



# Sharing Our Voice

*Establishing an Indigenous Parent and  
Caregiver Advisory Council in EPSB*

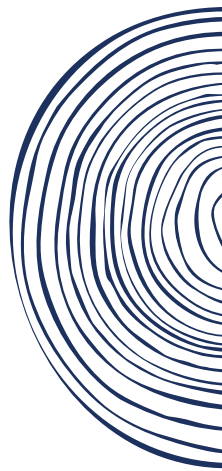
Annual Report 2018/19





"I'm coming back because I felt I was heard. It made a difference for me to have people listen."

– Council member



## Executive Summary

The Indigenous Parent and Caregiver Advisory Council was formed (a) to offer advice and input on issues of importance to schools and educators, and (b) to ensure that Indigenous parents, caregivers, and community members are heard and involved in meaningful ways to improve schools.

Emily Milne (MacEwan University), Jeanette Lean (Elder and Cultural Advisor), and John Holmes (Principal, Edmonton Public School Board) are working on this project in partnership with the Edmonton Public School Board (EPSB) and the support of 31 schools and principals across the W.P. Wagner and J. Percy Page School Catchment areas of EPSB. This project was made possible through the dedication and support of the Indigenous parents and caregivers who joined the Council and shared their perspectives, experiences, and input.

*This report provides an overview of activities and learnings to date, as well as future considerations.*

Insights that emerged from the 2018/19 year focus on, for both parents/caregivers and students, the appreciation of (i) being heard, respected, and valued; (ii) belonging, pride, and identity; and (iii) creating understanding and awareness.

These themes speak to the importance and value of establishing Indigenous parent and caregiver advisory councils and providing Indigenous families with a regular forum to engage in meaningful conversations about the education of their children. Moreover, creating a similar Council could be a valuable practice for other organizations wishing to address the Calls to Action that accompanied the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission final report.

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*"I want you to hear me.  
We're really fighting for that,  
because our ancestors cried when  
they died, because their voices  
weren't heard."*

*— Council member*

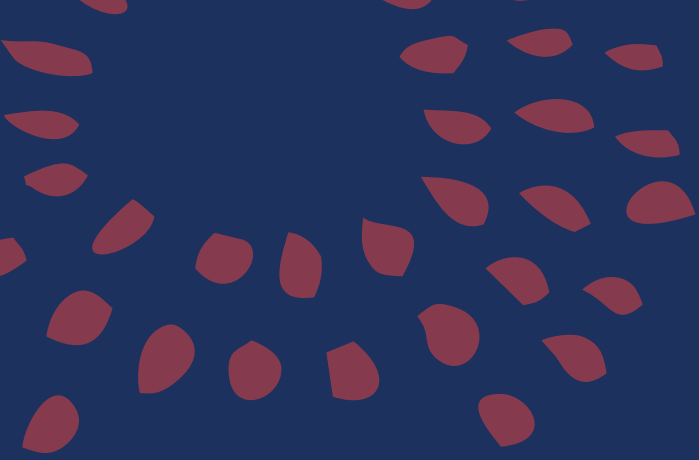
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Social Sciences and Humanities  
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Conseil de recherches en  
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## 1. Introduction



"I'm really grateful because I've learned so much. I've met so many principals, administrators, Board of Trustees, different types of people.

Most people that come, they're important just like we are, but we're equal when we're here, we're at the same table. We're not so equal when we're out in the real world. We say we are, but we're not, we're parents, they're administrators...But if we don't work together, we're missing something, and that's why we have to sit at these tables. As a mother advocate, this is my child and sitting at this table means so much to me. I sit here and I know that they value what I have to say...And I come every single time because it matters to me."

— Council member

Working in partnership with the EPSB and with the support of 31 schools in Edmonton Southeast, this project focuses on establishing and sustaining an advisory council comprised of Indigenous parents and caregivers alongside educators and other EPSB stakeholders. Council meetings engage participants in meaningful dialogue aimed at shaping educational policies and practices to further reflect Indigenous perspectives, experiences, and values. Council meetings take place monthly from 5 to 8 pm at Kate Chegwin Junior High School.

## a. Context

Educational mandates highlight the central role that parents play in children’s education, and this is supported by research showing a strong connection between parent involvement and students’ educational success.<sup>4,5,6,10,12,13,14</sup> Parent involvement is identified as an accountability measure for Alberta Education<sup>1</sup> and a priority in the EPSB District Strategic Plan.<sup>3</sup> Quality standards associated with “fostering effective relationships” also apply to all educators and administrators in Alberta.<sup>7,8,9</sup> For example, leadership quality standards include “creating opportunities for parents/guardians, as partners in education, to take an active role in their children’s education.”<sup>8</sup>

For many Indigenous families and communities in Canada, however, legacies of residential schooling and other negative school experiences have contributed to a disconnection between home and school.<sup>2,11,15,17,18</sup> In response, the Calls to Action that accompany the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) final report emphasize the need for full participation of Indigenous parents in the education of their children (Calls 10.vi., 10.vii.). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) also identifies “engaging families” as a priority to supporting Indigenous student success.<sup>16</sup> In line with the TRC and OECD, there are quality standards specific to engaging Indigenous parents. For example, teacher quality standards include “inviting First Nations, Métis and Inuit parents/guardians, Elders/knowledge keepers, cultural advisors and local community members into the school.”<sup>17</sup> Creating the Indigenous Parent and Caregiver Advisory Council aligns directly with these significant directives and priorities.

