

CMEC Indigenous Education Data Webinar Series

February – April, 2021

Summary

In February and April 2021, the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) hosted a webinar series that brought together participants from across Canada for a discussion on Indigenous education data. The event was an opportunity to learn from the experiences of a broad range of partners, including Indigenous organizations, provincial/territorial ministries and departments of education, Statistics Canada, and school administrators, in using data to improve Indigenous education outcomes and to support the collection of better data to inform evidence-based policy and decision making.

Initially planned as an in-person workshop in March 2020, the event was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic and eventually reimaged as a virtual webinar series. Presenters actively participated in shaping the agenda of the webinar series and helped define a virtual space that was safe and culturally relevant for all participants.

The webinar series focused on elementary and secondary education, exploring topics such as student completion pathways, data-sharing agreements, approaches to self-identification, use of Indigenous data, and linking quantitative and qualitative data. The list of topics was developed from discussions with provincial and territorial Indigenous Education Committee members and was informed by feedback from Indigenous education partners who have attended and participated in several of CMEC's events pertaining to Indigenous education, such as the 2018 CMEC Symposium on Indigenizing Teacher Education.

The CMEC Secretariat is located in Toronto, which is the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. Toronto is also covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit.

CMEC's work in Indigenous education

Indigenous education has been a part of the work of CMEC since it was identified as a key priority by ministers of education in 2004. This commitment was reaffirmed in July 2019 at the annual meeting of provincial and territorial ministers responsible for education, held in Victoria, British Columbia, where the CMEC Indigenous Education Plan (IEP) 2019-22 was approved. The [plan](#) focuses on four priority areas:

1. mobilizing and disseminating provincial/territorial and international successful practices and proven actions to improve Indigenous education;
2. revitalizing Indigenous languages and strengthening Indigenous culture and identity through education;
3. teaching excellence in Indigenous education; and
4. Indigenous student success and well-being in education.

In 2015, the CMEC Aboriginal Educators' Symposium convened delegations of Indigenous educators and Elders from across Canada to identify ways to encourage more Indigenous people to pursue a teaching career and to ensure that seasoned Indigenous educators remain in the profession and flourish.

The 2018 CMEC Symposium on Indigenizing Teacher Education gathered participants from different provinces and territories, along with Indigenous Elders and students, to share their perspectives on the Indigenization of teacher education programs and on how to help teachers Indigenize their elementary and secondary classrooms. Overall, the aim of the event was to identify and highlight the importance of, and ways to create, learning environments that reflect and respect Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Participants engaged in the pan-Canadian discussion by:

- exploring innovative work in teaching language, culture, and identity;
- examining Indigenous holistic perspectives on student well-being, including mental health and wellness;
- incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing into the curriculum;
- creating productive partnerships.

Symposium participants echoed the need to think broadly, embrace change, and act now in order to facilitate "reconciliation through education". The first actionable recommendation identified through discussions at the event was to establish and maintain productive and meaningful partnerships for change. These relationships are integral to Indigenous education data collection, analysis, and dissemination.

CMEC is dedicated to working in collaboration with Indigenous organizations and in partnership with Statistics Canada, through the Canadian Education Statistics Council, to improve how data are defined, collected, and shared. Data allow provinces and territories, as well as stakeholders and partners in Indigenous education, to understand and support Indigenous student success and well-being. The webinar series aligned with relevant priority areas of the IEP 2019-22 by

helping to mobilize and disseminate provincial, territorial, and international successful practices and actions to improve Indigenous education, specifically in the area of data collection and its applications to policy and programming. This work endeavours to advance reconciliation in Canada for the benefit of Indigenous students, and to lead to improved outcomes for all students across the country.

Building on the success of the first technical workshop in 2011

The webinar series was informed by the findings of the first [CMEC Technical Workshop on Pan-Canadian Aboriginal Data](#) in 2011, which provided the opportunity for technical experts and stakeholders to discuss issues relating to the improvement of pan-Canadian data on Indigenous learners in elementary-secondary education.

This workshop was held in Ottawa to examine the state of data on Indigenous education and to advise on the next steps to improve the availability of such data on Indigenous learners across the country. The workshop brought together technical experts working with Indigenous data from the provincial and territorial ministries and departments, Statistics Canada, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC), national Indigenous organizations, regional Indigenous organizations, and a number of other stakeholders. These participants were familiar with the technical issues involved in harmonizing data across jurisdictions.

These were the four emerging themes of the first technical workshop:

1. Building trust and strengthening partnerships

One of the key ingredients in collecting meaningful data is the trust that has to be established between those who are collecting the data and those who can provide the data.

