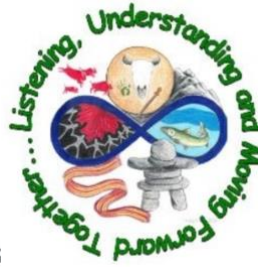




**CASS**

College of  
Alberta School  
Superintendents



## **2023 Learning Survey for the CASS First Nations, Métis & Inuit Education Gathering Executive summary**

The seventh [CASS First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Gathering, “Decolonizing Education: Truthing Our Way Forward”](#), took place April 24<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup>, 2023, at the Fantasyland Hotel in Edmonton. Four hundred twenty-six people attended and survey results indicate that the 4 goals of the Gathering were met with a high level of satisfaction from participants. CASS also received invaluable feedback and recommendations from participants for future planning for the Gathering including 56 responses from those willing to share their work in Indigenous Education.

Goals for the First Nations Métis and Inuit Education Gathering include:

- an increase in understanding of how to apply foundational knowledge about First Nations, Métis and Inuit for the benefit of all students;
- an increase in capacity building to meet the learning needs of First Nations, Métis and Inuit students;
- an increase in understanding how to engage and collaborate with First Nations, Métis and Inuit leaders, Elders, communities and organizations; and
- an increase in awareness and understanding of how to implement and lead practices that support reconciliation within our schools, school systems, and communities

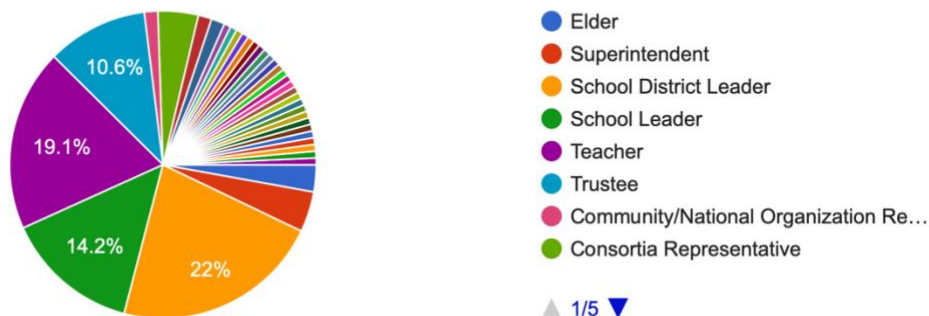
Below are the highlights of the 2023 survey findings which will inform the 2024 Gathering to be held, April 24<sup>th</sup>-26<sup>th</sup>, 2024 at the Fantasyland Hotel in Edmonton.

This year, each of the Keynote speakers featured at the [2023 Gathering](#) was highlighted in the CASS newsletter, CASS Connects. These highlights can be found on the [2023 Keynote Speaker tab](#) on the 2023 Gathering website and include articles, podcasts, videos, books and other resources. [Sharon Morin's Witness to Our Learning Statement](#) is also available and provides a comprehensive summary of the learning.

For additional information please contact Dr. Dianne Roulson, [dianne.roulson@cass.ab.ca](mailto:dianne.roulson@cass.ab.ca).

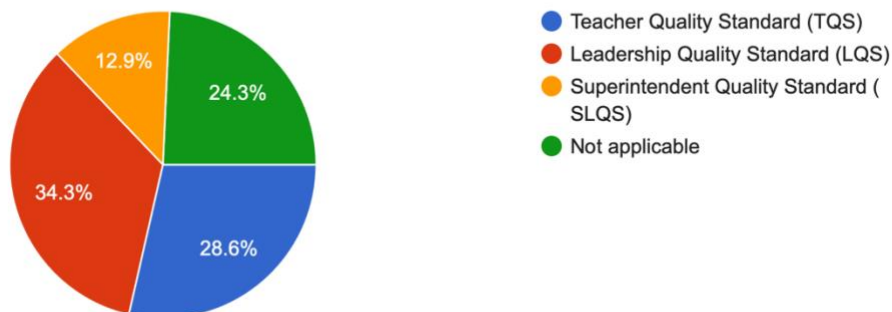
Please indicate your position.

141 responses



Which professional practice standard are you focused on addressing?

