strengthen Nation-based professional learning expectations to ensure cultural safety implementation is consistent and accountable.

#### Medium-Term Recommendations (18 Months–3 Years)

7. Build Indigenous language teacher capacity through partnerships, mentorship models, and long-term instructional planning.
8. Develop a “grow your own” workforce strategy to strengthen local Indigenous staffing pipelines and improve sustainability.
9. Strengthen evidence and reporting systems so that Indigenous definitions of success are visible and measurable alongside academic outcomes.

### **Key Risks and Considerations**

The review identified several implementation risks that require careful planning:

- The risk of destabilizing a staffing model producing strong academic outcomes
- The risk of increasing staffing without improving desired outcomes due to recruitment or role integration challenges
- Sustainability risks related to staff workload and emotional labour
- The risk of generalized Indigenization that is not locally grounded in Nation authority
- Continued misalignment if district success metrics remain primarily academic

These risks reinforce the importance of phased implementation, role alignment evaluation prior to staffing expansion, and a monitoring system that reflects both academic and Indigenous-defined outcomes.

## **Conclusion**

SD8 demonstrates strong academic success outcomes and staffing stability, positioning the district as comparatively strong within the provincial rural education context. However, stakeholder perspectives consistently identify that IEC priorities related to language revitalization, cultural safety, cultural continuity, and community connection require further system-level shifts.

The recommended path forward is not broad staffing expansion. Rather, it is a strategic, community-specific capacity-building approach that protects academic success infrastructure while embedding Indigenous definitions of success into district expectations, accountability structures, and monitoring systems.

This approach provides SD8 with the strongest opportunity to sustain academic outcomes while advancing meaningful systemic improvement aligned with the Nations and the IEC.

## **2. Overview of SD8 Indigenous Education Program**

### **2.1 District Context**

School District No. 8 (Kootenay Lake) is a geographically expansive and diverse rural district serving multiple communities across a wide and varied region. The district's "Families of Schools" model reflects this complexity, with distinct town sites and service areas that differ significantly in size, distance from one another, transportation access, and community infrastructure. As a result, SD8 operates within a context where geographic conditions are not simply background factors, but foundational system variables that influence the feasibility and consistency of program delivery.

The district's dispersed communities create structural realities that are likely to influence Indigenous Education programming across all sites. In large rural districts, travel distance can reduce the amount of time available for direct program delivery and relationship-based engagement. Geographic separation also creates logistical constraints related to collaboration, shared planning, and the ability to provide consistent programming across all communities. These realities often require districts to balance centralized coordination with community-specific approaches, particularly in contexts where local needs, cultural resources, and service access vary between regions.

An additional geographic consideration in SD8 is that the district spans two time zones, creating further complexity for district-wide scheduling. When communities operate on different local times, district planning processes must account for time-zone differences in meeting coordination, professional learning scheduling, and shared programming implementation. Over time, this structural factor can limit the feasibility of uniform district-wide scheduling approaches and reinforces the importance of flexible, regionally responsive planning.

Taken together, SD8's geographic context creates predictable system-level challenges related to equitable access, program consistency, and service delivery efficiency. These conditions underscore the importance of designing Indigenous Education staffing and programming approaches that are differentiated by region, grounded in local context, and aligned with community-specific priorities and opportunities.

### **2.2 Provincial Legislative and Governance Context (Bill 40 and IEC Role)**

Indigenous Education in British Columbia is guided not only by district policy commitments and reconciliation intentions, but also by evolving provincial legislation and governance expectations. In recent years, the province has moved toward a more explicit rights-based approach to Indigenous participation in education decision-making, reflecting broader commitments under the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA) and provincial reconciliation frameworks.

In this context, Bill 40 (School Amendment Act, 2023) established strengthened legislative requirements for Boards of Education related to Indigenous Education Councils (IECs). This legislation formalized expectations that school districts create and maintain IEC structures and engage Indigenous rightsholders in meaningful and ongoing ways. As a result, IECs are positioned not as advisory

committees operating informally, but as recognized governance bodies intended to influence district direction, planning priorities, and accountability processes in relation to Indigenous learner success.

Within this legislative framework, Indigenous Education improvement work should not be understood as ad hoc programming or discretionary initiatives. Rather, it is connected to a broader provincial expectation that Indigenous perspectives, Nation priorities, and Indigenous-defined measures of success are embedded into district planning and decision-making structures.

This is particularly significant in relation to Indigenous student success because it reinforces that academic achievement indicators alone are insufficient as the sole measure of effectiveness. The IEC's role includes elevating priorities such as cultural safety, language revitalization, community connection, and cultural continuity, and supporting the district to align its structures and evidence systems with these priorities.

In the SD8 context, this legislative and governance environment supports the need for intentional district-level planning processes that incorporate IEC voice not only in principle, but in practice—through predictable co-planning opportunities, evidence-informed decision-making, and system-level accountability measures that reflect both academic and Indigenous-defined outcomes.

### **2.3 Purpose and Scope of the Indigenous Education Program**

This external Indigenous Education program review was conducted to support School District No. 8 (Kootenay Lake) and the Indigenous Education Council (IEC) in assessing the current effectiveness of the district's Indigenous Education program and staffing model. The review is grounded in the understanding that SD8 operates within a complex rural and geographically dispersed context, and that program design must account for structural realities related to distance, equity of access, and community-specific needs.

The review was also conducted within the broader provincial governance and legislative environment that emphasizes strengthened Indigenous participation in education decision-making. With the implementation of Bill 40 and evolving provincial expectations for Indigenous Education Councils, districts are increasingly required to demonstrate that Indigenous Education planning is not only well-intentioned but also structurally embedded, evidence-informed, and responsive to Indigenous-defined measures of student success.

The primary purpose of this review was to respond to a central evaluation question:

To what extent is SD8's current teacher-heavy staffing model contributing to strong academic success outcomes for Indigenous learners, and what adjustments are required to ensure Indigenous Education programming aligns with IEC priorities related to language, culture, cultural safety, and community connection?

In addition to examining the relationship between staffing design and academic success indicators, the review also sought to identify system-level opportunities for improvement, including how SD8 may strengthen consistency of cultural safety implementation, expand culturally grounded learning opportunities, and build sustainable capacity in language and cultural continuity programming across diverse communities.

The scope of this review includes analysis of staff survey data, stakeholder interviews, and comparative district context. Findings are intended to support the IEC and district leadership in identifying both strengths to protect and areas requiring strategic improvement. Recommendations are designed to be realistic within SD8's geographic and labour environment, while supporting long-term system alignment with Indigenous definitions of student success and local Nation priorities.

## **2.4 Key Program Components**

SD8's Indigenous Education program includes multiple interconnected components intended to support Indigenous learner success across the district. These components reflect both academic and relational supports, as well as broader district commitments to reconciliation, inclusion, and culturally responsive practice.

While the specific delivery of Indigenous Education programming may vary by school and community context, the program generally includes the following core areas:

### **Academic Success Supports**

A central component of SD8's Indigenous Education model is its emphasis on academic success structures. This includes processes and staffing functions designed to support Indigenous learners through targeted academic interventions, credit completion planning, graduation pathway monitoring, and coordinated school-based support for students who may be at risk of disengagement or non-completion.

### **Student Advocacy and Relationship-Based Supports**

Indigenous Education programming also includes relationship-based supports intended to strengthen student engagement and wellbeing. These supports may include advocacy functions, connection to services, and culturally responsive approaches that promote student belonging and improved school experience.

### **Indigenization Support and Resource Development**

A key element of the district's approach includes Indigenization efforts that support schools in embedding Indigenous perspectives within learning environments. This may include resource development, instructional support, guidance to educators, and the integration of culturally responsive learning opportunities within curriculum and school practice.

## **Cultural Learning Opportunities and Community Connection**

The Indigenous Education program also includes cultural learning opportunities intended to strengthen cultural identity, belonging, and community connection. These opportunities may involve collaboration with Indigenous community members, cultural facilitators, and Nation partners, as well as school-based programming that supports cultural continuity and student connection to local identity and place.

## **District-Wide Planning and Co-Planning Opportunities**

In alignment with provincial expectations and the governance role of the IEC, the program includes district-level planning processes and co-planning opportunities connected to key Indigenous Education priorities. This may include coordinated planning around significant commemorative and learning days such as the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation and Indigenous Peoples Day, as well as other district-wide learning opportunities that support consistent implementation and shared district direction.

## **Professional Learning and Capacity Development**

Professional learning is an important component of Indigenous Education programming, intended to build staff capacity in culturally responsive practice, Indigenous perspectives, and cultural safety. Effective professional learning requires consistency, clarity of expectations, and alignment with local Nation knowledge and community context.

## **Summary**

Taken together, these components demonstrate that SD8's Indigenous Education program is multi-dimensional, combining academic success supports with broader cultural and relational programming goals. However, the effectiveness of these components depends on the district's ability to implement them consistently across geographically diverse communities and to ensure that Indigenous Education priorities are not delivered as isolated events, but as embedded and evidence-informed system practices aligned with local Nation perspectives and IEC direction.

## **2.5 Current Program Strengths**

SD8 demonstrates several notable strengths within its Indigenous Education program design. These strengths provide a solid foundation for continued improvement and are significant within a broader provincial context where many districts continue to face persistent challenges in Indigenous learner outcomes and staffing sustainability.