## b. Background

In 2017, Milne, Lean, and Holmes came together to start this initiative through a district approval research process. The first year (2017/18) focused on creating a space for Indigenous parents and caregivers to share their experiences and insights regarding their own schooling experiences and those of their children. These experiences and perspectives were shared back with the W.P. Wagner School Catchment area (group of 10 schools), and several promising practices

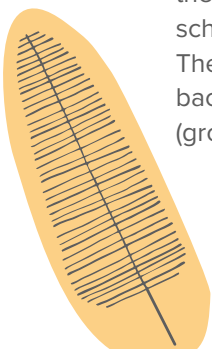
were subsequently discussed and supported by the catchment (e.g., regular Cree language classes, June welcome events for Indigenous families new to the schools).

Two changes happened in year two (2018/19). First, based on learning that happened in year one and feedback received from participating schools, the second year of the project focused directly on establishing an Indigenous Parent and Caregiver Advisory Council to (a) provide a forum where parents/caregivers could share their voice and unique perspective related to education and schooling, and (b) bring Council members together with key EPSB stakeholders—including trustees, assistant superintendents, directors, school administrators, and teachers—to engage in an authentic two-way dialogue. Second, the J. Percy Page School Catchment area schools (group of 21 schools) joined as participating schools and partners in this project.

Tobacco was offered at each meeting, and Elder Jeanette Lean opened meetings with a smudge ceremony and blessing. A meal was shared, child care was provided, and bus tickets were given



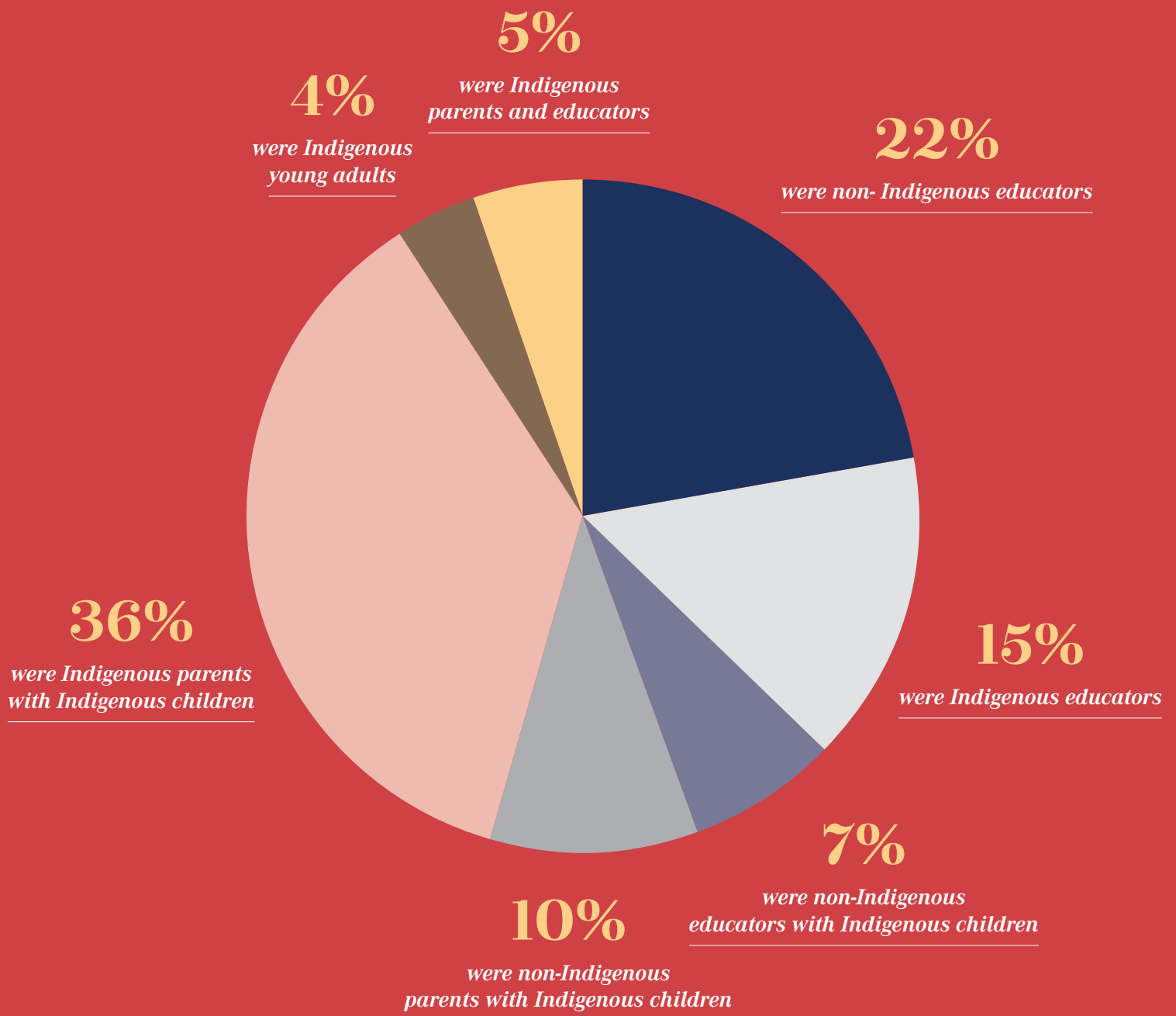
to cover costs of transportation to meetings. The discussion portion of the meetings began with a check-in circle, followed by meaningful conversation and dialogue facilitated by Elder Lean and a closing circle. Elder Lean then read a story to the children, and books were gifted to families in appreciation of