2. Enhancing data quality, comparability, and access

It is important to have high-quality, comparable, and accessible data on Indigenous learners in order to effect substantive changes in education systems and policies.

3. Broadening the scope of what is measured

There are limitations to current approaches to data collection and indicator development as they do not take into account the full spectrum of lifelong learning, and, in particular, the holistic nature of Indigenous learning.

4. Strengthening communication among all partners

Communication is the primary means of building collaboration and enhancing trust. Participants from across governments and organizations discussed the need to clearly define goals and for transparency in progress toward achieving them.

The 2021 CMEC webinar series on Indigenous education data

The 2020 pan-Canadian workshop was designed to help technical experts learn from the experiences of a broad range of partners and stakeholders, including Indigenous organizations, provincial/territorial ministries and departments of education, and school administrators, in using data to improve Indigenous education outcomes. In addition to sharing promising practices and identifying common issues and challenges, the event aimed to support interest across provinces and territories in collecting better data to inform evidence-based policy and decision making in Indigenous education.

As the in-person event was postponed to 2021 and transformed into a webinar series due to the COVID-19 pandemic, careful attention was given to uphold the workshop's spirit of collaboration. The panelists agreed to share their findings in this new format and helped to shape these sessions into safe and culturally relevant spaces. Building on their recommendations and feedback, the series included the following:

- Land acknowledgements were provided by the host and individual presenters, and there was a collective recognition that the webinar is happening in a shared virtual space.
- Participants engaged with Elders and Indigenous moderators who helped set intentions for the sessions and ground participants throughout the series.
- Care was taken to ensure that different voices and perspectives were present throughout the webinars.

Each of the three webinars began with an opening prayer and remarks from an Indigenous Elder. Only the presentations were recorded, according to the presenters' request, in order to allow for honest discussion after the presentations and an authentic engagement among participants throughout the webinar. Links to publicly available recordings are included in the presentations section below.

What we heard

1. Strengthening partnerships

The webinar discussions echoed some of the findings of the first technical workshop, most importantly the need to establish and strengthen partnerships with Indigenous education stakeholders, families, communities, and organizations. Participants expressed an interest in seeing better results reflected in Indigenous education data, but above all, in ensuring that data are collected and analyzed in the right way, meaning in a culturally relevant and ethical manner.

2. Data collection methodologies informed by Indigenous voices, perspectives, and ways of knowing

Participants were encouraged to reflect on how Indigenous voices, values, and priorities are considered in data lifecycles, and on how decision making is informed by data on Indigenous students. Current needs across the country go beyond data availability and equitable access to analytics, as capacity development is required within schools, districts, and ministries/departments to understand, analyze, and collect data in a culturally appropriate and relevant way.

3. An evolving and holistic definition of student success

The definition of Indigenous student success can be transformed within school systems to reflect a holistic and lifelong approach to learning. Historically, learning indicators in the formal education system have not given much consideration to traditional experiential learning or students' spiritual and physical development. A more holistic picture of success could consider language and culture, resiliency, mental health and wellness, and a student's engagement in their community. By embracing a holistic understanding of success, policy and program development can shift to recognizing, celebrating, and building on Indigenous student strengths.

4. Self-identification and building a sense of belonging

Another emerging theme from the discussions was the importance of building Indigenous students' sense of self and belonging in classrooms and schools. Some panelists shared evidence on how a strong sense of belonging can lead to improved attendance, graduation rates, and levels of self-identification among Indigenous students and staff. Capacity development among educators and staff can help schools be safe and welcoming spaces for Indigenous students.

5. Interpreting the data by asking different questions

Participants shared reflections on the interpretation of data and how stories crafted from the data can illuminate policy and program development. If different questions are asked, the measures may provide a different story. For instance, instead of looking at the completion rate as an indication of academic success or failure on the part of the student, some participants recommended that the data be interpreted as an indication of how schools, districts, and ministries/departments are doing in supporting Indigenous students to succeed.

6. Additional work is required to fully understand and address the barriers to Indigenous student success

Holistic approaches and systemic frameworks implemented in districts are some of the leading practices that help schools see and support Indigenous students throughout their learning journeys. There continues to be a need for more research and collaboration to help narrow achievement gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, and also to

celebrate areas of success for Indigenous learners, to identify persistent barriers, and to address systemic racism within school systems.