### **Staffing Stability and Program Continuity**

A key strength of SD8 is the relative stability of its Indigenous Education staffing model. In rural and geographically dispersed districts, staffing stability supports continuity of relationships, consistency of service delivery, and the ability to sustain long-term program development. Stability is particularly

important in Indigenous Education contexts where trust, relational accountability, and community connection require time and continuity.

### **Strong Academic Success Infrastructure**

SD8's Indigenous Education program includes a strong academic success infrastructure supported by a teacher-heavy staffing model. This structure aligns well with measurable indicators of academic success such as credit completion, graduation monitoring, and academic intervention processes. Within a provincial accountability environment shaped by reporting requirements such as HAWD indicators, this model represents a strong foundation and contributes to SD8's academic success outcomes.

### **Established Indigenous Education Department Capacity**

SD8 has established a relatively well-developed Indigenous Education structure compared to many rural districts. This includes program functions that support both academic and relational outcomes, as well as district-level coordination of Indigenous Education initiatives. This capacity positions SD8 to move beyond foundational program implementation and toward deeper system-level refinement.

### **Commitment to Indigenization and Cultural Learning Opportunities**

The district demonstrates an ongoing commitment to Indigenization through initiatives intended to strengthen culturally responsive practice and expand Indigenous perspectives within school environments. This commitment provides an important base from which to further embed cultural safety, local Nation-based knowledge, and community connection across all schools.

### **Summary**

Overall, SD8's Indigenous Education program demonstrates strong foundational strengths, particularly in staffing stability and academic success infrastructure. These strengths should be recognized as assets to protect and build upon as the district moves toward the next phase of improvement aligned with IEC priorities.

## **2.6 Ongoing Challenges and Contextual Considerations**

While SD8 demonstrates significant strengths in its Indigenous Education program design, the district's context presents predictable system-level challenges that influence program consistency and equitable access across communities. These challenges are not unique to SD8; they reflect common conditions across rural and geographically dispersed districts in British Columbia. However, in SD8, these factors are amplified due to the district's size, geographic diversity, and community distribution.

## **Geographic Dispersion and Equitable Access**

SD8's dispersed communities create predictable challenges related to equitable access and consistent program delivery. In rural districts, geographic distance reduces the feasibility of centralized delivery models and increases the complexity of providing consistent support across all schools. Where travel and time constraints are significant, districts often face a structural tension between ensuring consistent service access and ensuring that programming remains locally grounded and responsive.

## **Consistency of Cultural Safety and Indigenization Implementation**

A key challenge for districts across BC is achieving consistent implementation of cultural safety and Indigenization across schools. Cultural safety cannot rely solely on individual initiative or discretionary engagement. It requires district-level expectations, implementation structures, and accountability mechanisms to ensure that Indigenous learners experience culturally safe learning environments regardless of school site.

In SD8, the geographic and community diversity context increases the importance of establishing clear district-wide expectations while also supporting local adaptation.

## **Language Revitalization and Cultural Continuity Capacity**

Indigenous language revitalization remains one of the most complex and long-term priorities for Indigenous Education programming. Across BC, districts frequently face limited access to fluent speakers, limited instructional capacity, and insufficient structural pathways to sustain language programming over time. Language revitalization requires long-term investment, partnerships, and workforce development strategies rather than short-term program solutions.

This challenge reinforces the importance of building capacity through planning, locally grounded partnerships, and sustainable instructional models.

## **Balancing Academic Accountability and Indigenous Definitions of Success**

Across BC, Indigenous Education programming is shaped by two accountability systems: one focused on measurable academic outcomes, and another grounded in Indigenous definitions of success such as belonging, identity, cultural continuity, language, and community connection. Districts often demonstrate strong performance on academic indicators while still experiencing gaps in Indigenous-defined outcomes.

This creates a predictable system-level challenge: success may be measured differently depending on whether the emphasis is on academic completion indicators or on cultural and relational measures of success. Bridging these accountability frameworks requires explicit alignment of evidence systems and shared planning structures.

## **Need for Evidence-Informed Planning and Predictable Co-Planning Structures**

In order to move beyond ad hoc implementation, Indigenous Education programming must be grounded in evidence-informed planning. This includes using both quantitative and qualitative student data, as well as professional learning needs, to guide district decisions. Predictable annual co-planning opportunities, particularly in collaboration with the IEC, support coherence, strengthen implementation consistency, and reduce the risk of Indigenous Education being delivered through isolated events rather than systemic practice.

## **Summary**

SD8's ongoing challenges are best understood as structural and systemic rather than individual. The district's geographic dispersion, capacity needs related to language and cultural continuity, and the need to bridge academic and Indigenous-defined success indicators all point to the importance of strategic, community-specific planning supported by district-wide accountability structures. These contextual considerations provide the foundation for interpreting the findings and recommendations outlined in subsequent sections of this report.

### **3. Data-Informed Findings**

#### **3.1 Overview of Data Sources**

This section presents key findings drawn from the primary data sources collected as part of the SD8 Indigenous Education External Program Review. The findings are intended to provide an evidence-informed understanding of the strengths, constraints, and improvement opportunities within the current Indigenous Education model, with specific attention to staffing structure, academic success outcomes, and alignment with Indigenous-defined measures of student success.

The findings presented in this report are informed by a mixed-methods approach, including:

- Indigenous Education staff survey responses (**n=10**)
- In-person and online interviews with district leadership and IEC members
- A district staff interview with the District Indigenization Coordinator
- Review of staffing structure and program design context

Survey data was analyzed through descriptive review of response patterns and thematic coding of open-ended responses. Interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes, areas of alignment, and areas of divergence across stakeholder groups. Findings were triangulated across data sources to strengthen reliability and to ensure conclusions reflect broader patterns rather than isolated perspectives.

Given the district's geographic complexity and the multiple communities served, findings are interpreted through a system lens that considers the predictable impacts of rural service delivery, travel constraints, recruitment feasibility, and equity of access.

#### **3.2 Staff Survey Findings: Strengths Identified**

Staff survey responses reflect a strong commitment to Indigenous learner success and highlight several perceived strengths of the Indigenous Education program across SD8.

##### **Key Strengths Identified**

Staff responses indicate that Indigenous Education programming in SD8 is perceived as effective in areas such as:

- Strong student relationships and trust-building
- Advocacy and navigation support for students and families

- Academic support, particularly where teacher-led intervention roles exist
- Staff commitment and stability across the Indigenous Education department
- Dedication to student wellbeing and culturally responsive approaches

Survey responses suggest that the Indigenous Education department is staffed by individuals who care deeply about Indigenous learners and who are motivated by a strong sense of responsibility and relational accountability.

### **3.3 Staff Survey Findings: Systemic Challenges and Constraints**

While staff expressed pride in their work and in the program's strengths, survey data indicate consistent concerns related to workload, sustainability, geographic constraints, and uneven implementation of Indigenous Education priorities across schools.

#### **3.3.1 Workload and Time Constraints**

A dominant theme across staff responses was insufficient time to complete responsibilities effectively. Staff described experiencing role compression, competing demands, and difficulty maintaining consistent student contact due to the volume and complexity of needs across sites.

This finding suggests that the Indigenous Education program, while strong in intention and commitment, is operating under conditions where staff capacity is stretched. The perception of insufficient time appears to reflect structural conditions rather than individual performance.

#### **Key finding:**

Staff experience the workload as increasingly unsustainable, particularly in contexts where relational, cultural, and academic demands are all being carried simultaneously.

#### **3.3.2 Role Clarity and Role Expansion**

Staff responses also suggest that Indigenous Education roles are often required to respond to needs beyond formal job descriptions. This includes:

- Emotional labour and crisis response
- Family engagement support that extends beyond school boundaries
- Informal counselling and student regulation support
- Cultural and relational responsibilities that are not consistently recognized as protected time

Role expansion is especially significant in rural districts where staffing capacity is limited and Indigenous Education staff may be seen as the “default support” for complex student needs.

**Key finding:**

Staff perceive Indigenous Education work as increasingly dependent on individual capacity, flexibility, and informal labour rather than clearly defined system expectations.

### **3.3.3 Inconsistent Implementation of Cultural Safety and Indigenization Practices**

Survey responses suggest that Indigenization and cultural safety are not implemented consistently across schools. Staff described variability in:

- Staff readiness and confidence
- Administrative support and leadership expectations
- Classroom teacher engagement
- Access to appropriate cultural resources and local Nation direction

This inconsistency reinforces a core conclusion of the review: Indigenous Education programming remains vulnerable to uneven implementation when it relies on individual commitment rather than embedded structural expectations.

**Key finding:**

Cultural safety work appears dependent on individual initiative rather than systemic accountability, contributing to uneven student experience across the district.

### **3.3.4 Need for Increased Language and Cultural Programming**

A repeated theme across responses was the need for greater emphasis on Indigenous language and cultural continuity. Staff expressed support for more consistent opportunities for students to engage in:

- Local language learning
- Cultural programming grounded in Nation knowledge
- Land-based and community-connected learning experiences
- Identity-affirming learning beyond symbolic inclusion

This aligns directly with IEC-identified priorities and reinforces that Indigenous definitions of student success are not yet fully embedded into the operational design of the system.

**Key finding:**

Staff view language and cultural continuity as underdeveloped relative to academic success structures.

