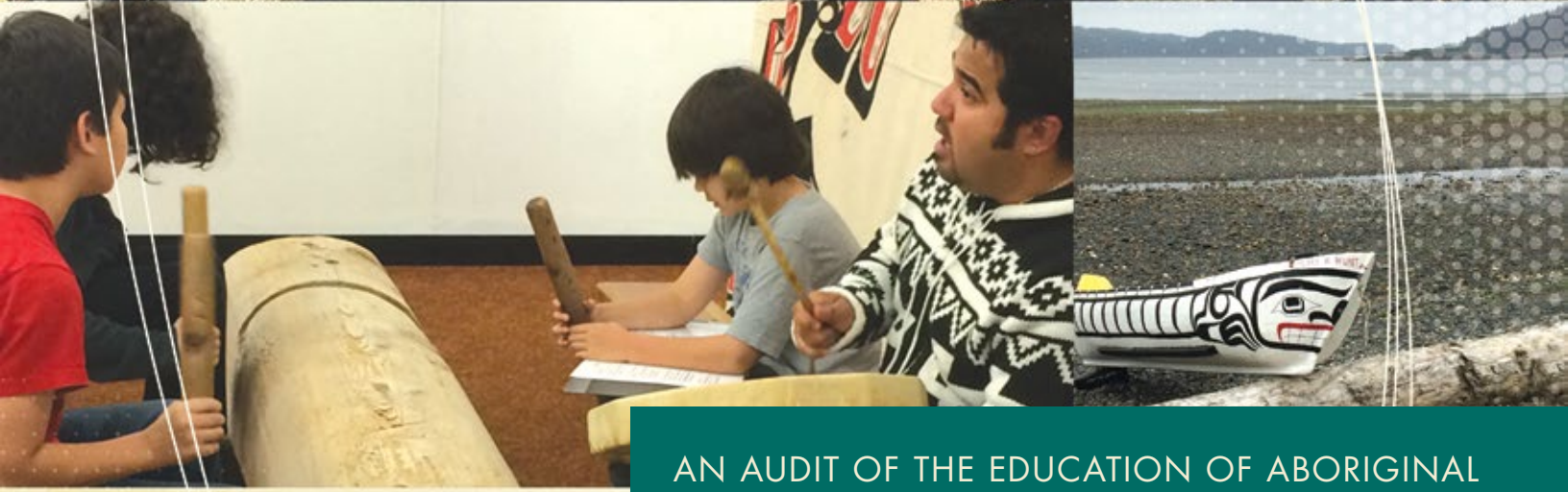


November 2015



## AN AUDIT OF THE EDUCATION OF ABORIGINAL STUDENTS IN THE B.C. PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

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The Honourable Linda Reid  
Speaker of the Legislative Assembly  
Province of British Columbia  
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Victoria, British Columbia  
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Dear Madame Speaker:

I have the honour to transmit to the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia my report, *An Audit of the Education of Aboriginal Students in the B.C. Public School System*.

We conducted this audit under the authority of section 11 (8) of the *Auditor General Act* and in accordance with the standards for assurance engagements set out by the Chartered Professional Accountants of Canada (CPA) in the CPA Canada Handbook – Assurance, and in accordance with Value-for-Money Auditing in the Public Sector.



Carol Bellringer, FCPA, FCA  
Auditor General  
Victoria, B.C.  
November 2015

Cover Photos: Welcome dance (Tlasala) performed by the Kwakiutl (Kwagiulth) First Nation for the audit team on their fieldwork visit to Vancouver Island North, School District #85.

Kwak'wala Language and Cultural Teacher Harold Nelson (Sisaxolas) singing traditional songs with students Seth Hunt (left) and Roman Child (right).

Canoe photo taken at Tsaxis, Kwakiutl village at Fort Rupert near Port Hardy B.C., Vancouver Island.



# AUDITOR GENERAL'S COMMENTS

**TEN YEARS AGO**, the B.C. government committed to close the social and economic gaps between First Nations and other British Columbians – including a commitment to achieve parity in education outcomes for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students by 2015. At the time, the graduation rate for Aboriginal students was less than 50%, compared to more than 80% for non-Aboriginal students. Last year, 62% of Aboriginal students graduated with their peers. The gap is narrowing, but more can be done.

Although the Ministry of Education has made improvements and B.C. has better results for Aboriginal students compared to other jurisdictions, there are still districts in B.C. where less than 50% of Aboriginal students graduate with their peers. The ministry must collaborate with boards of education, superintendents, and Aboriginal leaders and communities on a single, shared, system-wide strategy to close the gaps for Aboriginal students. The ministry needs to intervene when results are not being achieved.

All levels of governments have recognized their social, moral and legal obligations to increase the number of Aboriginal students graduating. This was reinforced by the federal government's Truth and Reconciliation Commission on residential schools, which stated that "reconciliation must create a more equitable and inclusive society by closing the gaps in social, health and economic outcomes that exist between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians."

The Aboriginal population is one of the fastest growing in B.C. Graduating means greater opportunities: employment, health and overall well-being. And ultimately, a better educated population supports a stronger provincial economy.

The ministry can do more to support non-racist learning environments: every child should feel safe; Aboriginal history, language and culture need



**CAROL BELLRINGER, FCPA, FCA**  
*Auditor General*

## AUDITOR GENERAL'S COMMENTS

to be valued; and educators need to expect that all Aboriginal students will graduate. Although we emphasize graduation rates and provincial assessment results in our report, we recognize that education is more than academic achievement. Education should also achieve important social outcomes such as social responsibility, personal development, behaviour, attitudes and work habits.

I am encouraged that the ministry is working with boards and Aboriginal partners on a number of new and ongoing initiatives to improve education outcomes for Aboriginal students. In addition, the ministry has accepted our 11 recommendations. We focused on Aboriginal students, but our recommendations should improve the public education system in ways that will benefit all students.

I would like to thank everyone we spoke with during our audit, especially trustees, school district staff and Aboriginal people who invited us into their schools and communities to gain a greater understanding of their commitment to the success of Aboriginal students.



Carol Bellringer, FCPA, FCA  
Auditor General  
Victoria, B.C.  
November 2015

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**EDUCATION OUTCOMES FOR** Aboriginal students in the B.C. public school system have historically been poor, when compared to outcomes for non-Aboriginal students.

In 2005, the B.C. government publicly committed to close the gaps in education outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students by 2015. At the time, Aboriginal students graduated at a rate of 49%, compared to 82% for non-Aboriginal students.

Outcomes for Aboriginal students have improved and provincially, the gap is narrowing. The graduation rate for Aboriginal students increased to 62% in 2014, compared to an increase from 82% in 2005 to 87% for non-Aboriginal students. However, there continue to be persistent and significant gaps in many school districts and for certain groups of students, including First Nations students living on reserve and Aboriginal children in care.

## OVERALL CONCLUSION

Despite government's public commitment in 2005, the Ministry of Education (ministry) had not fully exercised its duties and powers to close the gaps for Aboriginal students. Specifically, the ministry:

- ◆ had not provided the education system with sufficient leadership and direction to close the gaps
- ◆ undertook limited analysis of the wide range of student outcome data it monitored, to understand trends and outcomes for Aboriginal students and inform change
- ◆ reported on outcomes but not what was effective in closing the gaps

## MINISTRY LEADERSHIP

The ministry has not developed a shared, system-wide strategy to close the gap in outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, in collaboration with boards, superintendents, and Aboriginal leaders and communities. A strategy, with distinct responsibilities and accountabilities for the ministry and boards, and specific actions, targets and timelines, would focus the system on a common goal and enable follow-up when expectations are not met. Actions should include evaluating the effectiveness of targeted funding and enhancement agreements as strategies to close the gaps in education outcomes. There should also be support to ensure boards have the capacity to achieve results.

In the absence of clear direction and a focused and shared system-wide effort, the education system may continue to fail many Aboriginal students by not closing the gaps as rapidly as possible, across all districts.

Welcoming and supportive learning environments are key elements of student success. Within its mandate, the ministry can do more to address obstacles to ensuring safe, non-racist and culturally relevant learning environments for Aboriginal students.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### UNDERSTANDING RESULTS

Educators, administrators and decision makers need to know what is working and what should change. For decades, the ministry has monitored student data, trends, and results and shared this information with boards and the public. However, its analysis of this valuable information has been limited. More in-depth analysis would help the ministry understand why Aboriginal students have poorer outcomes in some contexts and better outcomes in others. This understanding should be used to inform ministry policy decisions and guidance to boards.

Although the ministry has shared data, not all boards have the capacity to analyze and use it. There is a role for the ministry to support boards and district staff to understand and use the wealth of data available. There is also an opportunity for the ministry to monitor additional indicators to better understand outcomes and inform strategies to support Aboriginal student success.

### PUBLIC REPORTING

Performance reporting helps stakeholders make decisions about future goals and strategies. To be useful, performance reporting must be clear and accessible to the people who need it. Overall, we found that the ministry reported on student results for over 15 years, but not on how effective the system has been in closing the gaps in education outcomes between

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. In addition, the ministry had not ensured that boards were meeting ministry expectations for public reporting.

### SUBSEQUENT EVENTS

Subsequent to our main fieldwork, the ministry announced several initiatives that relate to supporting Aboriginal students, reflecting the ministry's ongoing work with boards and Aboriginal partners to improve outcomes for Aboriginal students. Announcements included revisions to the provincial K-12 curriculum to address the history and legacy of residential schools, and the signing of a protocol with the First Nations Education Steering Committee to guide further collaboration on improving education outcomes for B.C.'s Aboriginal students.

### LOOKING AHEAD

In our report, we make 11 recommendations to support the ministry in its ongoing work with boards of education, superintendents, and Aboriginal leaders and communities, to improve education outcomes for Aboriginal students and close the gaps.


# REPORT HIGHLIGHTS



**62,000**  
**ABORIGINAL STUDENTS**  
in public schools (11.5%)

Aboriginal student enrolment generates

**\$500+**  
**MILLION**  
in funding to boards



Nationally,  
ABORIGINAL POPULATION  
**GROWING**  
**5X FASTER**  
than non-Aboriginal

2005 commitment to  
**RAISE ABORIGINAL**  
**GRADUATION RATE**  
to 85% by 2015



**IMPROVING:**  
2005 = **49%**  
2014 = **62%**

**EDUCATION**  
**IMPROVES**  
**LIFE CHANCES:**  
JOBS  
HEALTH  
WELL-BEING

ABORIGINAL STUDENTS  
**WILL BENEFIT**  
from a  
**SYSTEM-WIDE**  
**STRATEGY**  
to close the gaps

ABORIGINAL HISTORY,  
LANGUAGE  
AND CULTURE  
**NEED TO**  
**BE VALUED**

# SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

## WE RECOMMEND THAT THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION:

- 1** collaborate with boards of education, superintendents, and Aboriginal leaders and communities to develop a system-wide strategy with accountabilities to close the gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student outcomes.
- 2** provide support to boards of education and superintendents to ensure they have the capacity to achieve results.
- 3** take action when school districts have not achieved expected results for Aboriginal students.
- 4** evaluate the effectiveness of targeted funding and enhancement agreements as strategies to close the gaps in education outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, and use the results to improve its policies to better support Aboriginal student outcomes.
- 5** work with boards of education to ensure School Completion Certificates are only granted to students who require a modified program due to a special need that prevents them from working toward graduation.
- 6** collaborate with boards of education, superintendents, and Aboriginal leaders and communities to:
  - ◆ provide all students with a curriculum that addresses the past and present effects of the colonization of Aboriginal peoples in British Columbia.
  - ◆ address obstacles to ensuring safe, non-racist, culturally relevant learning environments through teacher professional development, cultural awareness training, and strategies to hire the best people to work with Aboriginal students.
- 7** collaborate with boards of education, superintendents, and Aboriginal leaders and communities to define and implement standardized monitoring and assessment of key indicators of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students' progress at key stages throughout their school career.



# SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

## WE RECOMMEND THAT THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION:

- 8** establish responsibility within the ministry for developing a systematic approach to data analysis on Aboriginal student achievement.
- 9** use the evidence from ministry data analysis to inform decision making and clarify expectations of boards of education.
- 10** support superintendents in their work with boards of education, staff, Aboriginal leaders and communities and other districts, to develop capacity to use data and evidence to plan for Aboriginal student achievement.
- 11** collaborate with boards of education, superintendents, and Aboriginal leaders and communities, to define and implement expectations for regular provincial and district reporting on:
  - ◆ Aboriginal student (on- and off-reserve, First Nations, Métis and Inuit) achievement.
  - ◆ progress in meeting targets to close the gaps.
  - ◆ effectiveness of strategies for Aboriginal students.