140 responses



## REFLECTIONS ON MY LEARNING:

**The Alberta Professional Practice Standards: Teacher Quality Standard (TQS), Leadership Quality Standard (LQS), and the Superintendent Quality Standard (SLQS) include a focus on Indigenous Education.**

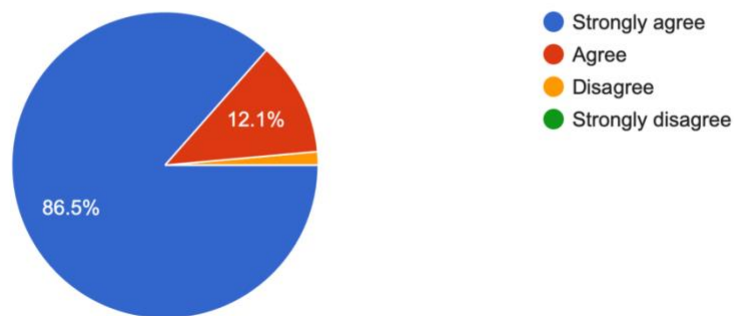
### 1. How did this learning opportunity contribute to your personal and/or professional awareness/understanding of Indigenous Education?

Participants had a great deal to share and provided detailed responses. Many were inspired by the idea of “truthing” and expressed a sense of responsibility/urgency to take action in relation to their learning. They talked about feeling motivated to speak up and be a strong voice/leader for Indigenous Education and success for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students. Several respondents identified new learning and insights about decolonizing and the necessity of dismantling current structures within schools, districts

and organizations in order to bring about deep, systemic change. This was connected to many comments about the importance of anti-racist education and how much learning (and unlearning) needs to take place. Participants described how much they valued learning from Elders, Knowledge Keepers and Indigenous educators. The strength of Indigenous voices at the Gathering was pronounced. This was tied to how important it is to learn *from* and *with* (not only *about*) First Nations, Métis and Inuit. Many people talked about how moved they were by the experience and said they needed time to absorb the deep impact of their learning. They expressed gratitude for all who presented and identified how much they will take away with them and share with others. The quality and excellence of the resources that were shared was a particular highlight.

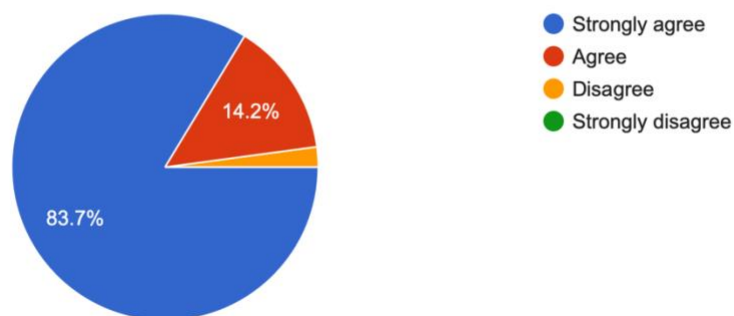
2. I commit to applying my learning (awareness and understanding) in my role/practice.

141 responses



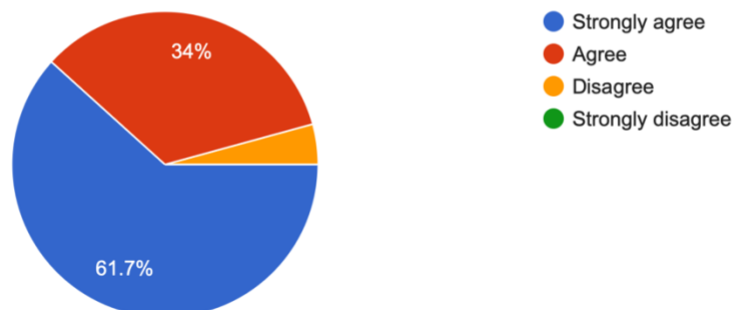
3. I commit to sharing my learning with my colleagues.

141 responses



4. This professional learning opportunity provided ideas about how to lead and incorporate strategies/actions into my work with my school authority.

141 responses



### 5. I commit to putting my learning into action by...

Respondents identified many actions and commitments inspired by their learning at the Gathering. These included: **being bold**, applying pressure and “rocking the boat” within their schools/districts/organizations; **exploring Gathering resources** and sharing those resources with students, staff and colleagues; applying their learning to **further develop relationships** with First Nations and Métis community partners; **initiating discussions** with white colleagues about privilege, anti-racism and decolonizing; creating **space for Indigenous voices and wisdom** in their schools and districts; seeking experiences for students and staff for **land as teacher**; **not allowing or accepting excuses** to step/look away; making **space to work alongside** Elders and Indigenous peoples; pushing for **large-scale change**; **sitting with discomfort**; **reading/exploring** the published work of the presenters; and, working with senior leaders and trustees to share **accountability for systemic change** so Indigenous students experience optimal learning, graduate and go on to pursue further educational endeavours.

### 6. Please identify one learning related to “Decolonizing Education: Truthing Our Way Forward” that made this Gathering meaningful.