### **3.4 Geographic Constraints as a Primary System Driver**

Survey findings consistently identified geography as a structural barrier impacting Indigenous Education delivery. Staff described how geography affects:

- Travel time and reduced student-facing service delivery time
- Limited collaboration between Indigenous Education staff across sites
- Difficulty delivering consistent programming across town sites
- Increased complexity of scheduling and coordination
- Uneven access to local Nation knowledge keepers and cultural supports

This geographic theme was reinforced strongly through the interview with staff, who identified both distance and access inequities across town sites as major barriers to consistent Indigenization work. The interview further highlighted unique SD8 realities such as geographic separation between communities (“over the mountain”) and the additional complexity of operating across two time zones.

#### **Key finding:**

SD8’s geography is not a secondary contextual variable; it is a primary system constraint that shapes staffing efficiency, program consistency, and equitable access.

### **3.5 Triangulated Finding: The System is Strong Academically but Uneven Culturally**

When triangulated with leadership and IEC interviews, staff survey findings point to a clear district-wide pattern:

- SD8 demonstrates strong academic outcomes for Indigenous learners, supported by stable staffing and teacher-led academic success structures.
- At the same time, Indigenous Education priorities related to language, cultural continuity, cultural safety, and community connection are unevenly implemented across communities and schools.
- Progress in cultural safety and Indigenization appears dependent on individual staff capacity, local relationships, and access to local Nation resources.

This triangulation is particularly significant because it demonstrates that academic success and cultural success are not in opposition; rather, the district has built strong academic systems but has not yet fully embedded Indigenous definitions of success into consistent system structures.

### **3.6 Key Emerging System Patterns**

Across survey and interview data, the following system patterns emerged as central to understanding SD8's Indigenous Education program:

#### **Pattern 1: Stability is a Strength**

The Indigenous Education program benefits from staffing stability, long-serving staff, and a well-developed teacher-heavy model that supports academic outcomes.

#### **Pattern 2: Cultural outcomes are vulnerable to inconsistency**

Language, culture, cultural safety, and connection outcomes are less structurally protected, leading to variation by school, administrator, and community context.

#### **Pattern 3: Indigenous Education work relies heavily on individuals**

The program's success is dependent on staff commitment, creating sustainability risk over time.

#### **Pattern 4: Geography amplifies inequity**

Geographic dispersion reduces collaboration and consistency and makes a uniform service model difficult to sustain.

#### **Pattern 5: The system measures what it is built to deliver**

The district has strong mechanisms for tracking academic outcomes; however, measures of belonging, cultural safety, and connection are less visible in formal reporting.

### **3.7 Data-Informed Conclusion**

Survey findings (n=10) reinforce that SD8's Indigenous Education program demonstrates significant strengths, particularly in staffing stability and academic success supports. However, staff also report consistent concerns related to time, workload, and uneven implementation of Indigenization and cultural safety across the district.

When viewed alongside IEC and leadership perspectives, these findings suggest that SD8 has developed a strong academic success infrastructure for Indigenous learners, but that additional system-level shifts are required to achieve the IEC's priorities related to language revitalization, cultural continuity, cultural safety, and community connection.

#### **Overall conclusion:**

SD8's Indigenous Education program appears strong in academic outcomes and stable staffing capacity, but less structurally designed to deliver consistent cultural and relational outcomes across diverse

communities. The next phase of improvement requires community-specific capacity building and governance-level alignment of expectations, evidence, and accountability.

*The district is demonstrating success within the system it has built; the question now becomes whether the system is built to deliver the full definition of success articulated by Nations and the IEC.*

## **4. Rightsholder and Stakeholder Perspectives**

### **4.1 Overview**

A core component of this review involved gathering perspectives from rightsholders and key stakeholder groups connected to Indigenous Education in SD8. These perspectives provide essential insight into how Indigenous Education is experienced across the district, how student success is defined, and where system-level alignment or misalignment may be limiting progress.

Rightsholder and stakeholder perspectives were gathered through interviews with Indigenous Education Council (IEC) members representing Nations, district leadership interviews, and interviews with school-based and district-based staff supporting Indigenization and Indigenous Education implementation. Themes were triangulated with staff survey findings to identify areas of convergence, divergence, and systemic constraint.

Across rightsholder and stakeholder groups, there was a shared commitment to improving outcomes for Indigenous learners. However, perspectives differed significantly in how success is defined and what priorities are viewed as most urgent.

### **4.2 Indigenous Education Council (IEC) Perspectives (Nation-Based Voices)**

#### **4.2.1 Student Success Defined Through Identity, Belonging, and Cultural Continuity**

IEC members consistently defined Indigenous student success through holistic outcomes grounded in identity, relationships, and cultural continuity. Across Nation-based perspectives, success was described as including:

- Students knowing who they are and where they come from
- A strong sense of belonging and cultural safety in school
- Pride in culture, language, and identity
- Connection to family, Nation, land, and community
- Wellness, confidence, and emotional safety
- Opportunities for Indigenous students to experience school as affirming rather than harmful

While academic success and graduation were recognized as important, IEC members emphasized that these outcomes are not sufficient on their own. From an IEC perspective, student success must include cultural and relational outcomes, particularly given the historical role of schooling in cultural harm and disconnection.

A consistent message across IEC perspectives was that students may graduate while still leaving the system disconnected from language, community, and cultural identity. In this view, the district's definition of success must reflect more than completion metrics.

#### **4.2.2 Priority Shortfalls Identified by the IEC**

IEC members identified several areas where the district has not yet met Nation priorities consistently across communities. These shortfalls included:

- Limited Indigenous language programming and long-term language capacity
- Inconsistent cultural programming across town sites
- Uneven integration of local Nation-specific knowledge and protocols
- Cultural safety concerns that vary significantly between schools and classrooms
- A need for stronger school-to-community connection and more meaningful family engagement

IEC perspectives emphasized that Indigenization should not be limited to isolated events or symbolic activities. Rather, it must represent a systemic shift where Indigenous worldviews, local Nations, and cultural safety are embedded into everyday practice.

#### **4.2.3 Community-Specific Approaches and Local Authority**

A strong theme across IEC perspectives was the expectation that Indigenous Education programming must be locally grounded and reflect the Nations, languages, histories, and knowledges of the land connected to each community served by SD8. IEC members emphasized that effective Indigenization is not achieved through generalized or pan-Indigenous approaches. Rather, it must be rooted in local Nation identity, local histories, and local cultural protocols.

IEC members identified the importance of strengthening their role in guiding district programming so that Indigenous learners experience education that is reflective of their place, their people, and their community relationships. This includes meaningful IEC input into district planning processes that shape learning resources, cultural programming, and school-based implementation.

### **4.3 District Leadership Perspectives**

#### **4.3.1 Student Success Defined Through Academic Outcomes and System Indicators**

District leadership perspectives were consistent in defining student success through measurable academic and system outcomes, including:

- Graduation and completion rates
- Credit attainment and progression indicators
- Attendance and engagement trends
- Post-secondary and employment readiness
- Reduction in students disengaging or leaving school early

Leadership perspectives emphasized that SD8 demonstrates strong academic success outcomes and that the current staffing model has contributed to these results. Leadership expressed confidence in the district's ability to support Indigenous learners toward graduation, particularly through established teacher-led academic success interventions and monitoring structures.

This perspective reflects a provincial accountability lens shaped by reporting expectations and system-level indicators such as HAWD.

#### **4.3.2 Emphasis on Stability, Sustainability, and Feasibility**

District leadership emphasized that staffing stability is a significant strength of SD8. In a provincial environment where rural recruitment and retention are increasingly challenging, leadership noted that SD8's ability to maintain stable Indigenous Education staffing is an advantage.

Leadership perspectives reflected a cautious approach to major staffing changes, emphasizing the importance of protecting the elements of the model that appear to be producing strong measurable outcomes.

#### **4.3.3 Labour, Hiring, and Cost Constraints**

Leadership perspectives acknowledged that SD8 operates within a highly unionized environment where staffing changes carry significant financial and operational implications. Participants emphasized that increasing staffing numbers does not necessarily improve outcomes if recruitment is difficult, if role clarity is limited, or if staffing increases result in fragmented service delivery rather than improved coordination.

Leadership emphasized the importance of targeted and evidence-informed staffing decisions rather than broad or uniform expansion.

#### **4.4 School-Based Staff Perspectives (Including Indigenization Support Roles)**

School-based and district-based staff perspectives provided insight into how Indigenization and cultural safety are enacted in daily practice across SD8 schools. These perspectives included individuals supporting Indigenization implementation across multiple sites, offering a district-wide view of how culture and Indigenous ways of knowing are currently being embedded into schools.

##### **4.4.1 Indigenization is Most Effective When Locally Grounded**

Staff perspectives emphasized that Indigenization work is most meaningful when it is grounded in local Nation knowledge, place-based learning, and culturally relevant content that reflects the communities served. Staff described that meaningful Indigenization occurs when Indigenous students can see themselves reflected in what they are learning, and when local Nations are visible through the curriculum, school culture, and learning environment.

##### **4.4.2 Uneven Access to Local Nation Resources Limits Consistency**

Staff perspectives identified uneven access to Nation guidance, cultural resources, and relationship pathways across the district. Participants described that the depth and consistency of Indigenization vary depending on the community context, including the strength of local relationships and the availability of local cultural resources.

This finding reinforces survey data indicating that cultural and relational outcomes remain inconsistent across town sites and school contexts.

##### **4.4.3 Geographic and Scheduling Constraints Reduce Equitable Access**

Staff perspectives reinforced that SD8's geographic context is a significant structural constraint affecting Indigenous Education implementation. Participants noted that travel time, scheduling complexity, and dispersed school sites reduce opportunities for consistent support and limit the feasibility of delivering uniform programming across the district.