# Breakdown of participants who attended the seven Council meetings in the 2018/19 school year



Among the 135 participants:





their time and contributions. Elder Lean selected the books to gift specifically to teach the children about Indigenous cultures and traditions and to reinforce the importance of literacy.

School administrators and educators from participating schools contributed to topics discussed at the meetings, as well as attended and participated in meetings. Holmes and Milne presented at the W.P. Wagner Catchment and J. Percy Page Catchment principal group meetings to provide updates, insights, and suggestions made by the Council.

### **c. Project details: Participants**

Parents and caregivers of Indigenous children and youth in EPSB were invited to participate. To promote the Council, an invitation flyer was designed for each meeting and shared with principals at all 31 schools in the W.P. Wagner and J. Percy Page Catchment areas. Principals posted the flyer on SchoolZone, printed and posted copies of the flyer at their school locations, included the flyer in school communications (e.g., newsletters), and shared the flyer with families of self-identified students. Members of the Council also received friendly reminders about dates and times of meetings.

Seven meetings took place in the 2018/19 school year. Holmes, Milne, and Lean attended every meeting, along with alternating school principals and educators from the partnering schools. Several EPSB trustees, staff from the EPSB district office, and two assistant superintendents also attended meetings. All attendees from the EPSB shared a common sentiment: they valued the dialogue and knowledge gleaned from attending the Council meetings.

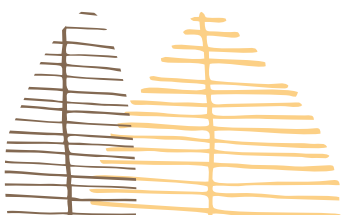
### **d. Project details: Meeting topics and structure**

School administrators from participating schools as well as parents/caregivers who participated in this project in 2017/18 contributed to the topics discussed at the meetings in 2018/19. Topics included implementing the teacher quality standards, fostering meaningful family/school relationships, and exploring conflict sources and management. In some cases, painful and emotional experiences stemming from

events that spanned beyond the scope of education emerged in conversation, such as the tragedy of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. Participants acknowledged that schools play a vital role in educating students about these events and heightening social conscience. Flexibility was afforded in meeting agendas to allow group members to express themselves and support one another as they collectively processed the events.

Meetings took the form of a focus group, which is an exploratory research method used to gather in-depth, detailed qualitative information about the attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of participants. Each meeting had three or four open-ended questions about the topic. Milne and Lean moderated and facilitated the discussion. All participants signed consent forms. With permission from participants, meetings were audio recorded, and audio recordings were transcribed. Transcriptions were immediately de-identified. The de-identified and summarized participant responses have been analyzed by way of thematic analysis and are shared in this document. This project was approved by the MacEwan University Research Ethics Board and by EPSB's Research and Innovation for Student Learning Office.

Milne, Holmes, and Lean collaboratively determined the focus of the project, as well as its aims and activities. They shared leadership and work as equal participants in this project, each contributing their own ideas and perspectives as well as valued knowledge and skills. Input shared by Elder Lean ensured that activities were meaningful and respectful and that processes moved forward in a good way. Principals of schools partnering on this project also had input on the current activities and future directions of the Council. When in attendance, trustees and representatives from the Office of the Superintendent contributed by introducing themselves, describing their roles and types of support that they offer, and listening to conversations. Council members became more active in meeting organization, and their dedication and support was invaluable to the success and continuation of this project.





## e. Report organization

A summary of what we have learning thus far is provided in this document. This summary is drawn primarily from the five Council meetings and debrief sessions with Lean, Holmes, and Milne that took place on October 25 and November 29 of 2018, and March 7, April 25, and May 30 of 2019. Information was also collected from a survey distributed in May 2019 to administrators and educators who have supported the Council. Eleven responded (3.82% response rate), and among those, nine completed the survey.

Two additional meetings stemmed from formal invitations from the EPSB to the Council and were held on January 17 and June 11, 2019. Information from these meetings is not included in this report. The first meeting aimed to invite feedback from the Council on the EPSB draft policy on First Nations, Métis, and Inuit education and was attended by several trustees as well as representatives from the Office of the Superintendent. The second was an

invitation to attend an EPSB Board meeting where the same draft policy was finalized by the Board.

The following section is organized around three central themes discussed at Council meetings: (a) applying foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples; (b) fostering meaningful relationships between Indigenous families and schools; and (c) supporting Indigenous students. Three subthemes emerged as significant to all topics discussed: (i) being heard, respected, and valued; (ii) belonging, pride, and identity; and (iii) creating understanding and awareness.

For confidentiality purposes, “Council member” refers to parents and caregivers of Indigenous students who are members of the Indigenous Parent and Caregiver Advisory Council. “Educator” refers to educators, administrators, and other EPSB District staff who participated in Council meetings.