Presentations

February 3, 2021

Concept of First Nations data sovereignty and work overview

Melissa Dane and Magnolia Perron, First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC)¹

This presentation offered an overview of the First Nations Information Governance Centre and the OCAP (Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession) principles. The work of the FNIGC is guided by a vision and mission developed by First Nations for First Nations, and endeavours to strengthen First Nations data sovereignty and self-determination. Information on the FNIGC and their online OCAP training course, is available on their website: <https://fnigc.ca/>

Braiding Indigeneity into data

Karla Helgason, British Columbia Ministry of Education

For the British Columbia Ministry of Education, improving Indigenous data relies on investing and rethinking processes or measurements, and adopting radical transparency to achieve reconciliation. This work relies on strong partnerships with Indigenous organizations and nations, and on the inclusion of Indigenous values, perspectives, and voices throughout the data lifecycle and the decision-making process.

<https://vimeo.com/625546884/be0eb59c81>

Teachers' readiness to support Indigenous students in Alberta

Janusz Zieminski, Alberta Education

The OECD's Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) was an opportunity for Alberta to fill the gaps in data, as little information is currently available to assess teachers' willingness and capacity to support Indigenous students and teach Indigenous content. TALIS allowed the province to gain data on teachers' pre-service training, their self-evaluated preparedness to teach Indigenous content and Indigenous students, and their professional development needs.

February 21, 2021

Measuring success in First Nations learning

Jarrett Laughlin, Assembly of First Nations (AFN)

This presentation advocated for a holistic understanding of measuring learning success. A holistic measurement framework steers away from policy and program development in response to learning deficits, and shifts to identifying solutions that recognize strengths and contributing factors in the community and home that can inform student success.

¹ For more information on the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC), please see fnigc.ca

Data-sharing agreements with First Nations education authorities

Chris Corley, Alberta Education

An overview of Alberta Education's data-sharing agreements with First Nations education authorities highlighted the goal to provide First Nations schools with the same information that is made available to public schools to ensure equitable access to data, analytics, and reporting that can support evidence-based decisions and strategic planning.

Indigenous education framework and the pathways to student success

Dan Ward, Mountain View School Division, Manitoba

In the spirit of inquiry and dialogue which is encouraged throughout school divisions in Manitoba, the Mountain View School Division developed a framework informed by data within its division plan to set the course on Indigenous education. Disaggregated data inform this conversation on Indigenous student success by exploring big questions related to the barriers and the pathways to completion, school wellness and mental health, the relationship between attendance and suspension, and initiatives that can support Indigenous students' sense of belonging and safety in school.

<https://vimeo.com/625547709/5181edfdff>

School District 48: Sea to Sky — leading for equity and excellence

Lisa McCullough, British Columbia School District 48

The British Columbia School District 48 encouraged Indigenous student success by creating conditions for equal access to opportunities and by implementing supports and programs aimed at empowering Indigenous students. This approach has narrowed the gap in completion rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. The school district is embedding a holistic perspective and including Indigenous ways of knowing at a system level to continue to learn how to further support Indigenous students by identifying and addressing specific barriers and systemic racism overall.

<https://vimeo.com/625547973/16a4598622>

April 6, 2021

Attendance as a predictor of Indigenous student graduation success

Rick Johnson, Saskatchewan Ministry of Education

This presentation explored the evidence that attendance is a strong and early predictor of student graduation success. Reflections were also shared on attendance as an indicator of other factors affecting student success, on listening to student voices and putting faces to the data, and on encouraging system-level changes to make a difference in the lives and success of Indigenous students.

<https://vimeo.com/625585224/f5519bcb52>

Approaches to self-identification: linking quantitative and qualitative data

Robert Riel, Director of Indigenous Education, Winnipeg School Division

The Winnipeg School division's success in encouraging self-identification among Indigenous students relies on building trust and relationships. This process includes professional development and training for staff, programs that can help student outcomes, and building capacity and representation of Indigenous educators in the classroom and schools.

<https://vimeo.com/625585870/1170e76fe2>

Using achievement to move towards equity

Christy Fennell, British Columbia School District 59

A relationship-based approach to learning is at the heart of improved graduation rates for Indigenous students at the British Columbia School District 59. Student success benefitted from nurturing a sense of belonging in the classroom, school, and district, and increasing student self-determination through engagement and collaborative partnerships with Indigenous families.

Upcoming events

CMEC is currently planning a Symposium on Indigenizing Education for July 2022, which will be a hybrid event, held both online and in person. The ultimate goal of the event is to provide educators and administrators with an opportunity to learn from leaders of Indigenous postsecondary institutions, with a focus on decolonizing education.

The symposium builds on emerging themes from the 2018 CMEC Symposium on Indigenizing Teacher Education, specifically those of partnerships, awareness, well-being, and change. An engagement process with Indigenous postsecondary institutions and Indigenous-led institutions, faculties, or partners within non-Indigenous establishments is currently underway to inform the event and gather insights on leading practices in the decolonization and Indigenization of education. Planning-related decision-making is expected to significantly and meaningfully consider the information or guidance shared by partners through this engagement process.