Staff also described that district-level coordination is made more complex by the practical realities of distance, travel cost, and limited access to cultural supports in some areas.

#### **4.4.4 Cultural Safety Must Be Embedded as System Expectation**

A strong theme across staff perspectives was that cultural safety and Indigenization cannot rely on optional professional development or individual teacher initiative. Participants noted that cultural safety is currently uneven because staff engagement, readiness, and confidence vary significantly between schools.

Staff perspectives suggested that cultural safety requires district-wide expectations, consistent accountability, and leadership follow-through rather than being treated as an optional area of interest or discretionary learning.

#### **4.4.5 Quantitative Success Indicators Do Not Capture the Full Student Experience**

Staff perspectives reinforced that academic indicators such as graduation and credit completion do not capture the full experience of Indigenous learners. Participants emphasized that Indigenous student success must include belonging, identity affirmation, mental health, cultural connection, and student voice.

This theme aligns directly with IEC perspectives and strengthens the conclusion that SD8's current success indicators do not fully reflect Indigenous definitions of student success.

It is noted that success indicators for the above areas are a focus for the district, as seen in these documents: <https://www.sd8.bc.ca/flipbook/26> and here [www.sd8.bc.ca/sites/default/files/documents/2022-09/AbEd\\_FocusAreas\\_2022-2027\\_final\\_reduced.pdf](https://www.sd8.bc.ca/sites/default/files/documents/2022-09/AbEd_FocusAreas_2022-2027_final_reduced.pdf). The district staff data also confirms that these are areas where growth is needed.

#### **4.4.6 Sustainability and Wellness Considerations**

Staff perspectives also highlighted the emotional and relational labour involved in Indigenous Education work, including the responsibility of supporting trauma-related learning and responding to experiences of racism or discrimination. Participants emphasized that Indigenous Education work requires trauma-informed approaches and sustained supports for staff wellbeing.

This finding reinforces the sustainability risk of relying on individual staff capacity to carry culturally heavy work without consistent system-level support structures.

#### **4.5 Central Comparative Finding: Different Definitions of Student Success**

One of the most significant findings of this review is that stakeholder groups define student success through different but equally valid accountability lenses. These differences are not only philosophical;

they shape district priorities, staffing expectations, and perceptions of whether the Indigenous Education program is meeting its intended purpose.

#### **4.5.1 District Leadership Definition of Success**

District leadership perspectives emphasized student success through measurable academic and system indicators, including:

- Graduation rates
- Credit attainment and completion
- Attendance and engagement indicators
- Post-secondary readiness
- Reduction in student disengagement

This reflects a system accountability framework aligned with provincial reporting requirements and HAWD indicators.

It is noted that although the limited number of interviews revealed the above findings, the Three-Year plan 2024-2027 points to ongoing and purposeful development in areas of culture, language and identity as seen in the document: [Flipbook Content | SD8 Kootenay Lake](#)

#### **4.5.2 IEC (Nation-Based) Definition of Success**

IEC perspectives defined student success through holistic and intergenerational outcomes, including:

- Belonging and cultural safety
- Identity development and cultural pride
- Connection to Nation, family, land, and community
- Access to language and cultural learning opportunities
- Wellness, confidence, and emotional safety

This reflects an Indigenous accountability framework grounded in community responsibility, cultural continuity, and long-term wellbeing.

#### 4.5.3 Summary of Key Divergence

| Dimension          | District Leadership Perspective   | IEC Perspective                  |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Primary indicators | Graduation, credits, completion   | Belonging, identity, wellness    |
| Time horizon       | School years                      | Lifetimes / generations          |
| Accountability     | Ministry, Board, system reporting | Nations, families, community     |
| Role of culture    | Complementary support             | Foundational condition           |
| Risk focus         | Students not graduating           | Students graduating disconnected |

Both perspectives value student success and acknowledge graduation as essential. However, IEC members emphasized that graduation is not sufficient if students leave school disconnected from culture, language, identity, and community.

#### 4.5.4 Why This Matters

This divergence is central to understanding perceived tensions related to staffing, priorities, and program evaluation. Leadership perspectives are shaped by academic outcomes and feasibility constraints, while IEC perspectives are shaped by cultural continuity, relational accountability, and student experience.

As a result, the district may interpret the current staffing model as successful due to strong measurable outcomes, while the IEC may interpret the model as incomplete because cultural and relational outcomes remain uneven and insufficiently embedded.

This divergence does not reflect a conflict of intent. Rather, it reflects a difference in the definition of success and the evidence used to validate improvement.

#### 4.6 Stakeholder Alignment: Shared Commitment, Different Outcome Priorities

Despite differences in emphasis, stakeholder groups share significant areas of alignment. Across leadership, staff, and IEC perspectives, there was consistent agreement that:

- Indigenous learners deserve equitable academic outcomes
- Students should feel safe, supported, and connected in school environments

- Relationships are central to engagement and success
- SD8 has demonstrated strengths in staffing stability and academic outcomes

The challenge is not whether Indigenous learners should succeed. Rather, the challenge is whether the system is currently structured to deliver success across both academic and Indigenous-defined outcome frameworks.

#### **4.7 Stakeholder Conclusion**

Stakeholder perspectives reinforce the overall conclusion of the review: SD8 has developed a strong academic success infrastructure supported by stable staffing and measurable outcomes. However, IEC priorities related to language revitalization, cultural continuity, cultural safety, and community connection require additional system-level shifts.

The next phase of improvement in SD8 is not primarily a question of whether academic outcomes are strong. Rather, it is a question of whether the system is designed to deliver the full definition of success articulated by Nations and the IEC, and whether SD8 is prepared to embed those priorities into consistent expectations, accountability structures, and community-specific approaches.

## **5. Analysis of Current Staffing Structure**

### **5.1 Overview of the Current Staffing Model**

SD8's Indigenous Education program is supported by a staffing structure that includes a combination of teaching roles and support staff roles. Based on stakeholder perspectives and staff survey findings, SD8 currently operates with a model that places significant emphasis on teacher-led academic success intervention and monitoring, supported by Indigenous Education support roles intended to provide relational, cultural, and student advocacy functions.

This staffing structure reflects a relatively stable model compared to provincial norms, with many Indigenous Education staff serving in their roles for extended periods. Staffing stability was consistently identified as a strength by both leadership and staff and is particularly significant within a provincial environment characterized by rural recruitment challenges and competition for qualified educators and Indigenous support staff.

The current model appears to have been designed primarily to deliver measurable academic outcomes, including credit completion, graduation pathways, and student progression indicators.

### **5.2 Strengths of the Current Staffing Structure**

#### **5.2.1 Stability and Continuity of Indigenous Education Staffing**

A consistent strength identified through interviews and survey data is the stability of SD8's Indigenous Education staffing. Staff longevity supports continuity of relationships with students and families and reduces disruption associated with frequent turnover.

In rural contexts, stability is not a minor operational factor; it is a foundational condition that enables sustained trust-building and consistent service delivery.

#### **5.2.2 Strong Alignment to Academic Success Outcomes**

Stakeholder perspectives suggest that the teacher-heavy components of the staffing model are strongly aligned with district academic success indicators. Teacher-led academic success roles support functions such as:

- credit monitoring and intervention
- targeted academic support for at-risk learners
- structured graduation planning

- coordination with school teams to identify students requiring additional academic intervention

District leadership perspectives reflect confidence that these structures have contributed to SD8's strong performance on measurable outcomes.

### **5.2.3 Established Indigenous Education Department Capacity**

SD8 is perceived as having a relatively well-resourced Indigenous Education department compared to many rural districts. This is reflected in staff perspectives that note the presence of a functional Indigenous Education infrastructure and consistent access to support roles across the district.

This capacity positions SD8 to move beyond foundational program development and toward more advanced system-level improvement work.

## **5.3 Constraints and Gaps Identified in the Current Staffing Structure**

### **5.3.1 Cultural and Language Outcomes Are Not Structurally Embedded**

While the current staffing model appears effective in supporting academic success, stakeholder perspectives suggest that the system is less structurally designed to produce consistent outcomes related to:

- Indigenous language revitalization
- cultural continuity and Nation-specific learning
- cultural safety and belonging
- consistent community connection and family engagement

IEC perspectives emphasized that these outcomes are foundational to Indigenous definitions of student success and are not yet embedded consistently across schools.

Staff perspectives also reinforced that Indigenization and cultural safety work is often dependent on individual teacher initiative, staff readiness, and local access to Nation knowledge and cultural resources.

### **5.3.2 Reliance on Individuals Creates Sustainability Risk**

A repeated theme across staff and stakeholder perspectives is that Indigenous Education success remains highly dependent on individuals. This includes reliance on:

- key staff members who carry cultural programming
- informal labour and extended responsibilities beyond formal job descriptions
- relationships built through personal commitment rather than system expectation

This reliance creates sustainability risk, as program strength becomes vulnerable to turnover, burnout, or changes in leadership capacity.

### **5.3.3 Role Compression and Emotional Labour**

Staff perspectives suggest that Indigenous Education roles often include responsibilities that extend beyond formal academic support or programming. These responsibilities may include crisis response, informal counselling, advocacy, and emotional labour related to trauma-informed student support.

This aligns with broader provincial patterns in Indigenous Education, where Indigenous support staff are frequently positioned as both cultural supports and student wellness supports without adequate structural protections for workload and wellness.