"Parents want to be involved and we have a ton of knowledge within us."

— Council member

### a. Applying foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples

#### Being heard, respected, and valued

Council members acknowledged that developing and applying knowledge about Indigenous peoples within teaching practice, as outlined in the teacher quality standards, is a vast undertaking. They offered legitimate support, reasoning that many parents and caregivers of Indigenous students are interested in supporting educators who teach about histories, cultures, languages, contributions, perspectives, experiences, and contemporary contexts of Indigenous peoples. For example, the Council member quoted below spoke about the positive experience that arose from volunteering in her daughter's class to teach the students about sage and sweet grass and the smudging ceremony.

*"We talked about it, and the teacher just didn't know...as a parent, I was really disappointed. So I'm like, this is an opportunity for me as a parent to help out, and I said, 'I can come in and help you'... I was so happy because they recognized me in her class... That was really cool, and my [child's] friends are like, 'You're Aboriginal?' 'Yeah!' It made [my child] more proud in her class."*

There are mutual benefits from the promising practice of incorporating parents as partners in education.<sup>78</sup> As discussed at Council meetings, parents who have knowledge and are able to share that knowledge may become resources to support educator professional learning as well as classroom learning and schooling events. A directory of names, contact information, and knowledge areas may be created listing parents/caregivers who could be invited to share knowledge, experiences, and input from both a parent perspective and an Indigenous perspective. This kind of initiative may advance a shared understanding of what parents as partners looks like in practice. As shared by an educator:

*"We don't have all the answers as teachers... I could bring a parent in and honour them for what they know... It could be a catchment resource around improving teacher practice."*

As previously discussed, Council members and educators present at the meetings agreed on the significant role that schools play in teaching students about historical events and social injustices and heightening our collective societal conscience. Topics of importance to Council members also included residential schools and their legacy, the historical negotiating and management of treaties, and injustices faced by Indigenous girls and women.

Council members discussed the importance of exposing students to Indigenous leaders and role models, and they appreciate when schools have books available and posters and pictures on display about Indigenous peoples as well as histories, cultures, and languages.

One promising practice shared by a Council member pertained to Orange Shirt Day. Her child's principal gave more reverence to the impact of residential schools by implementing a moment of silence at the beginning of the day in recognition of the residential school system. The Council member felt that the gesture "was so much more powerful and more moving—that was amazing."

### Belonging, pride, and identity

Council members acknowledged that efforts made by educators to develop and apply foundational knowledge about Indigenous peoples were a worthy and significant undertaking. They spoke about educators needing to "take things slow," "just take baby steps," and start from a place of belonging and relationships. As explained by a Council member:

*"We can't expect teachers to know everything because I am learning too. You hear our Elders say that all the time: 'We are learning, we are learning together'... It's building that relationship, and it is going back to the treaty relationship, which was when the newcomers came. They became our cousins and we became a family. So it starts with relationships first... It's about belonging, relationships. Everything else will fall into place."*

Belonging and respect were the first and foremost considerations emphasized by Council members. The spirit of reconciliation is captured when educators exercise sensitivity and consideration for Indigenous students' feelings, traditions, and ways of being, knowing, and doing to create an inclusive and supportive environment. According to one Council member, "The kids feel they belong because of things that happened at school. It's not that they went over the treaties." As summarized by an educator attending the meeting, "Before we have success as teachers to apply foundational knowledge, we need all kids to have a sense of

belonging." This educator went on to say, "That's something I can do in my school."

### Creating understanding and awareness

Several Council members recognized that educators are creating "a very supportive environment" for students and want to see them succeed. However, when it comes to including knowledge and content about Indigenous peoples in classroom learning, Council members recognized that educators may benefit from more and continuous learning opportunities. As mentioned by one Council member, "How do we expect them to do better if they are not given the tools to do better?" Another Council member said they "just don't know." There was a shared understanding about the benefit of more pre-service and on-the-job opportunities as well as the challenges associated with dedicating time to develop knowledge and understanding about Indigenous perspectives and experiences.

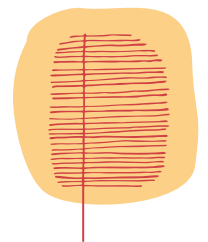
Council members also said that, when teaching about Indigenous peoples, it "has to come from the right place"—in other words, teaching with good intentions, being sensitive, and being sincere and genuine in efforts. The Council member quoted below suggested that educators can teach about Indigenous peoples and historical events but not lead or facilitate a ceremony.