# RESPONSE FROM THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

**THE MINISTRY OF** Education has a responsibility to Aboriginal students, as well as their parents and communities, to help improve their school experience, continue to increase their completion rates, and better celebrate their successes. This is an obligation that the Ministry takes very seriously. Furthermore, the Ministry understands that the task at hand is to change BC's public education system to better address the needs, interests, cultures, histories, languages, world views, and perspectives of Aboriginal students, knowing that by doing so all students will be more successful.

The success of Aboriginal students is one of the top priorities for government and the Ministry of Education. Ministry of Education shares with the Auditor General the commitment to do better for Aboriginal learners and for all learners. Not only does the Ministry agree with the recommendations provided by the auditors, the recommendations all align with the work the Ministry has undertaken and the goals we seek to accomplish working in partnership with Aboriginal partners such as First Nations Education Steering Committee and First Nations Schools Association.

“Education is a shared responsibility and the province has a formal commitment to work with FNEC to improve education outcomes for First Nations learners in BC. We look forward to continuing our positive working relationship with a focus on advancing the recommendations of the Auditor General and the priorities of First Nations Leadership.”  
Tyrone McNeil, President, First Nations Education Steering Committee.

The Ministry's approach is based on respectful relationships, an approach that makes sense in a province so diverse. Specifically, BC has Canada's greatest diversity of First Nations representing more than 30 languages and 200 communities. There are approximately 15,000 Status First Nations students living on reserves, who are the funding responsibility of the federal government, and while nearly 6,000 choose to stay on reserve to study at approximately 140 First Nation band-operated schools, nearly 9,000 attend BC public schools.

Those 9,000 Status First Nations students are counted among the almost 62,000 students, or over 11 percent of B.C.'s public school student population, who self-identify as Aboriginal. This, too, speaks to diversity: Aboriginal is an inclusive term spanning Status First Nation, non-status First Nation, Métis, and Inuit students, all of whom the BC public school system is working hard to serve.

The release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's "Calls to Actions" in June 2015 provided the assurance that the Ministry's actions were aligned with the directions to bring about reconciliation.

## RESPONSE FROM THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Regarding the Calls to Action specific to education, the Ministry has taken action to ensure age appropriate curriculum about residential schools is a part of the learning for all students. Expanding on this, the Kindergarten to Grade 9 curriculum now includes Aboriginal content at all levels. The Calls to Action also asked that all actions be taken in collaboration with Aboriginal people and, as the work to transform our education system has proceeded, Aboriginal people have played an integral role in all aspects.

Accordingly, from the development and implementation of agreements focused on improving results at the school district and community level to the introduction of memorandums of understanding and protocol agreements at the provincial level, the Ministry is building partnerships and networks. These agreements outline the shared goals and measurable indicators we want for our students. And this is creating an environment of innovation and exploration in which all parties are focused on the experience of Aboriginal students and their results.

It is because of this push for strong relationships, system-wide change, and Aboriginal student success that Aboriginal student performance has improved every year since 2000. More Aboriginal students are staying in school, performing better on provincial exams, graduating, and transitioning to post secondary institutions or training programs year after year.

Similarly, the Ministry's prioritizing Aboriginal student success in provincial programs such as Changing Results for Young Readers, and its collaborative work

with the First Nations Education Steering Committee and Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada to improve results for Status First Nations students all speak to the efforts being made to collaborate and take action to change the education system and improve Aboriginal student results.

However, the Ministry knows that more must be done. Despite the improvements over the last 15 years, which include increasing Aboriginal student completion rates by 22 percent, Aboriginal students continue to meet with lower results overall than non-Aboriginal students, and they continue to face racism in our schools.

Our teachers need help in authentically integrating Aboriginal content into the learning experiences of all students and our Aboriginal parents need to feel they are a more integral part of the education system. Education has the potential to positively change the life trajectory of students and the Ministry is confident that the necessary relationships, understandings, and other foundational pieces we are building will do exactly that for all Aboriginal students.

The Ministry appreciates the efforts of the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) of British Columbia in their performance audit of the education of Aboriginal students with the objective of continuing to drive improvement in learning outcomes for Aboriginal students; one that we and our partners in the education sector share with them.

## RESPONSE FROM THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Recommendation by OAG	Ministry Response
<p><b>RECOMMENDATION 1:</b></p> <p><i>We recommend that the Ministry of Education collaborate with boards of education, superintendents and Aboriginal leaders and communities, to develop a system wide strategy with accountabilities for closing the gaps between Aboriginal and non Aboriginal student outcomes.</i></p>	<p>The Ministry agrees that collaboration is the key to effect system-wide change toward improving Aboriginal student success. Accordingly, the Ministry, working with school districts, provides an environment of flexibility for boards, superintendents, Aboriginal leaders and communities to work together to create strategies in response to their local situations.</p> <p>What this looks like, currently, is the Ministry working with boards and local Aboriginal communities to improve Aboriginal student performance through Aboriginal education enhancement agreements and complementary accountability reporting. With 56 of 60 districts having completed at least one agreement, this is a system-wide strategy but one implemented at the local level to better engage BC's many distinct school districts, 203 First Nations communities, Metis associations, many other Aboriginal organizations, and a wide variety of education partners.</p> <p>As recommended, the Ministry will also work with all Education partners to create a higher-level system-wide strategy for Aboriginal education, and it will include appropriate indicators of success as part of the Framework for Enhancing Student Learning. These results will be reported on annually.</p>
<p><b>RECOMMENDATION 2:</b></p> <p><i>We recommend that the Ministry of Education provide support to boards of education and superintendents to ensure they have the capacity to achieve results.</i></p>	<p>Ministry agrees that providing supports at the local level to superintendents and boards of education will ensure strategies have the best chance for success.</p> <p>Accordingly, the Ministry currently second two Aboriginal education enhancement agreement coordinators to assist in the local development and implementation of those agreements. Furthermore, the Ministry provides targeted funding to school districts for the provision of enhanced services to self-identified Aboriginal students.</p> <p>To further support a community of practice, the Ministry will also put increased emphasis on providing advice to boards of education and superintendents on effective practices, problem solving, and resourcing being employed in other regions of the province. This will be communicated through provincial gatherings, publicly posting results, and providing feedback on annual reports submitted by boards. As well, the Ministry will directly engage with School Districts that are not achieving the desired outcomes to collaboratively implement actions to increase aboriginal student success levels.</p>



## RESPONSE FROM THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Recommendation by OAG	Ministry Response
<p><b>RECOMMENDATION 3:</b></p> <p><i>We recommend that the Ministry of Education take action when districts have not achieved expected results for Aboriginal students.</i></p>	<p>The Ministry agrees that it has an obligation to act when districts require assistance to improve the school experience and success of Aboriginal students. Indeed, the Ministry believes that school districts are in the best position to respond to individual student needs and so it looks for ways to provide districts with the best tools possible to improve results.</p> <p>Accordingly, the Ministry currently works collaboratively with school districts to analyze results and provides opportunities for districts to share and discuss successful strategies. These opportunities include provincial gatherings during the year and learning and resources shared by the Aboriginal education enhancement agreement coordinators as they travel the province.</p> <p>In response to a recognized need that more can be done to improve Aboriginal student success, the forthcoming Framework for Enhancing Student Learning will provide further opportunities for the Ministry to work directly with school districts that are not improving results for Aboriginal students. This may take the form, for example, of support teams being sent into districts to provide those districts with best practices and resources to help in reaching the desired outcomes. Student results will be reported annually and will be made publicly available.</p>
<p><b>RECOMMENDATION 4:</b></p> <p><i>We recommend that the Ministry of Education evaluate the effectiveness of targeted funding and enhancement agreements as strategies to close the gaps in education outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, and use the results to improve its policies to better support Aboriginal student outcomes.</i></p>	<p>The Ministry agrees with this recommendation. While the Aboriginal student completion rate has climbed steadily since these strategies were introduced, a formal review could provide insights to better refine the related policies and more effectively promote best practices.</p> <p>Accordingly, a research study on the effectiveness of Aboriginal education enhancement agreements and future considerations toward systematic change was awarded October 1, 2015. This research is expected to be complete by April 2016. The results of this study will inform the direction of Aboriginal education enhancement agreements in the future.</p> <p>Furthermore, in keeping with this recommendation, the Ministry is undertaking greater evaluation and assessment of the programs it funds to ensure the desired outcomes are achieved and future funding is targeted at those areas delivering the best results.</p>

## RESPONSE FROM THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Recommendation by OAG	Ministry Response
<p><b>RECOMMENDATION 5:</b></p> <p><i>We recommend that the Ministry of Education work with boards of education to ensure School Completion Certificates are only granted to students who require a modified program due to a special need that prevents them from working toward graduation.</i></p>	<p>The Ministry agrees with this recommendation. The school completion certificate known as the Evergreen was intended to celebrate the efforts of students who had met learning goals other than graduation. While such recognition is important, the certificate was not intended to be awarded to students who could earn the Dogwood graduation certificate, and a disproportionately high number of Aboriginal students are receiving this non-graduation certificate. While a few districts are issuing the majority of these certificates, and the numbers of students in question is quite small, the use of the Evergreen certificate must only be used as originally intended. Every student matters. Moreover, almost all students should be aiming for a graduation certificate and the entire system should be supporting them on that path.</p> <p>Accordingly, the Ministry is actively reviewing the use of School Leaving Certificates with the intent to limit its use as originally intended in the near future.</p> <p>Furthermore, the Ministry will consider this recommendation in the broader context of its education transformation efforts. In other words, the Ministry is committing to work with all education partners to ensure that all students graduate with the necessary skills and knowledge to reach their potential in school and life.</p>

## RESPONSE FROM THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Recommendation by OAG	Ministry Response
<p><b>RECOMMENDATION 6:</b>  <i>We recommend that the Ministry of Education collaborate with boards of education and Aboriginal leaders and communities to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ provide all students with a curriculum that addresses the past and present effects of the colonization of Aboriginal people in British Columbia.</li> <li>◆ address obstacles to ensuring safe, non-racist, culturally relevant learning environments through teacher professional development, cultural awareness training, and strategies to hire the best people to work with Aboriginal students.</li> </ul>	<p>The Ministry agrees with the recommendation, and for the Province this is a priority. In short, BC is dedicated to ensuring that the cultures and contributions of Aboriginal peoples in our province are reflected in all provincial curricula.</p> <p>We are proud of the progress we have made in the area. The work began in 2013 and is well aligned with the subsequent recommendations made by the Truth and Reconciliation to jurisdictions across the country.</p> <p>First, during the recent and ongoing education transformation process, the Ministry has ensured that there is Aboriginal expertise on each of the subject area development teams, to embed Aboriginal perspectives and knowledge throughout the redesigned curriculum, and to reflect the First Peoples Principles of Learning in this redesign. Ministry curriculum revision teams were mandated with ensuring that the history and legacy of residential schools be included throughout the new provincial curriculum, from an Aboriginal perspective.</p> <p>Second, a resource document entitled “Aboriginal Worldviews and Perspectives in the Classroom—Moving Forward” was released by the Ministry to help educators embed culturally relevant learning into each student’s experience. This resource reflects the voices of Aboriginal leaders, teachers, community members, students, and education partners including First Nations Education Steering Committee.</p> <p>And, a third example: announced in June 2015, the non-instructional day for the 2015/16 school year was dedicated to Aboriginal education. School districts will use that day to better understand how to integrate Aboriginal content into the curriculum and how they might better support Aboriginal student achievement. (Note: this will reach existing teachers; in an effort to ensure that new teachers have a foundational understanding of Aboriginal content, teacher training programs in BC have already included Aboriginal content as a requirement for graduation.)</p> <p>As a further and future response to this recommendation, the Ministry will consider how it might promote other tools available to boards of education. For example, the hiring of teachers is within the exclusive jurisdictional authority of each board and many but not all have taken advantage of Human Rights Tribunal exemptions to hire Aboriginal teachers and other professionals with Aboriginal ancestry.</p> <p>Likewise, the Ministry, in collaboration with the First Nations Education Steering Committee, will be managing a research project on racism in BC schools. The research will provide recommendations on how the Ministry’s ERASE strategy can be more effective specific to racism against Aboriginal students. ERASE training has been provided to school district personnel over the last number of years to ensure that a safe learning environment is provided for all students.</p>