### **5.3.4 Uneven Community Connection Where Roles Are Not Locally Grounded**

IEC perspectives emphasized that community connection is most effective when Indigenous Education staff are locally connected to the Nations and communities they serve. In contexts where staff are not locally grounded, additional staffing may increase capacity but does not necessarily improve Nation connection, cultural authority, or family engagement.

This finding supports the need for community-specific staffing decisions rather than uniform expansion across the district.

### **5.3.5 Geographic Efficiency Constraints**

SD8's geographic context significantly affects staffing efficiency. Where Indigenous Education staff must travel between communities and school sites, travel time reduces the time available for student-facing service delivery. Geography also reduces opportunities for collaboration between Indigenous Education staff across the district, which may contribute to variability in programming consistency.

Stakeholder perspectives reinforced that geography must be treated as a system design constraint when evaluating staffing deployment and determining where increased time or targeted capacity is most effective.

#### **5.4 System Coherence and Leadership Capacity**

Staff perspectives raised concerns that the Indigenous Education program's coherence requires sustained leadership focus and consistent district-level support. Stakeholders identified that Indigenous Education priorities can become diluted when leadership responsibility is distributed across multiple portfolios competing for attention.

This finding reinforces the importance of structural clarity and accountability for Indigenous Education priorities, particularly in a context where IEC expectations include systemic change related to cultural safety, language, and connection.

#### **5.5 Cost–Benefit Considerations in a Unionized Environment**

District leadership perspectives emphasized that SD8 operates within a highly unionized environment where staffing decisions carry significant financial and operational implications. Within this context, increasing staffing does not automatically result in improved outcomes.

The effectiveness of staffing changes depends on multiple conditions, including:

- recruitment feasibility
- local Nation connection and cultural authority
- clarity of role purpose and scope
- integration with school-based teams
- supervision and coordination requirements
- evidence of impact on student outcomes

Stakeholder perspectives suggest that staffing decisions should therefore be guided not only by perceived need, but also by the functional purpose of the role and the likelihood of improving the outcomes the IEC has identified as priority. It should be noted that any changes should heavily consider declining enrolment, and projected numbers for next year are significantly down from a couple of years ago

## **5.6 IEC Cost–Benefit Decision Lens for Staffing Proposals**

To support future staffing decisions that align with IEC priorities while remaining feasible and evidence-informed, the following cost–benefit decision lens is recommended for application to Indigenous Education staffing proposals.

### **Proposed IEC Cost–Benefit Decision Lens**

When considering new staffing or staffing adjustments, the IEC may apply the following guiding questions:

#### **A. Outcome Alignment**

- What specific student success outcomes will this staffing proposal improve?
- Are the intended outcomes academic, cultural, relational, or a combination?

#### **B. Evidence of Need**

- What evidence indicates that a staffing gap exists?
- Is the gap reflected in student data, staff survey findings, family feedback, or Nation concerns?

#### **C. Local Connection and Cultural Authority**

- Is the proposed role locally grounded within the Nation(s) connected to the community?
- Will this staffing change improve community connection, cultural continuity, and trust?

#### **D. Feasibility and Recruitment**

- Is the district likely to recruit and retain a qualified candidate for the role?
- Is there a local workforce pipeline that can sustain the role long-term?

#### **E. Integration and Role Clarity**

- How will the role integrate into school-based teams?
- Is the role scope clear, realistic, and sustainable?

#### **F. Cost and Opportunity Cost**

- What is the total cost of the role (salary, benefits, travel, training)?
- What alternative investments could produce similar or greater impact (e.g., language teacher capacity building, targeted release time, partnership agreements)?

## **G. Impact Pathway**

- How will success be measured?
- What indicators will demonstrate that the staffing change is improving outcomes?

This lens supports a structured governance approach that avoids framing staffing decisions as “more staff vs fewer staff,” and instead prioritizes the functional purpose and measurable impact of staffing proposals.

### **5.7 Summary Finding: Staffing Model Strength with Cultural Capacity Gap**

The current staffing structure in SD8 demonstrates strong alignment with measurable academic success outcomes and benefits from notable stability relative to provincial rural hiring challenges. This teacher-heavy model appears to contribute to strong HAWD-aligned indicators and graduation success.

However, stakeholder perspectives suggest that the current model is less structurally designed to deliver consistent outcomes related to language revitalization, cultural continuity, cultural safety, and community connection across all communities. These outcomes remain vulnerable to uneven implementation and are frequently dependent on individual staff capacity and local access to Nation knowledge and relationships.

#### **Overall conclusion:**

SD8’s staffing structure is effective in supporting academic success but requires targeted system-level adjustments and capacity-building approaches to fully align with IEC priorities and Indigenous definitions of student success.

## **6. Comparative Provincial Context**

### **6.1 Provincial Context: Indigenous Education Priorities and Accountability**

Across British Columbia, Indigenous Education is shaped by a dual accountability environment. Districts are expected to demonstrate progress through measurable academic indicators such as graduation, completion, and achievement trends, while also advancing broader provincial and Indigenous priorities related to reconciliation, cultural safety, and Indigenous rights-based approaches.

In practice, this creates a system context where districts are often highly structured around academic success indicators, while cultural safety and Indigenous-defined outcomes remain less consistently embedded into formal planning and reporting processes. This context helps explain why Indigenous Education programs may demonstrate strong academic outcomes while still experiencing gaps related to cultural continuity, language revitalization, and relational trust.

SD8's current Indigenous Education model reflects this broader provincial pattern: strong alignment to measurable outcomes, with additional work required to fully embed cultural and relational outcomes as consistent system expectations.

### **6.2 Strategic Use of Provincial Days as Capacity-Building Anchors**

Across BC, districts increasingly recognize that key provincial and national commemorative days provide structured opportunities to build staff capacity, strengthen cultural safety implementation, and increase the visibility of Indigenous perspectives in school planning. In SD8, stakeholder perspectives emphasized that the following dates represent strategic opportunities for consistent district-wide improvement:

- National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (September 30)
- Indigenous Peoples Day (June 21)
- The “6th Day” (as a district-supported instructional focus day)

IEC perspectives emphasized that these opportunities should not be treated as one-time events or symbolic activities. Rather, they can serve as structured “system anchors” for strengthening staff learning, local Nation engagement, and implementation consistency across schools.

This approach also supports coherence across the district by establishing predictable annual cycles where professional learning, student learning outcomes, and community involvement can be intentionally planned and monitored.

### **6.3 Provincial Hiring Context: Teacher and Support Staff Recruitment Challenges**

Across BC, districts are facing increasing challenges in recruitment and retention of both teaching staff and support staff. These challenges are amplified in rural and geographically dispersed districts, where limited local labour pools and competition across districts constrain hiring options.

From a provincial standpoint, it is widely recognized that increasing staffing allocations does not automatically lead to improved outcomes if positions cannot be filled with qualified candidates or if staffing turnover undermines relationship continuity.

This context is particularly relevant for Indigenous Education staffing. Many districts report challenges recruiting staff with the combination of:

- cultural knowledge and relational competence
- Indigenous language fluency or learning capacity
- familiarity with local Nation protocols
- experience supporting Indigenous learners in culturally safe ways

In rural settings, districts may also experience limited access to elders, knowledge keepers, and fluent speakers, which reduces the feasibility of rapid expansion in language or cultural programming without longer-term capacity-building strategies.

### **6.4 Unionized Environment: Staffing Expansion Carries Financial and Structural Implications**

BC's public education system operates within a highly unionized environment. This context influences staffing decisions in multiple ways:

- staffing additions carry ongoing financial obligations (salary, benefits, pension, and long-term sustainability)
- role boundaries and scope may be regulated through collective agreements
- staffing changes require clear supervision structures, integration processes, and defined job expectations
- increasing staffing numbers can introduce coordination demands and complexity if roles are not clearly aligned

Within this environment, increasing support staff positions may not automatically improve outcomes unless role design is purposeful, locally grounded, and clearly integrated with school-based teams.

This context reinforces the importance of targeted staffing decisions that are driven by outcomes, feasibility, and role clarity rather than by assumptions that increased staffing alone produces improvement.

### **6.5 Provincial Evidence Context: Teachers and Support Staff as Complementary Roles**

A review of broader education research indicates that classroom teachers are consistently linked to measurable academic outcomes, particularly where instructional time, curriculum delivery, and intervention strategies are the primary drivers of achievement.

At the same time, research also suggests that support staff roles can contribute significantly to student outcomes when their work strengthens conditions that support learning, such as:

- student engagement and attendance
- relationship continuity
- emotional regulation and behavioural support
- connection to family and community
- culturally safe school environments

Within Indigenous Education contexts, support roles are often most effective when they are locally grounded and positioned as relational bridges between school, student, and community. However, the evidence base suggests that support staffing alone is not sufficient to improve academic outcomes unless it is paired with strong instructional systems.

This reinforces the importance of avoiding a “teachers versus support staff” framing. Rather, staffing decisions must be guided by a clear understanding of what outcome is being pursued and which staffing function is most likely to influence that outcome. See Appendix A for more information.

### **6.6 Indigenous-Specific Research: Success as Cultural Continuity and Belonging**

Indigenous-specific research consistently emphasizes that student success must be understood beyond academic completion. Research across Indigenous education contexts highlight the relationship between student outcomes and factors such as:

- cultural continuity
- belonging and identity affirmation
- language revitalization

- relationship-based learning
- school-community trust

Indigenous research literature reinforces that students who experience schooling as culturally unsafe or disconnected may still achieve academic outcomes while experiencing harm to identity and belonging. Conversely, culturally safe learning environments strengthen engagement, retention, and long-term success.