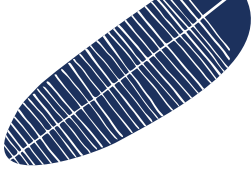
*"So long as you're doing something from the right mindset, from the heart. So long as you're doing it with good intentions. And as long as you're not going to start doing a pipe or a sweat."*

## **b. Fostering meaningful relationships between Indigenous families and schools**

*"I didn't have a voice when my kids were younger, but now I do, and now I'm sticking up for my kids...the parents have to have a voice, and the students have to have a voice and be listened to."*

*—Council member*





### Being heard, respected, and valued

Council members expressed appreciation for the opportunity to meet and be heard. They spoke about the importance of having a voice and being respected and valued by educators. They felt that sharing their perspectives and experiences with EPSB educators and administrators will benefit their children, children from other Indigenous families, and future generations of Indigenous children. As explained by a Council member:

*“I want you to hear me. We’re really fighting for that, because our ancestors cried when they died, because their voices weren’t heard... I’m proud to hear you share, proud to hear your voice, all of us here. Because hearing the ancestors’ cries, the doors they try to knock down, and nobody heard them. And now we’re still pounding on that, it hurts. If I walk into a school, I should be able to walk in and nobody’s gonna label me or put a condition on me, and the condition is that I have no voice... That’s where they took our voice away, and we need to get that back... We can make a difference.”*

Council members expressed their appreciation for teachers and administrators who address them “on one level” and stated that they felt valued when their knowledge, lived experiences and perspectives were acknowledged in their child’s school. They welcomed the opportunity to be actively involved and contributing members within their school communities and sought opportunities to collaborate positively with school staff members.

### Belonging, pride, and identity

Much time to date was focused on building a solid foundation for the Council, rooted in relationships, trust, respect, and a shared vision of supporting Indigenous students. Council members as well as educators who attend were getting to know each other, greeting each other with hugs, asking for life and family updates, and creating bonds that extend beyond Council meetings. As one Council member said, “That’s why this group is successful, because we built those relationships.” As explained by another Council member, establishing relationships is fundamental:

*“As First Nation...for me having to jump in with two feet, I have to be sure that relationship is there and to ensure that we have one vision... it’s hard to engage in something that you’re not sure where each individual is coming from—the background, the culture, the language, the ceremonies they go through.”*

Many Council members shared traumatic experiences that happened during their own schooling, their parents’ and family members’ schooling, and their children’s and grandchildren’s schooling. This period of sharing was necessary to establish understanding and awareness of where people were coming from, what they had been through, and what their perspectives were. These powerful memories provided a platform of mutual understanding and respect and allowed conversations to move forward with a collective mindset that we were working as partners.

Consideration was also given to the significance of opening each meeting with a smudge ceremony and blessing and ensuring Elder Jeanette Lean was present. Several Council members talked about feeling safe to be open and share, and feeling that they were equal at the table during Council meetings with educators and administrators. Council members also expressed their appreciation for the fellowship that developed between themselves and other Council members. They appreciated being invited into a space where they felt included, comfortable, and supported by Elders and other parents.

### Creating understanding and awareness

For several Council members, their parents were not involved in their education, and there was not a “shared understanding” about the need to be involved or interact with the educators. As explained by a Council member, parents want to have a relationship with the school that is different than the one their parents had:

*“My mom attended residential school for nine years...and my parents didn’t have any involvement in my education. They never walked in a school and never went to a parent interview... There was that stigma, and I guess there wasn’t a shared understanding for them.”*

Council members want their children to succeed in school, and some see the school as being part of their children's community and "second family." One Council member saw it as her "responsibility" to have a relationship with the educators, administrators, and secretary at her child's school because, by extension, they would also have a relationship and respect for her child and keep her child safe. She said, "That's my ownership of it: I make sure I have a relationship with the school. That's my job as her mom." Council members also recognized that parents and caregivers are engaged in different ways. Many are unable to volunteer or attend at the school for various reasons but still care about their children's education and, for example, support learning at home (e.g., asking about school, helping with homework, reading books).

As mentioned, parents take pride in supporting the inclusion of Indigenous cultures, perspectives, and histories in classroom learning. They want to be authentically involved. This support is enhanced with the presence of Elders, Indigenous role models, educators, and volunteers. These individuals can play a critical role in schools with reference to preventing

misunderstandings and practices that might be perceived as insensitive. For example, the Council member quoted below spoke about a time she gifted her child's school a dreamcatcher:

*"We gifted the school a dreamcatcher that my uncle made, and they didn't hang it up...instead of understanding it was a gift that should be honoured, they put it away in a box and left it there like it was nothing... I went back and I saw it on the ground, and I was like, 'Oh, my goodness!' I had someone smudge it. I spoke to the principal... I explained to her why it was gifted to the school and there was a teaching that went with it and why it was important that it was put back where all the students that were Aboriginal could see it... It's not that they don't care—a lot of time, they don't know."*

Another benefit stemming from the presence of Indigenous liaison workers, success coaches, and Elders working in schools is the ability they have to connect regularly with families and create opportunities for parents to attend at the school



and get involved. Elders may also have an important role within schools, offering support and guidance to families and students, creating welcoming environments for community and families, promoting awareness and understanding, and ensuring proper protocols and processes are followed. Referring to Elder participation in the Council, one Council member said, “I don’t think the group would have the courage and strength to speak up like that without you here.”

## c. Supporting Indigenous students

*“We have to speak up for our children, because so many of them won’t and so many of them can’t.”*

*–Council member*

### Being heard, respected, and valued

Council members spoke about wanting to stand with educators and administrators and be part of the school community supporting all students. Council members explained that some students are deeply impacted by social issues that they encounter in the broader community, such as racial profiling and discrimination. Negative experiences may be internalized by some students and contribute to students feeling like they do not have value. These feelings can be carried with them when they enter schools. Given these concerns, Council members appreciated the emphasis being placed on creating inclusive, welcoming, and caring environments in schools. Schools can also play a significant role in challenging and addressing negative attitudes about racism in society by creating understanding and awareness about Indigenous peoples among students and, by extension, families and communities.