## RESPONSE FROM THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Recommendation by OAG	Ministry Response
<p><b>RECOMMENDATION 7:</b></p> <p><i>We recommend that the Ministry of Education collaborate with boards of education and Aboriginal leaders and communities to define and implement standardized monitoring and assessment of key indicators of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students' progress at key stages throughout their school career.</i></p>	<p>The Ministry agrees that key indicators spanning K-12 are an invaluable tool. Accordingly, it currently provides school district and provincial-level data on Aboriginal student performance indicators at various grades. This data is used in monitoring and annual reporting at all levels.</p> <p>Also in relation to this recommendation, the Ministry has already recognized that the accountability framework had become less informative despite being reporting intensive, and so the Ministry is collaboratively implementing a new framework with a cross section of K-12 sector partners including FNEESC and the BC School Trustees Association. The selection of appropriate and informative indicators is part of this collaborative effort and these indicators must be such that action can be taken to ensure each student is meeting with success. The Ministry has committed to including specific reporting on indicators of aboriginal student success as part of the new framework.</p> <p>Further, the Ministry will keep this recommendation front of mind when working with all partner groups to build for the education system a new assessment framework: one that reflects the goals of education transformation.</p>
<p><b>RECOMMENDATION 8:</b></p> <p><i>We recommend that the Ministry of Education establish responsibility within the ministry for developing a systematic approach to data analysis on Aboriginal student achievement</i></p>	<p>The Ministry agrees that data is best managed in a systemic way and that more can be done in this regard. Under the new provincial Framework for Enhancing Student Learning, the Ministry will implement a more focussed approach for data analysis and reporting that is directly tied to province-wide continuous improvement efforts. System-wide strategies for analyzing and interpreting local data are a key part of the new framework, and include such things as the development of school- and district-based rubrics and analytic tools connected to BC's student information system.</p> <p>In addition, the Ministry is developing a systematic approach to evaluate educational program outcomes and student achievement, and will establish specific responsibilities in the Ministry in this regard.</p> <p>As an additional response to this recommendation, in consultation with education partners, the Ministry will produce a public report of key provincial evidence for the province, each district and, as appropriate, for particular groups of districts; on all indicators. This will include reporting of specific results for Aboriginal students.</p> <p>As part of their annual planning and reporting efforts, districts will be expected to make use of both local and provincial evidence and will be required to report annually on Aboriginal student outcomes.</p>



## RESPONSE FROM THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Recommendation by OAG	Ministry Response
<p><b>RECOMMENDATION 9:</b>  <i>We recommend that the Ministry of Education use the evidence from its data analysis to inform ministry decision making and clarify its expectations of boards of education.</i></p>	<p>The Ministry completely supports this recommendation and is taking deliberate action in this regard.</p> <p>The Ministry will add resources and develop more effective evaluation procedures to evaluate the impact of ministry decisions and programs, and further inform ministry decision-making with respect to improving student outcomes.</p> <p>Through multiple accountability and communication strategies (e.g., accountabilities with respect to student achievement, funding, and reporting, and regular conference calls and written communications with trustees and superintendents), the ministry will work to better outline its expectations of boards of education based on available evidence.</p> <p>As part of the new provincial Framework for Enhancing Student Learning, the Ministry and its education partners will continue to work together in 2015/16 to clarify and implement province-wide expectations with respect to student learning. This includes a system-wide focus on students' intellectual, human, social, and career development; multi-year district and school planning for continuous improvement; reporting meaningful and effective evidence at least annually by districts and the province; system-wide capacity building to enhance student learning; and, linkages with existing local agreements to ensure the consistent and meaningful support of Aboriginal students.</p>
<p><b>RECOMMENDATION 10:</b>  <i>We recommend that the Ministry of Education support superintendents in their work with boards of education, staff, Aboriginal leaders and communities, and other districts to develop capacity to use data and evidence to plan for Aboriginal student achievement.</i></p>	<p>The Ministry agrees with this recommendation and will take further action to support superintendents in this regard.</p> <p>Through secondees working directly with school district staff, workshops focused on data analysis, and responses to district reports to the Ministry, school districts have received support to increase their capacity to analyze and plan, and this important work will continue.</p> <p>As part of an initial capacity-building and implementation strategy for the Framework for Enhancing Student Learning, the Ministry is working with the BC School Superintendents Association and its chapters to develop and share capacity in evidence-based planning and to involve their local education partners, including boards of education, staff, and Aboriginal community members, in the planning process.</p> <p>Under the new Framework, the Ministry will also work with all education partners in 2015/16 to identify meaningful and effective evidence, both provincial and local, that can inform district plans and actions for improving achievement for Aboriginal students, and for enhancing learning for each student in BC's K-12 education system.</p>

## RESPONSE FROM THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Recommendation by OAG	Ministry Response
<p><b>RECOMMENDATION 11:</b>  <i>We recommend that the Ministry of Education collaborate with boards of education, superintendents, and Aboriginal leaders and communities to define and implement expectations for regular provincial and district reporting on:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ Aboriginal student (on- and off-reserve, First Nations, Métis and Inuit) achievement</li> <li>◆ progress in meeting targets to close the gaps</li> <li>◆ effectiveness of strategies for Aboriginal students.</li> </ul>	<p>The Ministry agrees that reporting is essential to the education system, and an essential part of being accountable to British Columbians. Accordingly, the Ministry has collected data on self-identified Aboriginal students since 1991, and, since 1998/99, it has published an annual report called <i>Aboriginal Report—How Are We Doing?</i> to help the public school system serve Aboriginal students.</p> <p>At the same time, the Ministry agrees that there is room for improvement in the area of reporting: specifically, the Ministry and education system as a whole can better connect reporting to responses that help each student reach his or her full potential. Accordingly, the Ministry continues to work with provincial education partners to improve accountability in BC’s K-12 education system. Boards of education, superintendents, Aboriginal leaders and community members, principals and vice-principals, secretary treasurers, teachers, parents, students, special educators, and the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth have all played important roles in shaping our provincial directions, resulting in the development of a draft Framework for Enhancing Student Learning.</p> <p>This means that, in line with this recommendation, future school years will have a different look. For example, key components of this new framework (which will be used in draft form in 2015/16 and refined as needed in May 2016) are multi-year district and school plans, updated annually, and meaningful and effective evidence to improve student outcomes. Under this framework, districts and the province will be expected to report at least annually on overall results, as well as Aboriginal students, children in care, and students with special needs. District plans will be expected to reflect local efforts to support each student, as well as to continuously improve outcomes for these groups of students.</p> <p>Furthermore, another key component of this new framework is system-wide capacity building through team-based supports. The Ministry will work with its education partners to better utilize existing structures (e.g., regional and provincial partner meetings, noninstructional days, etc.) to discuss and promote effective practices for Aboriginal students. It will also work with its education partners to build new team-based supports to act on provincial and local priorities and needs (e.g., a provincial success team focussed on Aboriginal learners).</p>

# BACKGROUND

**ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN** Canada face higher levels of poverty and a lower quality of life than non-Aboriginal Canadians. Researchers agree that the best way to alleviate poverty and address the marginalization of Aboriginal peoples in Canada is through improving education. Graduating from school greatly improves a person's life chances, particularly for employment and income-earning prospects.

There is a wide and historically persistent gap in school graduation rates between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Canada. According to Statistics Canada's 2011 National Household Survey, 29% of Aboriginal people aged 25-64 in Canada had not completed secondary school, compared to 12% of non-Aboriginal people.

The Canadian Constitution references three groups of indigenous peoples: First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. The term *Aboriginal* is used broadly to encompass these groups.

The B.C. school system is responsible for supporting all students to develop their individual potential, and to graduate from school with the knowledge and skills to make choices about post-secondary education and their careers. This responsibility includes all Aboriginal students attending provincial schools.

*Education outcomes* for Aboriginal students enrolled in B.C.'s school system have been historically poor when compared to outcomes for non-Aboriginal students. There are persistent gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, including:

- ◆ lower scores in provincial assessments for reading, writing and numeracy
- ◆ higher rates of special needs designations
- ◆ higher rates of enrolment in alternate education
- ◆ lower graduation rates
- ◆ lower rates of post-secondary enrolment

**First Nations:** including Status and non-Status Indians (as per the *Indian Act*) living both on- and off-reserve. There are 634 First Nations in Canada, speaking more than 50 distinct languages. Approximately 60% of those languages are spoken in B.C., and B.C. has around 200 First Nations. First Nations people are the original inhabitants of the land that is now Canada.

**Métis:** people of mixed European and Indigenous ancestry, and one of the three recognized Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

**Inuit:** an Aboriginal people, the majority of whom inhabit the northern regions of Canada. The Inuit homeland is known as Inuit Nunangat, which refers to the land, water and ice in the Arctic region.

**Education outcomes:** Refers to both academic and social outcomes of the education system. Academic outcomes include student graduation rates, performance on standardized assessments, attendance, incidence of special needs, and participation in secondary school courses that allow access to post-secondary education. Social outcomes include social responsibility, personal development, behaviour, attitudes and work habits.

## BACKGROUND

Through Royal Commission studies and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, governments have recognized the significant role the education system played in the colonization of First Nations people. Residential schools and assimilation policies had, and continue to have, a traumatic impact and contribute to significant socio-economic inequities between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians.

“*Accommodation of Aboriginal culture and identity should be regarded as a core responsibility of public institutions rather than as a special project to be undertaken after other obligations are met. Educational institutions have a pivotal role in transforming the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and Canadian society.*”

~ 1986 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples

Addressing these inequities requires multiple approaches, and the provision of quality education is key. Formal agreements, and most recently the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, have called for education systems that integrate Aboriginal cultures and languages to support Aboriginal student success. The education system is significant to student success and can reduce the impact of pre-existing socio-economic factors, such as poverty.

## PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT FOCUS TO CLOSE THE GAPS

The provincial government has publicly acknowledged that the gaps in education outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students are unacceptable, and has committed, on several occasions, to work with Aboriginal stakeholders to close the gaps ([see Exhibit 1](#)). To close the gaps means to achieve education outcomes for Aboriginal students that are the same as outcomes for non-Aboriginal students. This language does not imply any failure by Aboriginal students, but rather, a failure of the education system to meet their needs.

“*If we subscribe to a belief that socio-economic status limits the ability of learners, you start from a deficit position. The first thing we have to start with is our role as educators. At the top of the list of factors of effectiveness is teacher quality, educator effectiveness. Way down the list is family background. We can't use excuses. It's important to accept our role.*”

~ Superintendent

**The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)** was one element of the federal government's agreement to address the damage inflicted by its Indian Residential School system. The TRC was intended to contribute to truth, healing and reconciliation for all those affected, including former Indian Residential School students, the people and institutions involved in running the schools, and ultimately, all the people of Canada. It ran from 2008 - 2015, and resulted in several reports with 94 calls to action.



## BACKGROUND

**Exhibit 1:** Key provincial government commitments to close the gaps in education outcomes

1999	The provincial government publicly acknowledges that Aboriginal students are not experiencing school success in B.C., and signs a <b>Memorandum of Understanding</b> with First Nations leaders and public education partners to improve the situation.
2005	The provincial government signs the <b>Transformative Change Accord</b> with First Nations and the federal government, and commits to working collaboratively with First Nations to close the social and economic gaps between First Nations and other British Columbians over the next 10 years. This includes an explicit commitment to close the gaps in education.
2005	The provincial government, Aboriginal people, and communities throughout the province establish a vision for a new government-to-government relationship based on respect, recognition and accommodation of Aboriginal title and rights. The <b>New Relationship Vision Statement</b> includes the goal to eliminate the gap in standards of living with other British Columbians in education and other areas.
2005	The provincial government and the British Columbia Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education and Training Partners Group commit to work collaboratively to improve post-secondary participation and success rates for Aboriginal students. In response, the Ministry of Advanced Education develops an <b>Aboriginal post-secondary education and training strategy</b> (2007-2010), and a <b>policy framework and action plan</b> (2012). Goal 4 of the action plan is that Aboriginal students transition seamlessly from K-12 to post-secondary education.
2006	The provincial government and the Métis Nation of B.C. establish a <b>Métis Nation Relationship Accord</b> intended to close the gaps in quality of life, including education, between Métis people and other British Columbians.
2012	The provincial government, First Nations and federal government sign the <b>Tripartite Education Framework Agreement</b> , which re-states the provincial government's commitment to close the gaps in education outcomes between First Nation and other students.

## ACCOUNTABILITIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

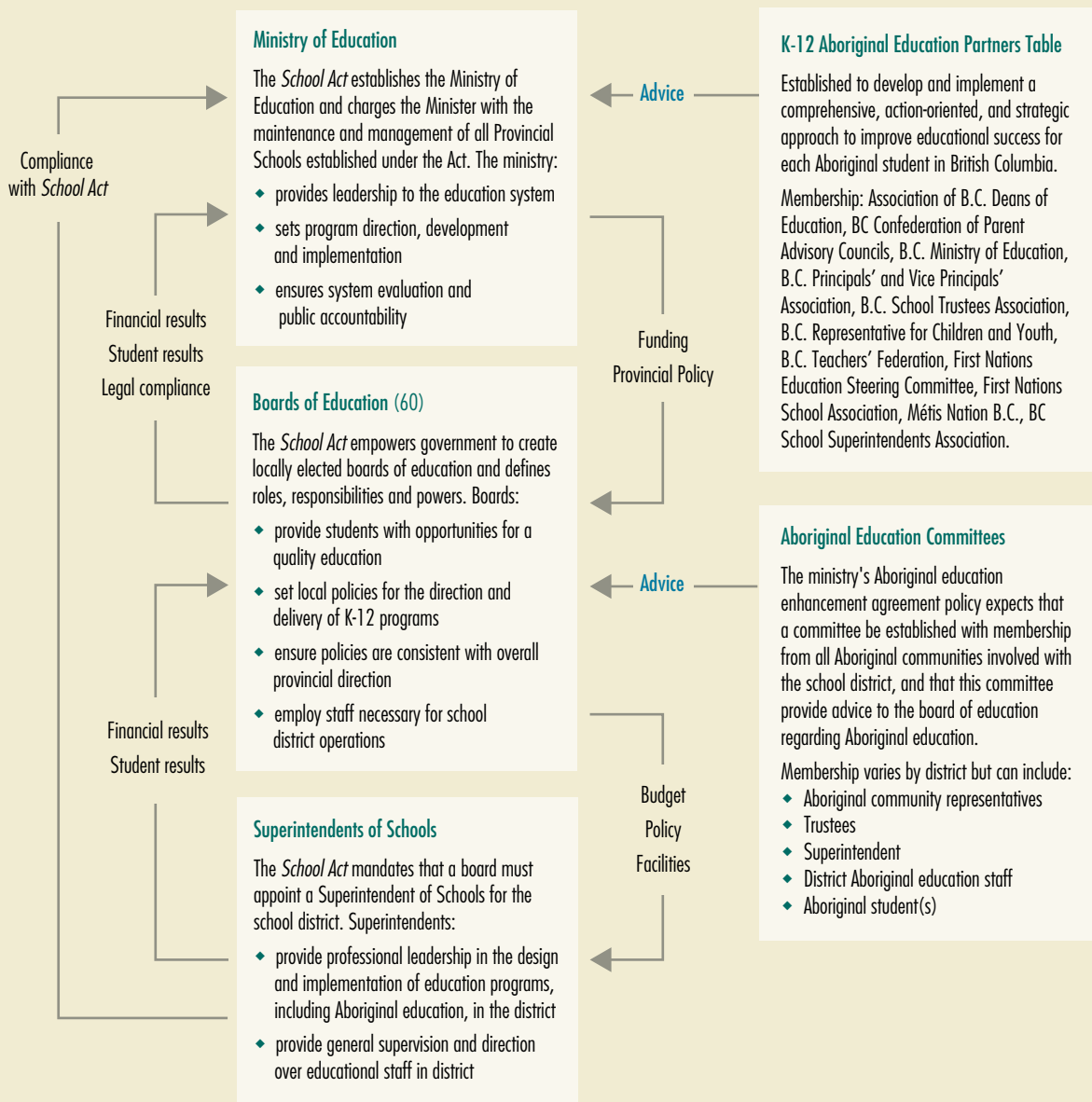
The Ministry of Education (ministry) has responsibility for public and independent schools in B.C., and has committed to share expertise and learning resources with federally-funded First Nations' schools as well. For the public school system, the *School Act* and the *Statement of Education Policy Order* set the mandate and legislative framework for the delivery of education to Aboriginal students. This framework defines the duties, rights and

responsibilities for all key partners in education – from students to the ministry.

The public education system is co-governed by the ministry and locally elected boards of education (boards). In 2014, a Co-Governance Relationship Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the ministry and boards (as represented by the B.C. School Trustees Association), to define their working relationship. Both parties recognize their individual and shared accountabilities, at the same time as the ministry's right to determine public education policy for the province ([see Exhibit 2](#)).

# BACKGROUND

**Exhibit 2:** Structure of the B.C. public education system, including Aboriginal education



Source: Office of the Auditor General of British Columbia

## BACKGROUND

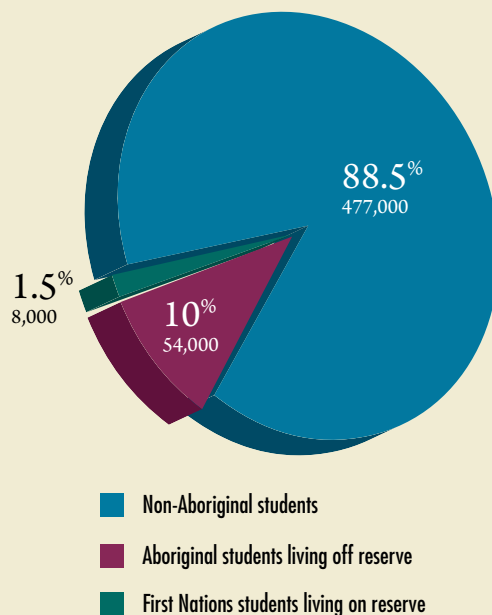
In the 2012 Tripartite Education Framework Agreement, the ministry, First Nations (as represented by the First Nations Education Steering Committee), and the federal government, formally agreed to a collaborative partnership on education initiatives. The First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) is an independent society that advocates for First Nations' education interests in B.C. Its board is comprised of 105 First Nations community representatives. The Agreement included a commitment for the ministry to consult with FNESC about proposed changes to provincial education policy.

## ABORIGINAL STUDENTS AND EDUCATION FUNDING

In 2014/15, 72,000 Aboriginal students were enrolled in B.C. schools: 62,000 in the public school system and 10,000 in provincial independent schools and band-operated schools.

The province is responsible for funding education programs for all students with one exception: under the federal *Indian Act*, the federal government is responsible for funding education for Status First Nations students living on reserve. In 2014/15, there were 15,000 First Nations students living on reserve in British Columbia: 8,000 attended public schools and 7,000 attended provincial independent schools or band-operated schools.

Exhibit 3: Students in B.C. public schools, 2014/15



Source: Office of the Auditor General of British Columbia based on Ministry of Education data

As shown in Exhibit 3, total enrolment in public schools for 2014/15 was 539,000, with 62,000 Aboriginal and 477,000 non-Aboriginal students. Aboriginal students, including Status First Nations students living on reserve who attend public schools, represent 11.5% of public school enrolment.

Each year, the province determines grant funding for public education, and uses student enrolment data and a funding formula to allocate these funds to boards. The funding formula is an allocation model and not a spending model. Boards are responsible for managing and dedicating funding based on local priorities.

## BACKGROUND

In 2014/15, the province provided boards with \$4.725 billion in operating grants. More than \$500 million was based on Aboriginal student enrollment and included \$64.6 million in targeted funding to develop and deliver Aboriginal education programs and services to Aboriginal students. All Aboriginal students, including First Nations students living on reserve, qualify for provincial targeted funding.

Federal education funding for Status First Nations students attending public schools goes to the First Nation, who then pays the board, when there is a local education agreement between the First Nation and the board. In 2014/15, boards received \$59.9 million in federal funding under local education agreements. When there is no local education agreement between a First Nation and a board, the ministry advances education funding for Status First Nations students to boards as part of their grant allocation, and the federal government reimburses the province. In 2014/15, that amount was approximately \$30 million.

Aboriginal students regularly move between schools and between school systems, which adds to the complexity of funding arrangements. The majority of First Nations students living on reserve will attend a public school at some point in their school career. In addition, almost 1,200 students eligible for a provincially funded education chose to attend a band-operated school in 2014/15. Under a reciprocal tuition agreement, the province provided approximately \$14 million to First Nations for education programs delivered to these students attending band-operated schools.

## RECENT CHANGES TO LEGISLATION AND POLICY

In 2015, as we were carrying out our audit, the ministry introduced two changes that will likely impact the framework within which policies, programs and initiatives relevant to Aboriginal students are delivered. Specifically, the ministry:

1. Is replacing the 2002 public school Accountability Framework with the Framework for Enhancing Student Learning. The ministry acknowledged that previous accountability efforts had become compliance exercises, where districts submitted multiple annual reports to the ministry, instead of concentrating efforts on system-wide improvements to student learning. Aboriginal students' learning and outcomes are intended to be a specific focus of this new framework.
2. Introduced Bill 11 – Education Statutes Amendment Act, 2015, which amends the *Independent School Act*, *School Act*, and *Teachers Act*. Several of the amendments made to the *School Act* correspond with the new Framework for Enhancing Student Learning, including: repealing the role of Superintendents of Achievement, reducing the number of reporting requirements, and strengthening the ability of the Minister of Education to carry out administrative directives.

# AUDIT OBJECTIVE

**WE CONDUCTED THIS** audit to determine whether the Ministry of Education (the ministry) had exercised its duties and powers to meet government's public commitment in the Transformative Change Accord to close the gaps in education outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students by 2015. Specifically, we expected that the ministry, as per its mandate, had:

- ◆ provided leadership and direction to the public school system to close the gaps
- ◆ monitored and analyzed outcomes and trends to inform strategies to close the gaps
- ◆ reported publicly on outcomes and the effectiveness of its strategies to close the gaps

We developed our objective and criteria for this audit based on:

- ◆ the *School Act* and the *Statement of Education Policy Order*
- ◆ the 1999 Memorandum of Understanding
- ◆ the 2005 Transformative Change Accord
- ◆ the 2012 Tripartite Education Framework Agreement
- ◆ discussions with ministry staff and key stakeholders
- ◆ advice received from five subject matter experts who have held a range of senior positions in First Nations organizations, the Ministry of Education and school districts
- ◆ good practices in public sector governance and results management



# AUDIT CONCLUSION

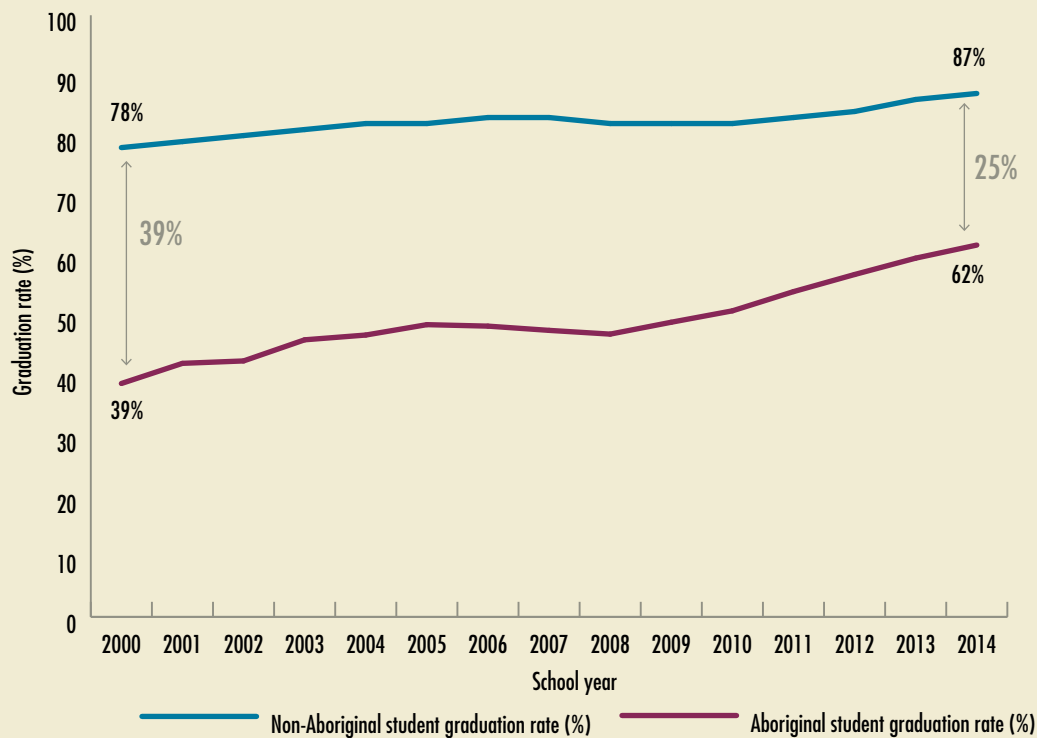
**EDUCATION OUTCOMES FOR** Aboriginal students improved between 2000 and 2014, and the gaps are narrowing province-wide. Exhibit 4 presents the improvement in the provincial graduation rate for Aboriginal students during those 15 years: an increase from 39% in 2000 to 62% in 2014.