This evidence aligns directly with IEC perspectives and supports the conclusion that SD8’s next phase of improvement should include structural investments in cultural safety, language capacity, and community connection alongside academic success supports.

### **6.7 Provincial Trend: “Grow Your Own” Workforce Strategies**

Across BC, many rural districts are increasingly shifting toward “grow your own” workforce strategies in response to persistent hiring challenges. This approach is particularly relevant for Indigenous Education priorities because locally grounded capacity is often the most effective pathway to sustainable language, cultural, and relational programming.

“Grow your own” approaches may include:

- supporting local Indigenous students into education pathways
- building education assistant and support staff pipelines into teacher certification
- developing partnerships with Nations and post-secondary institutions
- mentorship pathways for language and culture educators
- providing structured training and credentialing opportunities

This approach aligns with IEC priorities, emphasizing that staffing changes should be rooted in the community context. It also supports long-term sustainability, as locally connected staff are more likely to strengthen family engagement and Nation relationships.

### **6.8 Implications for SD8: System Change Must Be Feasible and Locally Grounded**

When viewed within the provincial context, SD8 demonstrates a strong staffing position relative to many rural districts. Staffing stability and measurable academic outcomes represent significant strengths.

However, provincial context also reinforces that meaningful improvement in Indigenous Education is unlikely to be achieved through uniform staffing increases alone. Systemic change requires:

- locally grounded capacity-building approaches
- clear role alignment and protected time for cultural work
- district-level expectations for cultural safety and Indigenization implementation
- evidence systems that measure belonging, cultural continuity, and connection alongside academic outcomes

In this context, the most feasible and sustainable approach for SD8 is not a broad expansion of staffing numbers, but a targeted and community-specific strategy that strengthens language teacher capacity, clarifies and evaluates support worker functions, and increases culturally grounded time and presence where local expertise exists.

## **7. Staffing Model Options and Recommendations**

### **7.1 Purpose of Staffing Model Review**

Staffing is a central driver of Indigenous Education program design and determines what outcomes a district is structurally able to deliver. SD8's current staffing structure has demonstrated strong academic success outcomes for Indigenous learners, supported by a teacher-heavy model focused on intervention, monitoring, and graduation pathways.

At the same time, stakeholder perspectives indicate that the IEC's priority outcomes—particularly Indigenous language revitalization, cultural continuity, cultural safety, and community connection—are not yet embedded consistently across all communities and schools. This section outlines staffing model options and recommendations intended to strengthen alignment between SD8's academic success infrastructure and Indigenous definitions of student success.

Recommendations are designed to support systemic improvement while recognizing provincial constraints related to recruitment, labour agreements, and long-term sustainability.

### **7.2 Staffing Model Options**

#### **Option A: Maintain the Current Teacher-Heavy Model with Targeted System Enhancements**

##### **Description:**

Under this option, SD8 maintains the current teacher-heavy staffing structure, prioritizing academic success and graduation pathways. Enhancements would focus on strengthening system expectations for cultural safety and improving coordination of cultural programming.

##### **Strengths:**

- Protects academic outcomes and current HAWD-aligned success indicators
- Maintains staffing stability and avoids destabilization
- Feasible under recruitment constraints
- Minimizes financial risk and operational disruption

##### **Limitations:**

- Does not structurally expand language capacity
- Does not fully address IEC concerns related to cultural continuity and community connection

- Risks reinforcing a definition of success that remains primarily academic
- Cultural programming remains vulnerable to uneven implementation

**Assessment:**

Option A is feasible and protects strong academic outcomes but is unlikely to meet IEC priorities without additional targeted capacity building.

**Option B: Hybrid Capacity-Building Model (Recommended)**

**Description:**

Under this option, SD8 maintains the strengths of its current teacher-heavy academic success model while intentionally strengthening Indigenous language and cultural capacity through targeted community-specific adjustments. This approach prioritizes strengthening outcomes rather than increasing staffing indiscriminately.

This model includes:

- protecting teacher-heavy academic success functions
- strengthening Indigenous language teacher capacity over time
- evaluating current support worker roles for alignment and effectiveness
- increasing time and presence in communities where local cultural expertise exists
- embedding cultural safety expectations as system accountability

**Strengths:**

- Maintains strong academic outcomes while advancing IEC priorities
- Supports systemic change without destabilizing the current model
- Aligns with Indigenous definitions of success
- Allows community-specific differentiation
- Provides the most realistic pathway given recruitment and cost constraints

**Limitations:**

- Requires disciplined implementation and monitoring
- Requires sustained district leadership focus
- May require reallocation of time or resources rather than expansion alone

**Assessment:**

Option B is the most balanced and feasible model to bridge the district's academic success outcomes with IEC priorities for language, culture, and connection.

**Option C: Support Staff Expansion Model****Description:**

Under this option, SD8 would significantly increase Indigenous support staff capacity across schools, including additional Indigenous Education workers, cultural support roles, or family liaison functions.

**Strengths:**

- Increases student-facing relational support
- May strengthen family engagement where roles are locally grounded
- Aligns with IEC emphasis on connection and belonging

**Limitations:**

- High recruitment risk, particularly for locally grounded candidates
- High ongoing financial cost in a unionized system
- Increased staffing does not guarantee improved outcomes if role clarity and integration are weak
- Risk of fragmentation if additional staff are spread thin across many communities
- May not improve language outcomes unless roles are specifically designed for language revitalization

**Assessment:**

Option C may be appropriate only where local Nation-connected staffing capacity exists. Broad implementation carries significant feasibility and cost risks.

**7.3 Recommended Staffing Model Approach**

Based on staff survey findings, stakeholder perspectives, and provincial context, the recommended approach is:

**Option B: A Hybrid Capacity-Building Model that maintains the strengths of SD8's teacher-heavy academic success infrastructure while building targeted Indigenous language and cultural capacity through community-specific approaches.**

This recommendation is grounded in a central finding of the review: SD8's current model appears effective in supporting academic success outcomes but is less structurally designed to deliver consistent outcomes in language, cultural continuity, cultural safety, and community connection.

Option B strengthens SD8's ability to deliver the full definition of success articulated by Nations and the IEC, while protecting academic success outcomes and maintaining feasibility in a constrained labour environment.

## **7.4 Recommendations (Phased)**

### **Phase 1: Immediate Recommendations (0–6 Months)**

#### **Recommendation 1: Conduct a Role Alignment and Capacity Evaluation of Indigenous Education Support Staff**

It is recommended that SD8 conduct a focused evaluation of current Indigenous Education support roles to assess:

- alignment between role design and intended outcomes
- clarity of responsibilities and scope
- workload sustainability
- integration with school-based teams
- community-specific effectiveness and local connection

#### **Purpose:**

To ensure that existing staffing capacity is being used effectively before considering expansion.

#### **Recommendation 2: Establish District-Level Expectations for Cultural Safety and Indigenization Implementation**

It is recommended that SD8 strengthen district-level expectations for cultural safety and Indigenization by clarifying that these priorities are not optional or discretionary.

This may include:

- defining minimum cultural safety expectations for schools

- requiring principals to report on Indigenous Education implementation within school planning processes
- embedding cultural safety accountability into professional learning expectations

**Purpose:**

To shift cultural safety from optional participation to system expectation.

**Recommendation 3: Establish an Annual IEC Co-Planning Cycle for Key Indigenous Education Days**

It is recommended that SD8 establish an annual co-planning structure led jointly by the district and IEC to support district-wide learning opportunities connected to key Indigenous Education days, including Truth and Reconciliation Day, Indigenous Peoples Day, and other district-identified learning days such as the 6th day.

This annual co-planning cycle should include:

- clear learning outcomes for students and staff
- local Nation and community input into themes and content
- consistent district messaging and school implementation expectations
- resources aligned to local histories, languages, and knowledges of the land
- post-event reflection and evidence collection to support continuous improvement

**Purpose:**

To move Indigenous Education days from ad hoc planning toward structured, culturally grounded district capacity-building opportunities.

**Phase 2: Short-Term Recommendations (6–18 Months)**

**Recommendation 4: Increase Time and Presence Where Local Cultural Expertise Exists**

It is recommended that SD8 prioritize increasing time allocation or continuity of Indigenous Education supports in communities where local cultural capacity exists and where increased presence would strengthen:

- Nation connection
- cultural programming continuity

- relational trust and family engagement
- culturally grounded student support

This recommendation emphasizes targeted enhancement rather than uniform staffing increases.

**Purpose:**

To deepen impact where cultural relevance and local authority are strongest.

**Recommendation 5: Strengthen School–Nation Connection Through Community-Specific Indigenous Education Approaches**

It is recommended that SD8 implement differentiated, community-specific Indigenous Education approaches that reflect the Nations and priorities connected to each town site.

This may include:

- localized plans for language and cultural learning
- partnership agreements or protocols with Nations
- site-based implementation priorities that reflect local context

**Purpose:**

To ensure Indigenous Education is locally grounded and not generalized across diverse communities.

**Recommendation 6: Strengthen Professional Learning Through Local Nation-Based Learning Priorities**

It is recommended that SD8 strengthen professional learning expectations by shifting from generalized Indigenous awareness training to locally grounded learning priorities.

This may include:

- Nation-specific history and protocols
- cultural safety training embedded into district expectations
- school-based learning plans that require implementation follow-through

**Purpose:**

To reduce inconsistency and ensure professional learning results in practice change.