For example, the Council member quoted below spoke about a conversation she had with her son:

*“The world has completely been set up that you’re going to fail already...nobody’s expecting you to succeed...you will go through your whole life knowing that this weight is on your shoulders... They’ll fall into the cracks because nobody told them that they can do better...because they have as much value as any other person.”*

Indigenous girls, specifically, may be treated differently in the broader community and see themselves differently as they encounter realities associated with many Indigenous women and girls going missing and being murdered. According to one Council member, for Indigenous girls, “all of a sudden, the light dies in her.” Another Council member explained further:

*“There’s something that happens. They shut down. They are not these adventurous, outgoing little girls anymore. It’s a huge thing that has to do with society... They don’t join extracurricular activities. They’re not the ones who raise their hands... And these girls walk with their heads down, and they feel very depressed, and they’re ready to quit... So we need to find a way that we can make these girls feel that they have the same amount of value as the rest of them and make society realize that our lives matter too.”*

In response, Council members spoke about the importance of schools creating opportunities to recognize and empower students, present them as leaders, and find outlets where they can find success. Promising practices noted by Council members included presenting an annual Indigenous leadership award, inviting students to volunteer in the community, and providing students with the opportunity to contribute to Indigenous cultural and learning events at the school.

Council members also shared promising practices associated with teaching students about resiliency and overcoming challenges and about empowering students to share their voice. As one Council member said, “Just allowing the child to have a voice and be heard—I think that’s huge for their success.” Talking about her daughter, another Council member explained that her daughter “felt safe” and “validated” by knowing she could share her story with her educators and have her voice and perspective heard.

### Belonging, pride, and identity

According to Council members, a strong sense of identity, pride in who they are, and a feeling of belonging among students contributes to the confidence they bring to their education. For Council members, encouraging students to feel that they belong and that they are appreciated and accepted at school is crucial. “Belonging is everything,” as one Council member explained. This sentiment was



captured by another Council member who spoke about how her child has benefitted from being in a school where his Indigenous identity has been nurtured through various cultural activities and opportunities. She said he is “growing” and “coming into his own,” and he recently told her, “I’m growing my hair long... You know that’s where our strength comes from.”

A different Council member quoted below said that “things are happening, and I’m very grateful” about changes that were happening at her child’s school. By changes, she was referring to culture and ceremony being recognized at school, which encouraged her daughter to feel “proud” of her Indigenous identity.

*“[My child] tells everybody she is First Nation and she is proud—but she is able to be proud of that now. Before she was proud, but she didn’t know if it’s ok. There was nobody fostering that with her at school even though we did at home and taught her. But at school, they taught everything else. Now at school, it’s different. Now, she did drumming; she did singing; they had Aboriginal dancing at the school. They never had that before.”*



The benefit of having Indigenous liaison workers and Indigenous success coaches working in school buildings was discussed at almost every meeting. Students can identify with these individuals and look

to them as role models, and students and parents can feel comfortable coming to them for help navigating issues and schooling processes. Since “some parents don’t have a voice...don’t know what questions to ask and where to go for help,” staff in these roles were recognized as individuals who can “stand behind” parents and students and offer a safe place and guidance.

One Council member spoke about an issue that took place at school involving her child. The issue did not have the outcome the Council member wanted, but they were satisfied “because [she] got heard,” and this was because of the help provided by the liaison worker.

### Creating understanding and awareness

Council members discussed how powerful it can be when educators take the time to know where students are coming from, to get to know them as individuals, and to understand the circumstances and realities that students are dealing with. As one Council member stated, “How can you help if you don’t know?” This feeling was echoed by another Council member who explained the following:

*“The legacy of residential schools, it has significantly impacted family structures, so many First Nations children, so heartbreaking. Many of them are not with their first families... These kids come from some challenging family backgrounds and from generational trauma caused by the residential schools. It’s not just about these kids and their culture. It’s bringing back that culture that they lost, and it’s important for teachers to understand where these kids are coming from—just not from them, from their parents and way back the line that has affected them in such a unique way.”*

Council members are encouraged by the commitment demonstrated by educators to teach all students about Indigenous peoples, cultures, and histories. Creating a shared understanding is a way to be proactive as well as responsive to negative interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Council members recognize that diversity and difference can sometimes lead to tensions and that there is a need for “honouring culture diversity and promoting intercultural understanding.” As one Council member stated, “We’re





in a multicultural school, and the kids just don't know, and their parents don't know." The following educator shared that she felt "happy" and "hopeful" after a presentation to students:

*"We were talking about the missing and murdered women. And it's always sad to talk about that, but it made me hopeful because after the presentation, the non-Native kids were overwhelmed, because they said, 'We never knew this. We had no idea this was going on.' And I said, 'So what can we do now?' And they said to me, 'We have to tell other people now. We have to tell our families. We have to tell everybody we know that this is what's happening to the Native people.'"*

Like this educator, Council members want schools to "give kids that knowledge and [teach] the kids about who we are." Council members also feel that Indigenous cultural activities and learning are more meaningful when they are taught inclusively and made available and open to all students. Council members and educators again spoke about the benefits of having Indigenous peoples represented in the school as educators, secretaries, and liaison workers, among other roles, since, as mentioned by one Council member, "if we are visible, the kids are learning respectful things about us."