However, there continue to be persistent and significant gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in many districts and for certain groups of students, including First Nations students who live on a reserve.

We found that, despite their long-term goal to close the gaps by 2015, the ministry had not fully exercised its duties and powers to close the gaps for Aboriginal students. Specifically, the ministry:

- ◆ had not provided the education system with sufficient leadership and direction to close the gaps
- ◆ had undertaken limited analysis of the wide range of student outcome data it monitored, to understand trends and outcomes for Aboriginal students and inform change
- ◆ had reported on outcomes but not what was effective in closing the gaps

**Exhibit 4:** Provincial graduation rate\* trends for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, 2000-2014



\* The graduation rate is measured as the percent of first time Grade 8 students who receive a certificate of graduation within 6 years.

Source: Office of the Auditor General of British Columbia based on Ministry of Education data.

# AUDIT SCOPE

**WE CARRIED OUT** our audit work between February 2014 and May 2015, and we substantially completed the work on September 3, 2015. Our work involved:

- ◆ reviewing agreements, legislation, policies and other documents
- ◆ conducting interviews with ministry staff, representatives of education partner groups and individuals involved in Aboriginal education
- ◆ analyzing ministry data on education outcomes and targeted funding from 1999 to 2014
- ◆ reviewing studies related to Aboriginal education in B.C., Canada and other jurisdictions. [See Appendix B](#)
- ◆ visiting four diverse school districts (Vancouver, Prince George, Fort Nelson and Vancouver Island North) where we met with district staff, representatives of local Aboriginal communities, and board trustees, to see how ministry policies for Aboriginal education operate in the public K-12 system

The role of provincial independent schools and First Nations band-operated schools in educating Aboriginal students was excluded from our audit scope.

We analyzed Ministry of Education student achievement data, along with factors such as socio-economic vulnerability, number and proportion of Aboriginal students, funding, and geographic characteristics to determine which four school districts to visit. [Appendix A](#) explains the statistical analysis we carried out and how we applied the results.

We conducted the audit in accordance with the standards for assurance engagements set out by the Chartered Professional Accountants of Canada (CPA) in the CPA Handbook – Assurance and Value-for-Money Auditing in the Public Sector, Section PS 5400, and under the authority of Section 11 (8) of the *Auditor General Act*.

## SUBSEQUENT EVENTS

Between June and September 2015, subsequent to our main fieldwork, the ministry announced several initiatives that relate to supporting Aboriginal students. We have not audited these initiatives and therefore can offer no audit opinion on them. However, they are important to acknowledge as they reflect the ministry's ongoing work with boards and Aboriginal partners to improve outcomes for Aboriginal students. They are also consistent with our recommendations. Recent announcements have included:

- ◆ revisions to the provincial K-12 curriculum to address the history and legacy of residential schools
- ◆ signing a protocol with the First Nations Education Steering Committee to guide further collaboration on improving education outcomes for B.C.'s Aboriginal students
- ◆ establishing a non-instructional day for teachers to learn more about supporting Aboriginal learners and integrating Aboriginal content in the classroom

# KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## LEADERSHIP AND DIRECTION

In the 2005 Transformative Change Accord, the Ministry of Education (ministry) made a public commitment to close the gaps in education outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students by 2015. We examined whether the ministry had provided leadership and direction to the public school system to meet this commitment. Specifically, we expected that the ministry had:

- ◆ established a system-wide strategy, jointly with boards, and Aboriginal leaders and communities, with clear accountabilities for closing the gaps
- ◆ evaluated the effectiveness of its policies to close the gaps
- ◆ ensured learning environments were safe, supportive and culturally relevant

We found that ministry policies for Aboriginal education did not change in response to this 2005 commitment. Despite ministry and board intentions to improve Aboriginal student results, the ministry did not work with boards, superintendents, and Aboriginal leaders and communities to develop a shared, system-wide strategy to close the gaps with distinct responsibilities and accountabilities for the ministry and boards, and specific actions, targets and timelines. Further, the ministry did not evaluate existing policies for Aboriginal education to understand their effectiveness in closing the gaps.

The ministry's enhancement agreement policy continued after 2005 to encourage on-going collaboration between boards and Aboriginal

communities to set local goals to support Aboriginal student outcomes. However, there was no requirement that these local goals align with the ministry commitment to close the gaps in education outcomes by 2015. The ministry has also led initiatives to contribute to safe, supportive and culturally relevant learning environments. However, we found that more can be done.

In the absence of clear direction and a focused and coordinated system-wide effort to close the gaps, the system risks failing many Aboriginal students by not closing the gaps as rapidly as possible across all districts. This is particularly the case for First Nations students living on reserve, whose results have been persistently lower than results for other Aboriginal students, although they have improved more rapidly in recent years.

### No shared system-wide strategy

We found that the ministry had not engaged boards, Aboriginal leaders and communities, and other education partners to develop a shared system-wide strategy for Aboriginal education, with goals and

## KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

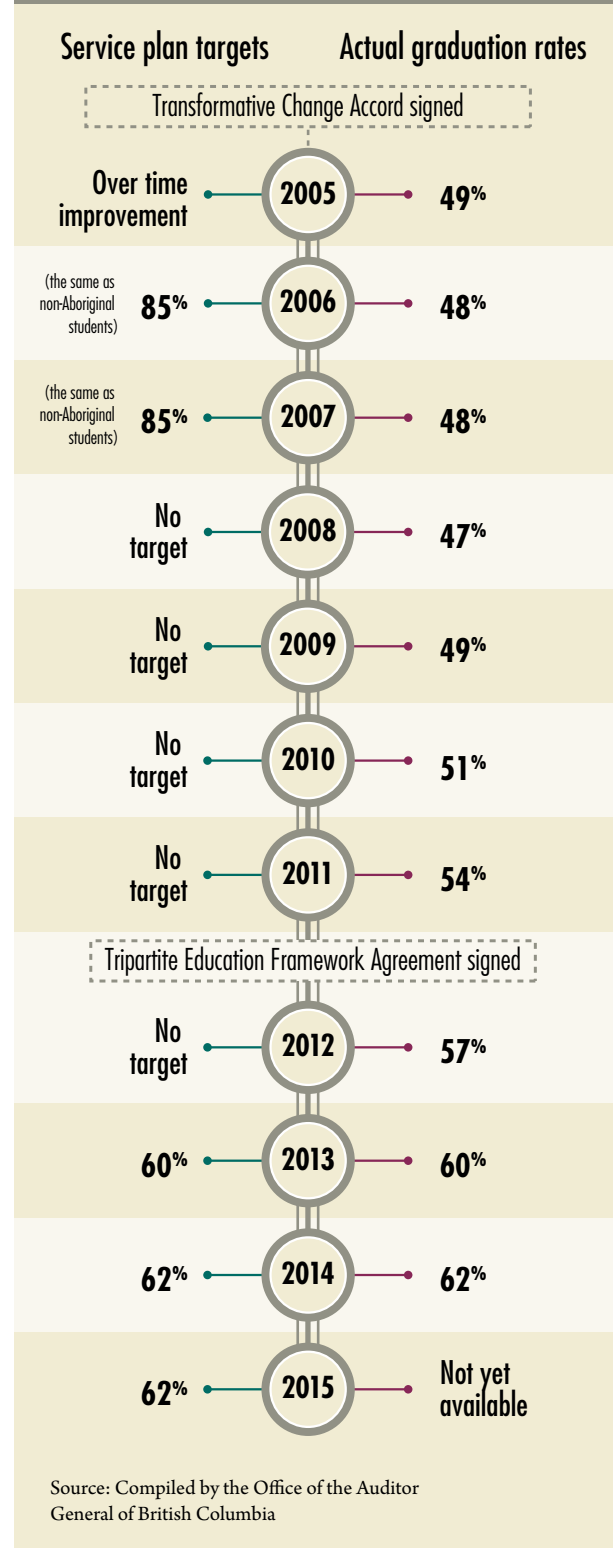
targets focused on closing the gaps. The ministry did set graduation rate targets between 2005 and 2014, but in the absence of a clear strategy, its approach to setting targets for Aboriginal students was inconsistent.

As presented in Exhibit 5, provincial targets for Aboriginal student graduation rates have varied significantly since the Transformative Change Accord was signed. In 2006, the year after signing the agreement, the ministry set a target for Aboriginal student graduation of 85% by 2015. This target reflected an expectation of reaching parity with non-Aboriginal students by 2015. In 2008, this 2015 target was dropped. Recent ministry targets have been 1% improvement each year. At the same time, the ministry shifted its focus from “closing the gaps” to “improving Aboriginal student success.” The vagueness of this target makes it more difficult for the ministry to measure results and determine whether strategies need to change.

The ministry expected boards to set local goals and targets for Aboriginal student achievement in their annual district achievement contracts, but did not require these goals to focus on closing the gaps. For 2013/14, we found that 21 of 60 boards had not complied with this requirement to set local goals for Aboriginal education.

We also found that the linkage between provincial targets, district achievement contracts and school plans was inconsistent and limited, accountabilities were unclear, and the ministry did not take action when results were poor.

**Exhibit 5:** Timeline of provincial service plan targets for Aboriginal student graduation by 2015



# KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## SETTING TARGETS

Since the mid-2000s, the Fort Nelson School District has had a target to close the achievement gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students for each of the goals in its district achievement contract. Between 2008/09 and 2013/14, the Aboriginal student graduation rate increased from 55% to 100%. In 2013/14 the graduation rate for Aboriginal students was 2% higher than that of non-Aboriginal students. Our data analysis confirmed that the district's results were consistently better than expected, given its characteristics as a small, remote school district with a significant proportion of Aboriginal students.

## Unclear accountability for Aboriginal student achievement

We found that the ministry had not set clear and distinct accountabilities to close the gaps. In the ministry's governance model, responsibility and accountability for student achievement are shared between the ministry and boards: the ministry is responsible for the system and each board is responsible for their district. The complexity of this shared accountability, compounded by the lack of a system-wide plan, resulted in neither party taking clear responsibility for closing the gaps in education outcomes for Aboriginal students.

## ACCOUNTABILITY FOR TRANSPORTATION FOR FIRST NATIONS STUDENTS

In our interviews with district staff and Aboriginal communities, the issue of transportation for First Nations students often came up as an area where accountability was complex. Responsibility for providing transportation to and from school for on-reserve students is negotiated between each First Nation and the local board. Transportation for First Nations students living on reserve was identified as a challenge in the majority of the nine school districts we spoke with. The ministry also informed us of several situations in the province where responsibility for transportation was an issue of significant concern between First Nations communities and school districts.

Students in remote areas, as is the case for many First Nations reserves, have long commutes for schooling, are not able to participate in extra-curricular activities, or most challenging, have to leave their rural homes to go to school in an urban area. The following example highlights how a lack of clarity in responsibility and accountability within the system has the potential to leave students without adequate access to schooling.