### **Phase 3: Medium-Term Recommendations (18 Months–3 Years)**

#### **Recommendation 7: Build Indigenous Language Teacher Capacity as a Long-Term District Investment**

It is recommended that SD8 prioritize Indigenous language teacher capacity building as a long-term strategy. This may include:

- supporting teachers to pursue language learning pathways
- partnering with Nations to identify speakers and language mentors
- developing co-teaching or mentorship models
- exploring credentialing pathways and post-secondary partnerships
- integrating language into school routines and instructional environments

**Purpose:**

To embed language revitalization into the instructional core of the district rather than treating language as enrichment.

#### **Recommendation 8: Develop a “Grow Your Own” Indigenous Educator Workforce Strategy**

It is recommended that SD8 develop a long-term workforce strategy to strengthen local Indigenous education capacity, including:

- pathways for Indigenous youth into education careers
- mentorship programs for Indigenous education assistants and support workers
- partnerships with Nations and post-secondary institutions
- targeted recruitment strategies focused on local retention

**Purpose:**

To address long-term sustainability and reduce dependence on external recruitment.

#### **Recommendation 9: Strengthen District Evidence Systems to Reflect Indigenous Definitions of Success**

It is recommended that SD8 strengthen evidence systems so that success is measured not only through academic indicators but also through Indigenous-defined outcomes such as belonging, identity, and cultural continuity.

This may include:

- student belonging surveys or culturally responsive climate measures
- community voice mechanisms
- reporting on language/culture programming consistency
- qualitative narrative reporting alongside quantitative data

**Purpose:**

To ensure that district decision-making reflects both academic accountability and Indigenous accountability.

**Recommendation: Embed Local Nation Perspectives into District Program Development**

It is recommended that SD8 establish a formal process for IEC and Nation input into the development of district programming resources and Indigenous Education initiatives. This includes ensuring that learning materials, school-based activities, and district-wide programming reflect:

- local Nation histories and protocols
- local language priorities
- local land-based knowledge systems
- Nation-defined understandings of cultural safety and community connection

**Purpose:**

To ensure Indigenous Education programming is locally grounded and supports cultural continuity rather than generalized Indigenization.

**7.5 Summary: Staffing Recommendations as a Bridge Between Success Frameworks**

The recommendations above are designed to bridge two valid definitions of success identified through this review:

- SD8's strong academic outcomes, supported by the teacher-heavy staffing model
- IEC priorities related to language, culture, cultural safety, and connection

The recommended path forward does not involve destabilizing SD8's academic success infrastructure. Instead, it focuses on targeted capacity building, role alignment, community-specific differentiation, and

strengthened accountability systems that ensure Indigenous Education success is defined and measured holistically.

## 7.6 Recommendation Summary Table

| Phase       | Recommendation Focus                                                                        | Intended Outcome                                     |
|-------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Immediate   | Role evaluation + cultural safety expectations + monitoring dashboard                       | Strengthen system coherence and accountability       |
| Short-Term  | Increase time where local capacity exists + community-specific approaches + strengthened PL | Improve cultural continuity and connection           |
| Medium-Term | Language teacher capacity + grow-your-own workforce + Indigenous success indicators         | Sustainable systemic shift aligned to IEC priorities |

## **8. Risks, Considerations, and Next Steps**

### **8.1 Overview**

The findings of this review indicate that SD8 demonstrates strong academic success outcomes for Indigenous learners supported by a stable staffing model. At the same time, stakeholder perspectives identify consistent gaps related to language revitalization, cultural continuity, cultural safety, and community connection. Addressing these gaps will require system-level shifts, and these shifts must be approached strategically to ensure sustainability, feasibility, and alignment with local Nation priorities.

This section outlines key risks, implementation considerations, and recommended next steps for the IEC and district.

### **8.2 Key Risks**

#### **8.2.1 Risk of Destabilizing a Model Producing Strong Academic Outcomes**

SD8's current teacher-heavy model appears to contribute to strong measurable academic outcomes. A major risk of large-scale staffing restructuring is destabilizing the elements of the system that currently support graduation, credit completion, and academic monitoring.

A shift toward new staffing structures must therefore be approached cautiously and should prioritize protecting the academic success functions that have contributed to positive district performance indicators.

#### **8.2.2 Risk of Increasing Staffing Without Improving Desired Outcomes**

Stakeholder perspectives emphasized that increasing staffing does not automatically lead to improved outcomes, particularly in a rural and unionized environment. Without clear role alignment, integration, and accountability, staffing increases may result in:

- fragmented service delivery
- unclear responsibilities
- inconsistent implementation across sites
- increased coordination burden without improved outcomes

This risk is heightened if staffing additions are made without ensuring that roles are locally grounded and connected to Nation priorities.

### **8.2.3 Recruitment and Retention Risk in Rural Context**

Across BC, rural districts face persistent challenges in recruitment and retention. This is particularly significant for Indigenous Education staffing, where the district may seek individuals who hold cultural knowledge, relational capacity, and Nation-connected experience.

SD8's staffing stability is a strength, and recommendations should avoid assuming that new positions can be easily filled. Expansion strategies must account for the feasibility of hiring qualified staff and the long-term sustainability of roles.

### **8.2.4 Risk of “Generic Indigenization” Without Local Nation Authority**

A repeated theme across IEC and staff perspectives is that meaningful Indigenization must be locally grounded and Nation-specific. There is a risk that well-intentioned programming becomes generalized, symbolic, or disconnected from local Nations when it is not supported through strong relationship structures.

This risk reinforces the need for differentiated approaches across communities rather than district-wide uniform implementation.

### **8.2.5 Sustainability Risk: Burnout and Emotional Labour**

Staff perspectives identified the emotional and relational labour involved in Indigenous Education work, including supporting trauma-related learning and responding to experiences of racism or discrimination. Without systemic support, there is a risk of burnout and turnover among Indigenous Education staff.

This risk is particularly important because the system currently relies heavily on individual capacity and informal labour. Sustainability requires workload clarity, protected time, and culturally safe staff support systems.

### **8.2.6 Risk of Misalignment Between Academic Accountability and Indigenous Accountability**

The review identified a key divergence between district leadership definitions of success and IEC definitions of success. Without explicit alignment, there is a risk that:

- The district continues to measure success *primarily* through academic indicators, although there are meaningful targets for culture and language.
- The IEC continues to perceive limited progress in cultural and relational outcomes

- If this divergence or communication barrier is not addressed, staffing decisions and program improvement work may remain stalled or cyclical.

### **8.2.7 Risk of Symbolic Implementation Without Measurable Capacity Growth**

A key risk identified through this review is the potential for Indigenous Education initiatives to become symbolic if they are implemented as isolated events without structured planning, measurable outcomes, or follow-through. Stakeholder perspectives emphasized that Truth and Reconciliation Day, Indigenous Peoples Day, and other key learning opportunities must not be treated as one-time activities. These days represent strategic district-wide capacity-building anchors and should be planned through an IEC co-planning model, grounded in local Nation priorities, and evaluated through student outcome evidence and teacher learning needs.

## **8.3 Key Considerations for Implementation**

### **8.3.1 Cultural Safety Must Be Treated as System Design, Not Individual Practice**

Stakeholder perspectives suggest that cultural safety cannot be achieved solely through optional professional development or individual teacher initiative. Cultural safety must be embedded through:

- district-level expectations
- consistent leadership reinforcement
- protected time for implementation
- accountability and follow-through mechanisms

This is a system design issue rather than an individual compliance issue.

### **8.3.2 Evidence-Informed Indigenous Education Planning (Quantitative and Qualitative Data Integration)**

To strengthen systemic improvement, Indigenous Education planning should be grounded in both quantitative and qualitative evidence. IEC perspectives emphasized that district decisions must move beyond ad hoc implementation and instead be driven by clear evidence of student needs and staff learning priorities.

A recommended approach is to integrate:

**Quantitative student indicators**, such as:

- attendance and engagement patterns
- credit completion and graduation trends
- course participation data
- literacy and numeracy progress indicators
- transitions and retention measures

**Qualitative indicators**, such as:

- student voice and belonging data
- family engagement feedback
- cultural safety climate measures
- community perspectives on school connection
- staff readiness and professional learning needs

This evidence-informed approach ensures that Indigenous Education initiatives are intentional, targeted, measurable, and aligned to both district accountability expectations and IEC-defined priorities.

### **8.3.3 Equity Requires Community-Specific Differentiation**

SD8 serves diverse communities with distinct Nation relationships, cultural resources, and local priorities. Implementation must recognize that equity does not mean identical programming across communities.

District improvements should allow for differentiated approaches that reflect:

- local Nation priorities
- local staffing capacity
- geographic feasibility
- community-specific needs and opportunities

This approach aligns with IEC perspectives emphasizing local authority and Nation-based identity.

### **8.3.4 Language Revitalization Requires Long-Term Investment**

Indigenous language revitalization is an intergenerational goal that cannot be achieved through short-term programming or isolated staffing changes. Language capacity building requires long-term planning, partnerships, and sustained resourcing.

This reinforces the importance of focusing on teacher capacity building and “grow your own” workforce strategies rather than relying on rapid recruitment models that may not be sustainable.

### **8.3.5 Staffing Effectiveness Depends on Role Purpose and Integration**

Staffing decisions should be guided by functional purpose rather than staffing numbers. The district and IEC should consider:

- what outcome the role is intended to improve
- whether the role is locally grounded and culturally relevant
- how the role integrates with school-based teams
- how impact will be measured

This reinforces the need for role alignment evaluation before staffing expansion.