### 3. Does This Council Have Value?



*"We're putting a voice to the silence of generations of discrimination towards our children and our people."*

The power and the value of this group; we're breaking the silence. You can't put a price on it...That's what our ancestors wanted us to do, to bring back the strength and voice that we had."

– *Council member*

#### a. Council members

Council members were consulted about whether creating and sustaining this Council had value. They agreed that the Council had value for the practice of educators at their school, for their school community, and for Indigenous families (parents/caregivers and their children) in the school community. When asked directly about the value of the Council, Council members said the following:

*"I absolutely want 100% to know it's moving forward – for my kids and everybody else's kids."*

*"It's wonderful to have principals here that are dedicated to listening."*

*"Keep, continue, totally valuable. Build on my hope for our children attending EPSB will be treated fairly and with more respect."*

Most Council members agreed that their decision to attend meetings was influenced by the smudge ceremony and prayer at the beginning of meetings, the relevance of the topics discussed, the presence of an Elder, a meal being provided, and the Council proceedings being recorded for research purposes. Some also noted that factors influencing their attendance included principals and other district leaders being present, consistent attendance by the same Council members, and the meeting being concluded with an Elder reading to their children and sharing a book. A few were influenced in their decision to attend by the fact that bus tickets were given to cover costs of transportation to meetings and supervision and activities were provided for the children.



## b. Educators

Educators who attended Council meetings and responded to the survey said positive things about starting the Council, attending meetings, and learning from Council members about how to improve their school and teaching practices. Comments from educators included the following:

*“This is exactly what we need to hear so we can make some changes.”*

*“I am very honoured and proud to be here.”*

*“This is what I hoped to get out of this, so that I can go back to my school and make sure that all of my kids feel valued and my families feel valued, and everyone that walks through that building is valued and cared for and loved and heard. Everyone deserves that.”*

*“This group is an invaluable resource for teacher professional development.”*

*“Just to be here and witness and listen and learn—I mean, that’s what I hoped to get out of it.”*

*“This is such a powerful group not only for our Indigenous families, but for all of us who attend. It is important to come together and do our best as a united community for the betterment of our students and their success.”*

When asked directly, several educators agreed that knowledge gained from this Council would inform their own practice. Several educators also agreed that this Council had value for the practice of educators at their school, for Indigenous families at their school, and for their school community more generally.

Survey respondents were asked to what extent they felt that their support of the Council and/or participation in Council meetings contributed to achieving components of the teacher quality standards.

Seven out of eight agreed that the Council contributed to:

- » acting consistently with fairness, respect, and integrity;
- » demonstrating empathy and a genuine caring for others; and
- » inviting First Nations, Métis, and Inuit parents/guardians, Elders/knowledge keepers, cultural advisors, and local community members into the school.

Eight out of eight agreed that the Council contributed to:

- » providing culturally appropriate and meaningful opportunities for parents/guardians, as partners in education, to support student learning;
- » honouring cultural diversity and promoting intercultural understanding;
- » building capacity to support student success in inclusive, welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environments;
- » enhancing understanding of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit world views, cultural beliefs, languages, and values;
- » developing and applying foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples;
- » capacity building in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit education; and
- » building relationships for the benefit of both the students and the community.





## 4. Looking Back and Looking Forward



"Knowing that Edmonton Public Schools actually wants to hear what it's like from our perspective and find ways to make the programs work for us.

I was so blown away. I never thought of anything that would be so empowering...it's really reaching people on a whole new level. It's absolutely exciting!"

– Council member

### a. Successes and lessons learned

#### Highlights:

- I. The formation of the Council, the support from catchment principals/schools, and the support from EPSB reflect concrete actions that are making steps toward reconciliation.
- II. EPSB Trustees sought input from the Council in January 2019 on a draft policy for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit education.
- III. Trustees invited Council members to a Board meeting at the District office where the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit education policy was finalized.
- IV. The Council had multiple mentions in EPSB's Annual Education Results Report (2017–18).
- V. Council members took it upon themselves to attend Indigenous parent welcome events held at several schools in the W.P. Wagner School Catchment area in June 2019 to welcome families and promote the Council.
- VI. Milne, Lean, and Holmes were invited to present to the Edmonton Education Society about the Council.
- VII. Experiences and perspectives shared during meetings in 2017/18 contributed to changes made in at least four schools (e.g., regular Cree classes, June welcome events for Indigenous families new to the schools).

### *Lessons learned:*

- I. Opening and closing circles were important to the cohesiveness and closure of meetings.
- II. Council members appreciated knowing the meeting topic and the questions to be discussed, and they appreciated receiving a copy of the agenda ahead of time. They also appreciated that copies of the agenda and paper were available at the meetings for note taking and following along.
- III. An attempt was made to remove potential barriers to participation. For example, bus tickets were provided to cover the cost of transportation to and from meetings, child care and a meal were provided, and additional food was sent home. Sitting together—educators, administrators, trustees, Elders, parents/caregivers, and children—and sharing a meal together helped remove the feeling of differences and hierarchies and allowed people to sit together at the meeting table as equals.
- IV. Learning is still taking place around the following:  
(a) navigating the complexity of meeting facilitation, which involves balancing the need to keep discussions on track and on time and allowing participants to be heard and to share their voices and experiences; (b) determining the appropriate ratio between educators and administrators and Council members; and (c) navigating how to ensure there is time for discussing topics as well as for bonding and trust building.