*In an isolated First Nation community, there are four education options for the children: a public school in the catchment district, a public school in a neighbouring*

*district, a band-operated school, and home schooling.*

*Other than home schooling, all options require the children to travel a significant distance. For a number of years, the community chose to send the children to school in the neighbouring district. They had to travel at least an hour and a half each way to school with considerable challenges, such as poor roads, winter conditions and limited access to fuel.*

*When the bus, which was owned and operated by the First Nation community, could no longer run, the students could not get to school.*

*The superintendent chose to send a teacher into the community on a weekly basis. But given that this area is outside of district boundaries, the ministry's funding model does not provide funding to establish a remote school, and therefore a remote school was not a viable option. It is unclear who is accountable for these students getting access to school: the ministry, the district where the students had been attending school, the district where the students reside, or the First Nation (that relies on funding from the federal government). Complex accountabilities should not impact student access to education.*



## KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Lack of action to address low Aboriginal student achievement

Although the provincial graduation rate for Aboriginal students increased over 15 years, the graduation rate for many districts continues to be below the provincial average of 62%. [Exhibit 6](#) illustrates the gap between graduation rates for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, by school district, for 2000 and 2013, and the positive trend between those years.

If there is no gap between outcomes for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students (i.e., the graduation rate is the same) the district would plot its point on the equity line. If all points on the charts were at the top right corner, it would mean that 100% of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students had graduated.

Overall, the charts highlight improvement over time, with the cluster of points moving toward the top right corner and toward the equity line. More Aboriginal students graduated in 2013 than in 2000, and their graduation rates more closely matched those of non-Aboriginal students.

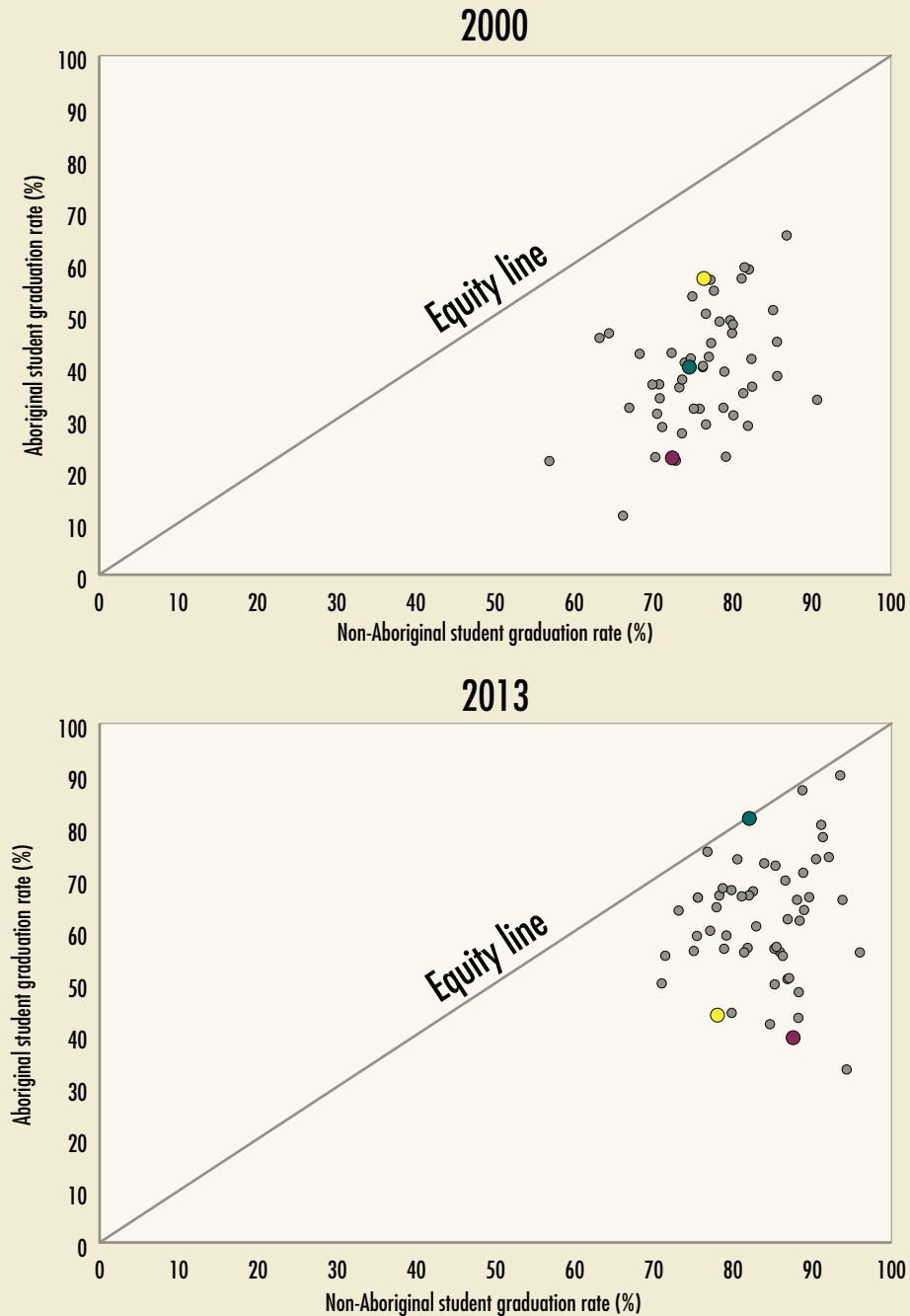
However, this progress was not consistent across all districts. For example:

- ◆ green point: this school district has effectively eliminated the gap, with a graduation rate of over 80% for all students in 2013
- ◆ red point: this school district has experienced a persistent gap in its graduation rates for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students
- ◆ yellow point: this school district has seen the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students increase between 2000 and 2013

The school districts highlighted in [Exhibit 6](#) were selected for illustrative purposes. They are not the school districts that we visited during the audit.

# KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Exhibit 6:** Graduation rates for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, 2000 and 2013



*Note: Only districts with 10 or more Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students expected to graduate are included in the graphs.*

Source: Office of the Auditor General of British Columbia based on Ministry of Education data

## KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

We found that the ministry had not used the full extent of its legislated powers to take actions to address poor Aboriginal student achievement, even in districts where achievement had been persistently low.

The *School Act* enabled the ministry to appoint Superintendents of Achievement. Between 2007 and 2014, senior educators – usually school district administrators – were seconded to the ministry to fill this role. Superintendents of Achievement had the power to make recommendations to improve outcomes. However, we found no examples of Superintendents of Achievement directing districts to improve their Aboriginal student results. In 2015, the *Act* was changed to eliminate the position of Superintendent of Achievement.

The *Act* also enabled the ministry to appoint a Superintendent of Aboriginal Achievement, which it did, in 2012. However, we did not see evidence that the ministry gave the position the opportunity to exercise its authority to require action when school districts had poor results for Aboriginal student achievement. This position became vacant in July 2014, and was later eliminated as part of the legislative changes in 2015.

In addition to the role of Superintendents of Achievement, the ministry had the legal authority to appoint a special advisor, issue administrative directives or replace the board of trustees with a ministry appointee to address lower than expected student achievement. These legal tools were also available to address concerns with board financial performance. While we noted many examples of the ministry appointing a special advisor to address poor financial results, there was only one instance between

1999 and 2014 where a special advisor was appointed to address problems with student achievement.

**RECOMMENDATION 1:** *We recommend that the Ministry of Education collaborate with boards of education, superintendents, and Aboriginal leaders and communities to develop a shared, system-wide strategy with accountabilities to close the gaps between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student outcomes.*

**RECOMMENDATION 2:** *We recommend that the Ministry of Education provide support to boards of education and superintendents to ensure they have the capacity to achieve results.*

**RECOMMENDATION 3:** *We recommend that the Ministry of Education take action when school districts have not achieved expected results for Aboriginal students.*

## KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### EFFECTIVENESS OF MINISTRY POLICIES

The ministry has implemented two policies focused specifically on Aboriginal education: *targeted funding* and *enhancement agreements*. We expected that the ministry would evaluate and, if necessary, change these policies to help close the gaps in education outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

We found that the ministry had not evaluated the effectiveness of targeted funding or enhancement agreements.

#### Targeted Aboriginal education funding

The provincial government introduced targeted Aboriginal education funding in 1993 for boards to provide culturally appropriate programs and services to support the success of Aboriginal students. The model provides funding to boards based on the number of Aboriginal students in their district each year. For the 2015/16 school year, targeted funding increased from \$1,160 to \$1,195 per student. Boards must provide a targeted program or service to each student they claim for funding. However, students or their families can choose not to receive these services, in which case the board cannot claim them for funding.

We found that the ministry had not evaluated either the relationship between the use of targeted funding and outcomes for Aboriginal students, or the effectiveness of its funding model. The ministry did monitor enrolment, eligibility for funding, and compliance with spending policy, but not

whether Aboriginal students had benefitted from improved education opportunities. After 2005, when government made its commitment to close the gaps by 2015, the ministry made no change to its targeted funding policy.

An evaluation of the effectiveness of targeted funding as a policy to close the gaps for all Aboriginal students is important to inform future funding policy decisions.

#### TARGETED FUNDING

B.C. was the first jurisdiction in Canada to provide targeted funding based on the number of Aboriginal students enrolled in the school district. A number of other jurisdictions in Canada have since followed suit.

#### Aboriginal education enhancement agreements

The ministry's Aboriginal education enhancement agreement policy was introduced as a strategy to develop collaborative partnerships between boards and local Aboriginal communities. Enhancement agreements (EAs) are five-year plans focused on improving Aboriginal student outcomes. The first EA was signed in the Kamloops/Thompson school district in 1999.

#### EVALUATING PROGRAMS

To identify areas of strength and growth opportunities, the Vancouver Island North School District hired a consultant to use the goals of its enhancement agreement as a framework to review the programs it was providing to Aboriginal students through targeted and district funding.

## KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The ministry's expectation of boards was that they develop an EA, establish an Aboriginal Education committee, and involve Aboriginal communities in the implementation of their EA. However, the ministry did not clearly define or monitor its expectations for what successful district collaboration with Aboriginal communities should be. Not surprisingly, practices varied across the province, with some Aboriginal communities more engaged in planning and decision making than others. For example, there was no expectation that boards involve Aboriginal communities in discussions on how district resources would be used to meet the goals of the EA.

Although the establishment of an EA is voluntary, we found that 56 of 60 districts had finalized at least one EA over the last 15 years. We did note that, as of January 2015, half of these EAs were out-of-date. However, the ministry informed us that they continued to support these districts to develop their next EA.

Without an EA, there is no other formal ministry strategy to facilitate district collaboration with Aboriginal communities on priorities for Aboriginal students. In addition, a third of districts did not have an Aboriginal Education committee in place.

“*There is slow progress from the schools becoming more involved with our community and being open to our input. We are right here and we can offer so much to the process. We want to play a huge part caring and supporting students as much as possible.*”

~ First Nation community member

The ministry did not have information identifying which district practices had been most effective, or how effective the overall EA policy has been. An evaluation of the effectiveness of the EA policy would inform improvements to both the policy and guidance, and identify successful practices that can be shared with all districts.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:** *We recommend that the Ministry of Education evaluate the effectiveness of targeted funding and enhancement agreements as strategies to close the gaps in education outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, and use the results to improve its policies to better support Aboriginal student outcomes.*

## ENSURING SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Welcoming and supportive learning environments are key elements of student success. The importance of high quality learning environments and culturally appropriate curriculum for Aboriginal students has been noted in government studies and agreements, including the Transformative Change Accord.

Many Aboriginal students within the public school system have reported feeling ostracized, marginalized and misjudged. When students feel accepted and comfortable, and that their culture is reflected in their school environment and curriculum, they are more likely to learn and engage with others in school activities and events.



# KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## CREATING SAFE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

The Vancouver Island North School District partnered with the First Nations Education Council and the Gwa-sala-Nakwaxda'xw local First Nation to create an on-going vision for the Eke Me-Xi learning centre. The school is operated by the district and located in a building owned by the First Nation. The learning environment focuses on ensuring students feel welcome, safe and supported, to keep them engaged with learning.

We expected the ministry to have integrated Aboriginal content into the curriculum to improve its cultural relevance to Aboriginal students. We also expected the ministry to set and monitor expectations for boards to actively promote safe, non-racist learning environments for Aboriginal students.

Although progress has been made, we found that there are opportunities to improve the learning environments for Aboriginal students through the development and delivery of culturally appropriate curriculum and continuing efforts to address racism.

## Curriculum

In 2008, the ministry developed several courses with Aboriginal-focused content, in partnership with the First Nations Education Steering Committee. Together, they created BC First Nations Studies 12, and English First Peoples 10, 11 and 12. However, during our district visits, we heard that the ministry needs to do more.