### **8.3.6 Monitoring and Reporting Must Reflect Indigenous Definitions of Success**

To align district progress with IEC priorities, reporting systems must include indicators that reflect Indigenous definitions of success, including belonging, cultural safety, connection, and cultural continuity. Without this, progress will remain invisible in formal district reporting and will be difficult to sustain as a strategic priority.

## **8.4 Recommended Next Steps**

### **8.4.1 Confirm and Validate Findings with District Staff and IEC**

As a next step, it is recommended that SD8 leadership and the IEC review the thematic findings together to confirm:

- accuracy of interpretations
- feasibility of proposed recommendations
- priority sequencing for implementation

This process supports transparency and reduces risk of misinterpretation or unintended implementation consequences.

#### **8.4.2 Establish an IEC Monitoring and Reporting Framework**

It is recommended that the IEC request the establishment of a monitoring dashboard that includes both:

- academic success indicators (HAWD-aligned)
- Indigenous-defined success indicators (belonging, cultural safety, language, connection)

This framework should be used to guide annual review and to support accountability.

#### **8.4.3 Conduct Role Alignment Evaluation of Existing Indigenous Education Support Staff**

Prior to staffing expansion, SD8 should complete a role alignment review to clarify:

- role scope and workload sustainability
- alignment with intended outcomes
- community-specific deployment effectiveness
- integration with school-based teams

This ensures that the system is maximizing current staffing investments.

#### **8.4.4 Develop a Community-Specific Indigenous Education Improvement Plan**

It is recommended that SD8 move toward community-specific planning that reflects local Nation priorities. This may include differentiated approaches by town site to ensure that cultural and language programming is locally grounded rather than generalized.

#### **8.4.5 Prioritize Language Teacher Capacity Building as a Medium-Term Strategy**

SD8 should identify language revitalization as a strategic medium-term priority and begin developing a capacity-building plan that includes:

- teacher learning pathways
- Nation partnerships
- mentorship models

- long-term workforce strategies

This supports systemic improvement beyond short-term program delivery.

#### **8.4.6 Develop a “Grow Your Own” Workforce Strategy**

SD8 should explore long-term strategies to strengthen local Indigenous education capacity, including pathways for Indigenous youth and community members into education roles. This supports sustainability and improves alignment with IEC priorities related to local connection and Nation-based authority.

### **8.5 Suggested Implementation Timeline (High-Level)**

#### **Immediate (0–6 Months)**

- Confirm findings with IEC and district leadership
- Establish IEC monitoring dashboard framework
- Begin role alignment and workload evaluation
- Clarify cultural safety expectations at the district level

#### **Short-Term (6–18 Months)**

- Adjust time allocation where local cultural capacity exists
- Develop community-specific Indigenous Education approaches
- Strengthen Nation-based professional learning expectations
- Identify pilot sites for strengthened cultural safety implementation

#### **Medium-Term (18 Months–3 Years)**

- Implement Indigenous language teacher capacity-building strategy
- Develop grow-your-own workforce partnerships and pathways
- Strengthen district reporting systems to reflect Indigenous-defined success
- Sustain annual monitoring and adjustment through IEC governance cycles

## **8.6 Closing Statement**

SD8 is positioned as a district with strong staffing stability and strong academic outcomes for Indigenous learners. These strengths provide a solid foundation for the next phase of improvement. However, stakeholder perspectives indicate that the IEC's priorities, particularly language revitalization, cultural safety, cultural continuity, and community connection, require additional system-level shifts.

The path forward is not a simple staffing expansion model. Rather, it is a strategic, community-specific capacity-building approach that protects academic success structures while embedding Indigenous definitions of student success into district expectations, accountability, and program design.

Sustainable progress will require alignment between district leadership accountability frameworks and IEC Nation-based definitions of success, supported by clear monitoring, evidence systems, and phased implementation planning.

## Appendix A

### Teachers and Support Staff in Indigenous Education: A Brief Research Synthesis to Inform Staffing Decisions

#### Abstract

This brief synthesis reviews selected research literature examining the comparative roles and impacts of certified teachers and support staff (e.g., educational assistants, teaching assistants, paraprofessionals) in K–12 education. While the literature does not support simplistic conclusions about role superiority, it consistently demonstrates that teachers and support staff contribute to student success in distinct and non-interchangeable ways. This synthesis is intended to inform Indigenous Education governance decisions, particularly those related to staffing models, cost–benefit considerations, and sustainability in rural and unionized public-school contexts.

#### Introduction

School districts across British Columbia are increasingly required to justify staffing decisions in relation to student outcomes, fiscal responsibility, and equity. In Indigenous Education, staffing decisions are further shaped by community priorities related to cultural safety, family engagement, language revitalization, and relational accountability.

This paper responds to a recurring governance question: **What does research suggest about the effectiveness of certified teachers compared to support staff, and how should this evidence inform staffing decisions?** Rather than framing this as a binary choice, the research literature emphasizes the importance of role function, system positioning, and integration. Staffing decisions are most effective when they are aligned to intended outcomes and grounded in evidence-informed program design.

#### Teachers and Academic Outcomes

Research consistently indicates that certified teachers exert the strongest influence on formal academic outcomes, particularly those tied to curriculum delivery, assessment practices, instructional quality, and progression toward graduation.

Studies examining classroom interactions demonstrate that teachers are more likely than teaching assistants to engage students in cognitively demanding instructional dialogue and higher-order learning processes (Rubie-Davies et al., 2010). These differences are significant because instructional interaction quality is a key mechanism through which academic achievement is developed.

Additional research suggests that teachers report higher instructional self-efficacy than paraprofessionals, reflecting differences in training, certification requirements, and professional scope

of practice (Altamirano & Zhang, 2024). Teacher roles are also structurally embedded in accountability systems tied to grades, reporting, credit accumulation, and graduation completion.

From a system design perspective, teacher-heavy staffing models are therefore plausibly associated with improved academic success indicators, particularly those captured in district-level outcome reporting such as How Are We Doing (HAWD) measures.

### **Support Staff and Relational, Engagement, and Wellbeing Outcomes**

While support staff roles are less directly linked to measurable academic outcomes, research indicates that support staff can play an important role in student engagement, wellbeing, and targeted intervention delivery, particularly when roles are clearly defined and aligned with evidence-based practice.

The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) has emphasized that teaching assistants can contribute positively when deployed strategically to deliver structured, time-limited interventions under teacher guidance. However, the EEF also cautions that when teaching assistants are used as informal substitutes for instructional leadership or are assigned without structured planning and oversight, impacts on student achievement may be limited or inconsistent (Education Endowment Foundation, n.d.).

In Indigenous Education contexts, support staff may contribute to cultural safety, relational continuity, and trust-building—particularly when staff are locally grounded and connected to the community. Importantly, research suggests that the benefits of support staff depend less on the number of support staff and more on the clarity of role purpose, training, integration, and alignment with local cultural context.

### **Cost, Integration, and System Design Considerations**

A consistent finding across policy and research literature is that increasing staffing numbers does not automatically lead to improved outcomes. The effectiveness of support staff roles depends on how they are integrated into instructional systems, the quality of supervision and planning structures, and whether the role function is clearly distinct from—and complementary to—teacher roles.

In unionized public education systems, staffing changes also carry indirect costs related to supervision, coordination, role overlap, and potential fragmentation of responsibilities. For governance bodies, staffing proposals should therefore be evaluated not only by headcount or perceived need, but by functional gain relative to cost and sustainability.

Research also reinforces that teacher stability matters. Teacher turnover has been shown to negatively affect student achievement, particularly in schools serving historically marginalized communities (Ronfeldt et al., 2011). This evidence suggests that where academic outcomes are a priority, maintaining

teacher stability and protecting teacher-led intervention structures should remain a key strategic consideration.

### **Implications for Indigenous Education Governance**

Taken together, the research suggests several implications relevant to Indigenous Education Councils and district governance bodies:

1. Teachers and support staff serve different but complementary functions; one does not substitute for the other.
2. Teachers are more directly positioned to influence measurable academic outcomes, including graduation, credit completion, and instructional progression.
3. Support staff contribute most effectively when roles are locally grounded, clearly defined, and strategically integrated into school-based instructional teams.
4. Increasing staffing numbers alone is unlikely to improve outcomes without attention to role purpose, community context, and system design.
5. Long-term capacity-building approaches (e.g., “grow your own” strategies) may offer more sustainable benefits than repeated external recruitment, particularly in rural contexts.

### **Limitations of the Literature**

It is important to note that:

- Much of the available research is not Indigenous-specific.
- Few studies isolate staffing models as single causal variables, as education systems are influenced by multiple interacting factors.
- Outcomes related to belonging, cultural safety, and community connection remain under-represented in large-scale quantitative research.

As such, research evidence should be used to inform, but not replace, Indigenous governance judgment and local knowledge.

## Conclusion

The research literature does not support a simplistic conclusion that either teachers or support staff are categorically “more effective.” Instead, it highlights the importance of aligning staffing roles with intended outcomes, recognizing the structural advantages of teacher roles in academic accountability systems, and valuing the relational and cultural contributions of support staff when these roles are contextually and strategically designed.

For Indigenous Education governance, this evidence reinforces the need for careful, community-specific, cost–benefit-informed staffing decisions that protect what is working academically while investing in sustainable cultural and relational capacity for the future.

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