## **b. Future considerations**

*“Now you do know. So what are you going to do with that knowledge? [...] Where do we go with it?”*

*–Council member*

There are several considerations moving forward:

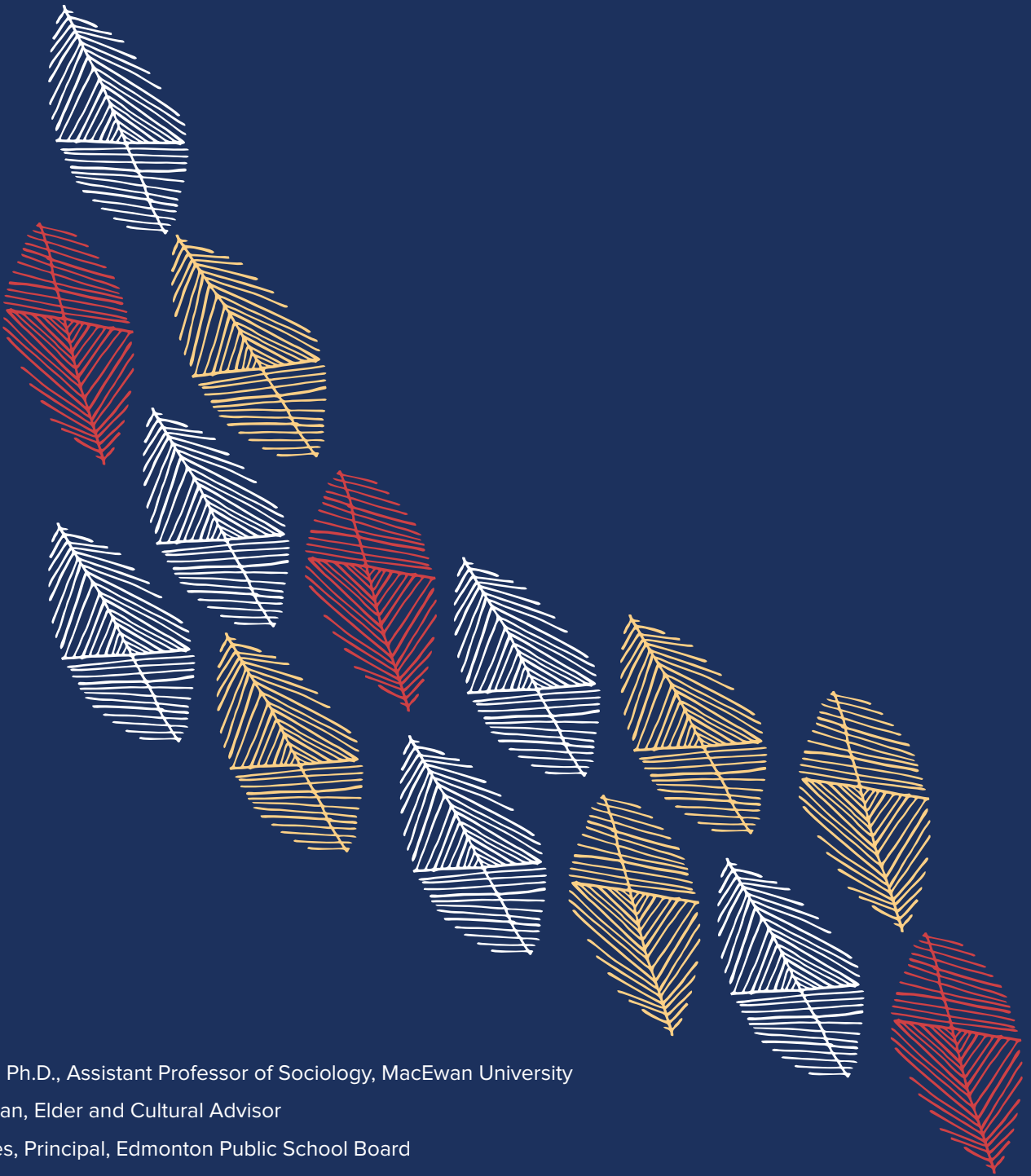
- I. Council members expressed interest in more opportunities for bonding as a group as well as opportunities to engage in ceremony and cultural learning.
- II. Consideration is being given toward how to best honour, recognize, and celebrate Council members for their ongoing time and dedication to the project.
- III. Children’s books with cultural teachings from the Grandmother and Grandfather Book Series were gifted to Council members and educators who participated in meetings. Recognizing the significance of both child and adult literacy and learning, next year, books shared will target a variety of age groups on topics including language, history, and cultural teachings.
- IV. Broader interest in the Council was expressed. Milne, Lean, Holmes, and Council members were approached about this initiative by educators and administrators from other EPSB schools and community organizations about getting involved or starting their own Council. Further, on several occasions, Council members expressed the desire to connect with other similar Indigenous parent/ caregiver groups or Councils in EPSB or Edmonton.





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