During our district visits and interviews, we learned that:

- ♦ offerings of, and enrolment in, BC First Nations Studies 12 and English First Peoples 10, 11 and 12 had been very limited
- ♦ from the perspective of Aboriginal leaders and communities, the curriculum did not yet sufficiently reflect Aboriginal history, knowledge and culture; in particular, issues regarding residential schools, racism and the *Indian Act*

At the time of this audit, the ministry was working on further integration of Aboriginal content, knowledge and worldviews into its curriculum redesign, and has published new resources for teachers to help bring Aboriginal culture, history and perspectives into the classroom.

We also heard about challenges to delivering a curriculum strong in Aboriginal content. For example, non-Aboriginal teachers may lack the confidence or knowledge to comfortably deliver a curriculum rich in Aboriginal content. Professional development could strengthen teacher confidence. B.C. universities now require teachers-in-training to take a course on Aboriginal education to increase awareness and knowledge. However, there is no mandatory professional development on Aboriginal education for teachers who were trained before that requirement was introduced.

## KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“*When we have new employees, they sit with elders to understand the role of children in the community, to hear those voices. We need to understand the moral imperative we have as a place of learning; without understanding that we don't stand a chance. The work is not done, it continues.*” ~ Superintendent

Also, there are barriers to hiring the best people to work with Aboriginal students. For example, there are requirements to hire qualified teachers based on seniority rather than on their relevant experience with Aboriginal education. To give Aboriginal candidates preference in hiring, each board needs to apply individually to the Human Rights Tribunal for a human rights exemption, which is inefficient.

Student responses to the province's satisfaction survey reveal the impact of the challenges of integrating Aboriginal content into the curriculum. While a majority of Grade 4 Aboriginal students reported they are being taught about Aboriginal peoples in Canada, fewer than 40% of students in Grades 7, 10 and 12 answered the same. Aboriginal content in provincial curriculum, particularly content that addresses Aboriginal history, is important for all students.

### Non-racist learning environments

We found that the ministry had set policies for safe and non-racist schools, but had not monitored district compliance. All four districts we visited had established policies that complied with ministry requirements. However, we found that these district policies had not been consistently translated into explicit codes of conduct and practices to address racism at a school level. More importantly, district staff were not aware of the extent of racism that the First Nations people we spoke with had experienced.

The ministry has provided *ERASE Bullying* training to all districts since 2012. The training makes clear to boards that they are expected to actively support non-racist learning environments for Aboriginal students, as well as for all other students. However, the effectiveness of this training is unknown, as the only evaluations the trainers had done were focused on participants' satisfaction with the course.

In the education system, racism can take the form of educators having low expectations for students based on preconceptions or biases stemming from social attitudes. This is the concept of the *racism of low expectations*, and we were told about it in our interviews with ministry staff, district staff, and members of Aboriginal communities. In addition to interviews, we observed two outcomes that could be influenced by this kind of racism.

### PROVIDING CULTURAL AWARENESS TRAINING

Several districts we visited have delivered professional development and training for staff to improve cultural awareness. For example, the Prince George School District began delivering cultural awareness training to principals and vice-principals in the fall of 2014. The district plans to offer the training to teachers starting in the fall of 2015. The Vancouver Island North School District holds a mandatory new employee orientation that includes cultural awareness. The session focuses on regional history and the Kwakwaka'wakw story, and is led by First Nations elders.

## KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For example, Aboriginal students, especially First Nations students living on reserve, were more likely than non-Aboriginal students to be granted a School Completion Certificate, even when these students did not have a *special needs* designation.

A School Completion Certificate is intended to recognize the achievement of a student who completes a modified education program, typically because of a significant special need that leaves them unable to meet the criteria for graduation. It does not give access to post-secondary education and is not the equivalent of a graduation certificate in the job market.

Ministry policy does not prohibit the granting of School Completion Certificates to students without special needs. However, given that the intention of the policy is to recognize students who are unable to meet the criteria for graduation, we would not normally expect to see boards grant School Completion Certificates to students who do not have a special needs designation, or whose special need does not prevent them from working towards graduation. This would indicate that the students had not achieved their full potential.

“*Teachers need to be willing and courageous enough to examine their own biases and expectations of Aboriginal learners. It’s about the students knowing that the teachers they had in grades 1, 2, 5 etc... knew that they would be successful.*” ~ School principal

**Special needs:** The ministry has defined 12 categories of special need. Students with certain special needs normally require a modified program with an individualized education plan that sets out the goals they are working towards. For example, students who are physically dependent and require assistance with feeding, dressing, toileting and mobility might have individualized education plan goals such as learning to feed and dress themselves. Students with other special needs, such as a learning or behaviour disability, would typically still be capable of working towards graduation. Their individualized education plans would describe the adaptations and support they require to address their needs.

Another potential indicator of the racism of low expectations is that Aboriginal students were almost twice as likely as non-Aboriginal students to complete courses that limit their options for entry to post-secondary education. As a result, those students may need to take additional courses to upgrade, should they choose to attend post-secondary institutions, at a cost to themselves and/or their First Nation.

**RECOMMENDATION 5:** *We recommend that the Ministry of Education work with boards of education to ensure School Completion Certificates are only granted to students who require a modified program due to a special need that prevents them from working toward graduation.*

## KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**RECOMMENDATION 6:** *We recommend that the Ministry of Education collaborate with boards of education, superintendents, and Aboriginal leaders and communities to:*

- *provide all students with a curriculum that addresses the past and present effects of the colonization of Aboriginal people in British Columbia*
- *address obstacles to ensuring safe, non-racist, culturally relevant learning environments through teacher professional development, cultural awareness training, and strategies to hire the best people to work with Aboriginal students*

## MONITORING AND ANALYZING STUDENT OUTCOMES

Monitoring and analyzing student results is important at all levels of the education system, for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. However, monitoring performance is only the first step in evidence-based decision making. Data must be analyzed to show trends, patterns, successes and challenges to inform practice.

We expected to find that the ministry:

- ♦ monitored outcomes for Aboriginal students and ensured that boards assessed and monitored data on Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student outcomes
- ♦ analyzed outcomes and trends and used this evidence to inform policy and actions

Overall we found that the ministry had monitored key outcomes for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, but did not have a clear strategy for analyzing trends and outcomes. Also, there is an opportunity to monitor additional indicators and outcomes for groups of students to better understand outcomes and to inform decisions about strategies to support student success.

### Monitoring outcomes for Aboriginal students

We found that the ministry had consistently monitored Aboriginal student results for decades, across a range of key performance indicators, and had shared this data with school districts. Ministry monitoring has included graduation rates, results on provincial assessments and exams, and incidence of special needs.

District staff we spoke with found value in the data because they could track their trends and plan for improvement. However, one common concern regarding data we heard in our interviews was the impact of low participation in provincial assessments on the validity of the data.

We also found that the ministry had not monitored, or required districts to monitor, indicators that can highlight where Aboriginal student achievement has been lowest. Although the overall trend for Aboriginal student graduation had improved at the provincial level, this improvement was not consistent across the system. In 2014, 10 of B.C.'s 60 school districts had Aboriginal graduation rates of less than 50%. For Aboriginal children living in government care, the provincial graduation rate was only 40%.

# KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## Gaps in monitoring

As shown in Exhibit 7, education research has highlighted a number of key indicators for Aboriginal student achievement, but ministry monitoring of these indicators has been limited.

Exhibit 7: Key indicators relevant to Aboriginal student achievement	
Key indicator	Ministry monitoring practice
Readiness to learn in kindergarten	There is no ministry requirement for districts to assess student readiness to learn when they first enter school or to carry out any assessments of student skills in primary grades. We found that district practices for early assessment varied, and the first assessment of student achievement required by the ministry happens when students are in Grade 4.
Education outcome trends of on-reserve First Nations students attending public schools	Students living on reserve have consistently experienced lower success in the provincial school system, although their graduation rate has improved more rapidly in recent years than other Aboriginal students (see <a href="#">Exhibit 8</a> ). This gap is more significant for boys. The ministry has this data but had not highlighted this trend for district attention.
Student movement patterns between schools, districts and school systems (not including normal transitions from elementary to middle and secondary school)	There has been no provincial tracking of students who leave public schools and no requirement for districts to track or report drop-out rates. Students may have gone to a different school system, a different province, or dropped out of education altogether.  The ministry assigns a provincial education number to students in public and independent schools, but not to students in all band-operated schools. The province and First Nations are working towards the consistent use of provincial education numbers across all school systems. This will ensure better information on where students are, whether they are attending school, and support tracking of student outcomes.
Patterns of student self-identification as Aboriginal within the school system	In any one year, an average of more than 10% of Aboriginal students attending public schools have chosen not to self-identify, and therefore are not eligible for enhanced services. The ministry has not done analysis to understand why students have chosen to self-identify and receive Aboriginal education services in one school or district and not in another, or in one year, but not the next.
Student attendance	Research shows that regular absence from school creates a barrier to academic success. Each board monitors and reports attendance to parents, as per board policy. There is no required reporting to the ministry, and there is no provincial monitoring. Attendance has been a persistent problem for many First Nations students, often affected by limited transportation.

Source: Office of the Auditor General of British Columbia



## KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There have been pockets of students whose results have been persistently poor. Better provincial and district monitoring of additional indicators, such as the ones presented above, could help identify, understand and address the needs of these students. It would encourage districts to:

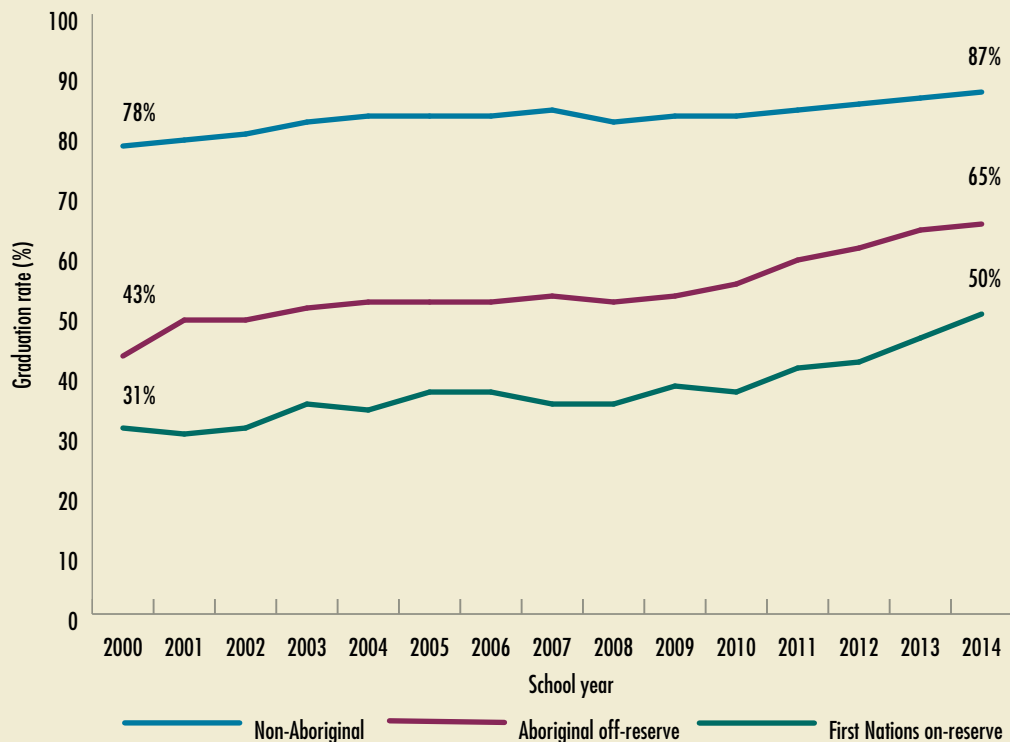
- ◆ intervene earlier to meet student needs
- ◆ focus more attention on Aboriginal students who most need support
- ◆ develop better informed strategies
- ◆ use data to evaluate the effectiveness of ministry and board initiatives

### Participation in provincial assessments

The Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) is an annual, province-wide assessment that shows how well Grades 4 and 7 students have learned foundation skills in reading comprehension, writing and numeracy.

These annual assessments are intended to provide the ministry and districts with a point-in-time measure of achievement, a view of trends over time, and a comparison of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student results. The assessments can also provide districts with an opportunity to compare their trends to those of other districts. The ministry has identified Aboriginal

**Exhibit 8:** Graduation rates in B.C. public schools, 2000 - 2014



Source: Office of the Auditor General of British Columbia, based on Ministry of Education data.

## KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

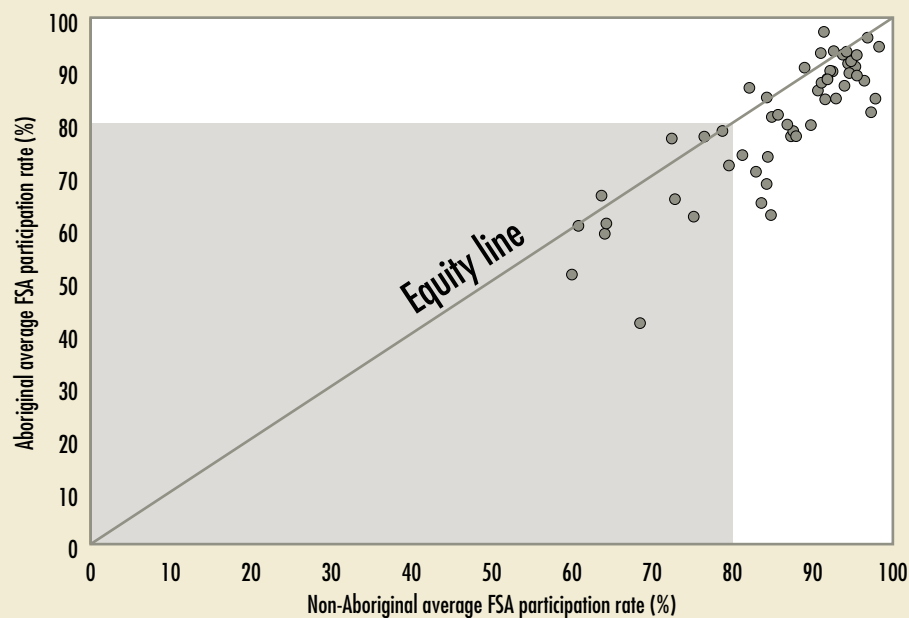
student participation in the FSA as a strong predictor of graduation, likely because it ensures schools pay attention to individual student progress.

However, the value of these assessments is undermined when a high proportion of students do not participate. According to ministry staff, only 5% of students would have a legitimate reason not to participate in the FSA. They also noted that participation should be 80% or higher for the results to be useful and reliable for educators. The ministry's FSA participation data shows that a number of school districts have participation rates of less than 80% for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

We found that participation in the FSA varied between districts, with a persistent gap between the rates at which Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students participated. We also found that the ministry had not taken action when student participation in the FSA was low.

Exhibit 9 presents FSA participation rates for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students for 2013. Most districts were below the equity line, indicating that non-participation was more of an issue for Aboriginal students.

**Exhibit 9:** District participation rates in the 2013 FSA, averaged across Grades 4 and 7 reading and numeracy assessments



The results for districts inside the grey rectangle may be invalid due to low participation

Source: Office of the Auditor General of British Columbia based on Ministry of Education data

# KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## ASSESSING STUDENT PROGRESS

The Fort Nelson School District set strong expectations that all students would write the Foundation Skills Assessments, in addition to district-wide assessments of literacy and numeracy skills at the beginning and end of each year. This has ensured they have good information to plan student learning. The district has achieved participation rates of between 83% - 95% in the FSAs for last two years. The Prince George School District has also achieved high rates of participation in the FSAs in recent years, between 90% - 100% for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

**RECOMMENDATION 7:** *We recommend that the Ministry of Education collaborate with boards of education, superintendents, and Aboriginal leaders and communities to define and implement standardized monitoring and assessment of key indicators of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students' progress at key stages throughout their school career.*

## Analyzing data to understand outcomes

We found that the ministry did not have a clear and consistent strategy for using available data to analyze trends and outcomes for Aboriginal students. However, we did find examples of good data analysis.

For example, when the *How Are We Doing?* report was first published in 1999, it included results of

the ministry's analysis of outcome data. The report explained the data on Aboriginal student outcomes and identified what needed to improve. Over time, this analysis decreased and by 2007, the ministry no longer provided an interpretation of the data. This report is a useful monitoring tool, but would be strengthened with analysis and reporting of trends, patterns, successes and challenges.

Researchers and practitioners have identified a number of other significant factors correlated with student success, which should be analyzed to better understand results, including:

- ◆ peer effects
- ◆ special needs
- ◆ socio-economic variables
- ◆ culturally responsive programs and services

We found that the ministry had not analyzed these factors. Better evidence about these factors, based on rigorous evaluation of the impact of different approaches and programs on student outcomes, would be valuable to inform the ministry's policy decisions. Better-informed policy decisions could lead to better outcomes for students and a more efficient and effective education system.

More recently, the ministry created a tool to help districts identify when to intervene with students who are at risk of not graduating. The ministry's analysis showed a strong correlation between participating in the Foundation Skills Assessment for Reading in Grade 4, writing the English 10 exam on time, and graduating from secondary school within six years

## KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

of entering Grade 8. Although this tool has not been rolled out to all school districts, many districts have been working with the ministry over the last two years, individually or in cohorts, to apply this analysis.

### District capacity to analyze data

We also found that districts varied in their capacity to collect, analyze, understand and use performance data for evidence-based planning and decision making. We heard from superintendents that there were not enough opportunities to share good practices with other districts. Ministry staff also told us that they had fewer opportunities to share with other staff across the ministry the information they gathered on district progress, or to plan collaboratively. There is opportunity for the ministry to take a leadership role in supporting district data collection and analysis practices.

Experts highlight the importance of involving Aboriginal communities and organizations in discussions about data. Aboriginal communities have knowledge of local conditions that affect learning, and have their own priorities for Aboriginal learners. They can improve the quality of data on self-identification, and contribute to evaluation.

Three of the four districts we visited had discussed data with local Aboriginal communities – typically through their Aboriginal Education committees. However, there was room for further improvement, as we heard from several Aboriginal communities and provincial stakeholders that they would like more information than they had been receiving.

For example, a number of First Nations communities would find it useful to have results for their students to better tailor their own support to student needs. The ministry has sought ways of sharing and reporting data that respect the principles of First Nations ownership of data ([OCAP principles](#)), or locally agreed-upon terms, and also protect personal information.

### USING DATA FOR DECISION MAKING

In the Fort Nelson School District, teachers use both provincial and district-wide assessment information to plan their work with students. Administrators use the information to allocate resources to classrooms and students. The district has implemented a low-cost literacy program which is provided to any student whose reading is below the level expected for their grade. For non-Aboriginal students, this intervention ends when students are reading at grade level.

For Aboriginal students, the district provides the literacy intervention more regularly and keeps it going until the student is reading at a grade level higher than expected.

### SHARING DATA WITH ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

The enhancement agreement between the Kamloops/Thompson School District and its local Aboriginal communities lays out what indicators they will monitor, what their targets are, and what data they will use to measure success. The strength of this approach is that the partnership gives the First Nations Education Council the ability and power to decide what aspects of performance are important, and use the data to inform their decision making.

## KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**RECOMMENDATION 8:** *We recommend that the Ministry of Education establish responsibility within the ministry for developing a systematic approach to data analysis on Aboriginal student achievement.*

**RECOMMENDATION 9:** *We recommend that the Ministry of Education use the evidence from its data analysis to inform decision making and clarify its expectations of boards of education.*

**RECOMMENDATION 10:** *We recommend that the Ministry of Education support superintendents in their work with boards of education, staff, Aboriginal leaders and communities, and other districts to develop capacity to use data and evidence to plan for Aboriginal student achievement.*

Overall, we found that the ministry had reported on student results for over 15 years, but not on system effectiveness to close the gaps. In addition, the ministry had not ensured that boards were meeting ministry expectations for public reporting.

### Ministry public reporting

The content of the ministry's *How Are We Doing?* report changed over time, but it consistently included key performance indicators, such as graduation rates, and provincial assessment and exam results.

In the mid-2000s, in response to stakeholder recommendations, the ministry reported additional information, including results for children in care and numbers of School Completion Certificates provided to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. However, during that time, the ministry dropped other elements of data it reported – most significantly, the comparison of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students outcomes, by district. The ministry did not have historic information to explain why the reporting had changed.

The ministry published performance data annually, but because of its limited analysis and evaluation of results, it had not reported on the effectiveness of its strategies to close the gaps in education outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. In addition, we found that there was an opportunity for the ministry and districts to share more information on Aboriginal student results with local education stakeholders and Aboriginal communities.

We also found that the ministry had not clearly distinguished outcomes for First Nations, Métis, and

## PUBLIC REPORTING

Performance reporting helps stakeholders make decisions about future goals and strategies. To be useful, performance reporting must be clear and accessible to the people who need it.

We expected the ministry to have reported publicly on Aboriginal student achievement and to have ensured that boards report publicly on their districts' progress. We also expected the ministry to monitor board reporting on Aboriginal student achievement and take action when boards have not met ministry expectations.



## KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Inuit students in its reporting. Other B.C. ministries – and most other provinces – have shown data for First Nations, Métis and Inuit people separately, rather than combined under the broader heading of “Aboriginal.”

### District reporting

The ministry set expectations for boards to report publicly on an annual basis through the Superintendent’s Report on Student Achievement and their Aboriginal enhancement agreement (EA) annual report. However, district practices were varied.

In May 2015, we reviewed ministry and district websites to determine whether the Superintendent’s Report on Student Achievement and EA annual reports for 2013/14 were publicly available. We considered posting reports on the internet to be the primary way to make them accessible to the public. We did not verify with districts whether they had made their reports available to the public by other means. We found that practices varied and not all reports were available on websites.

**RECOMMENDATION 11:** *We recommend that the Ministry of Education collaborate with boards of education, superintendents, and Aboriginal leaders and communities to define and implement expectations for regular provincial and district reporting on:*

- *Aboriginal student (on- and off-reserve, First Nations, Métis and Inuit) achievement*
- *progress in meeting targets to close the gaps*
- *effectiveness of strategies for Aboriginal students*

### MAKING REPORTS ACCESSIBLE

We observed several examples of reports that were accessible and easy to read. For example, the Fort Nelson School District had colour coded its results to highlight exactly which outcomes had or had not met expectations. The Rocky Mountain School District has published its District Achievement Contract in an interactive, online format that allows it to update information as results come in throughout the year. This is significant in a system where the *School Act* has required the Superintendent’s Reports on Student Achievement to be submitted in July, even though key elements of key performance information are not available until November.

# APPENDIX A:

## OUR APPROACH TO SELECTING SCHOOL DISTRICTS

**EDUCATION RESEARCH SHOWS** that a range of factors can influence student achievement. Some factors are related to student characteristics, such as their family's socio-economic status. Other factors are related to the education system, such as aspects of school quality, and education policies.

School quality factors include the experience level of the teachers, student/teacher ratio, expenditure per student and academic performance of students. Specifically for Aboriginal students, research highlights factors such as:

- ◆ parental income and education levels
- ◆ student mobility
- ◆ peer effects
- ◆ district leadership making Aboriginal education success a priority
- ◆ engaging Aboriginal leaders and community
- ◆ making use of objective data

We used Ministry of Education (ministry) student achievement data, along with information on factors such as socio-economic vulnerability, number and proportion of Aboriginal students, funding, and geographic characteristics in our analysis to better understand school district results for Aboriginal students.

Our advisor carried out statistical analysis to identify which factors had the highest correlation with student achievement – specifically, we focused on graduation rate as the main result of interest.

Our analysis found that the model with the greatest predictive power explained 50% of the variation between districts' graduation rate results for Aboriginal students. We used a 5-year mean for the completion rate to smooth out the annual fluctuation for districts with small student numbers. The predictors in this model were the amount of Aboriginal student targeted funding provided by the ministry (which is based on enrolment and therefore can be seen as a proxy for the number of Aboriginal students in the district), the proportion of the targeted funds that were spent (lower spending was correlated with higher results), and student achievement on the Grades 4 and 7 Foundation Skills Assessment tests (higher results were correlated with better graduation rates).

Using this model, we identified school districts that were achieving better, or worse, results for their Aboriginal students than would normally be expected based on their existing characteristics. We used this information to inform our selection of school districts to visit for our audit work. The ministry could be doing this type of analysis to identify areas of focus, including both good practice and challenges.

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