Responses spanned the full range of learnings at the Gathering and included ideas related to keynotes, sessions, ceremony, time to visit/network, resources and the Gathering theme. In particular, the following topics/ideas were noted as key areas of learning: **systemic racism** and related harms; the necessity of **anti-racism education/literacy**; **Elder circles** and teachings; letting **Indigenous students** lead the way; **addressing concerns** courageously and boldly; **letting go of fear** of doing it wrong and accepting you will make mistakes; recognizing colonialism and learning how to **dismantle colonial structures**; **listening to Indigenous peoples** about their experiences; **learning about** (informational) and **learning from** (relational); **holistic learning** (engaging spirit, heart, body and mind); learning the truth and then **accepting responsibility to take action**; kinship and the importance of **making**

**relatives'**; decolonizing as **deconstruction and reconstruction**; recentering the **land as teacher**; that **anti-racist education** is not the same as **cultural learning** and that **both are necessary**; and, being willing to have hard conversations and **listening to what is not easy to hear**.

#### **7. One aspect of this learning opportunity that might be improved is:**

Overall, participants expressed great appreciation for the organization of the Gathering and excellent program offerings. They did offer some suggestions that would further strengthen the Gathering.

Participants offered suggestions related to **earlier registration**, the **facility**, the **schedule** and **program content**.

Feedback related to **the facility** included: the long distance between the ballroom and meeting rooms; the ballroom feeling crowded at times; having a room set aside for artisans to minimize crowding; and, providing a more up-to-date and cost-effective venue.

Some of the feedback related to **the schedule** was to have fewer offerings each day or to spread out over more days. A number of participants found the days very long and full and said they would appreciate easing up on the pacing of the Gathering.

In terms of **the program content**, suggestions included; providing more **pre-conference opportunities** and **duplicate sessions** for those that are most popular; having **microphones** available during all sessions to make sure Elders and presenters can be heard; **keynote** selection; **Inuit presence** and teachings; including **First Nations, Métis and Inuit cultural arts**; expanding opportunities for **discussion/talking circles**; providing access to **presenters' materials** (e.g., slide decks); **balancing First Nations, Métis and Inuit** offerings; highlighting **youth voice**; holding **smaller Elder Circles** to maximize the time they are able to share teachings; **focussing Elder Circles solely on Elder teachings** and not that of others in the circle; and, **length/scheduling** of sessions (some too long, others too short).

#### **8. One thing I require to further support my personal/professional learning is:**

A number of themes emerged as participants reflected on their next steps in learning. These included the need to have: time for **reflection**; access to **resources**; open and honest **conversations**; respectful **relationships** with Elders and Knowledge Keepers; ongoing **learning with/from** Elders and Knowledge Keepers; **Treaty** education; learning related to **language** revitalization; time with **land** as teacher; opportunity to participate in **ceremony**; opportunity to **share** successful practices between schools/districts; guidance related to **hiring** Indigenous peoples; opportunity to **unpack** bias; and, **anti-racist education**.

Participants were effusive in their feedback about the opportunity to learn from and with Elders and their respect and regard for these teachings. This year, there were 27 sponsored Elders registered for the Gathering, 17 of whom were sponsored by their district and 10 of

whom were sponsored by CASS. The number of Elders attending each year has been steadily increasing, demonstrating a growing relationship between school districts and Elders/Knowledge Keepers. The presence of Elders at the Gatherings has been a notable highlight for participants.

### **9. Please share comments/suggestions regarding the structure of this learning opportunity. (e.g., facility, registration process, communication)**

Overall, feedback related to the structure was extremely positive and many expressed thanks for the overall organization, program offerings, communication and smooth running of the Gathering.

Feedback related to the overall **structure** was to consider making it less jam-packed and to allow time for visiting/networking (e.g., removing keynote address during lunch). The long days and length of sessions (i.e., some too long, some too short) were also mentioned. A suggestion was made to ask Elder Helpers to make up plates for the Elders before inviting others to line up. Suggestions were also made about decolonizing the Gathering itself. Additional comments are reflected in the suggestions already highlighted in the responses to other questions.

Feedback about the **facility** echo what has been shared in past years including: crowding in ballroom and space for artisans; dated venue; capacity/slowness of elevators; and, long distances between ballroom and sessions rooms. Some suggested blocking more rooms at the Fantasyland Hotel so more people could stay on site. Suggestions also included holding the Gathering at an Indigenous owned venue where there is greater capacity and access to outdoors/land learning opportunities. There was also mention of the Gathering being held in a different Treaty area.

Feedback related to the **registration process** identified the cost (e.g., in relation to PD budgets in schools/districts), the lateness of registration this year and limited pre-conference offerings. Many expressed interest in expanded pre-conference offerings with Elders and land learning.

Feedback related to **communication** included: earlier registration to allow time for pre-conference registration and scheduling changes.

### **10. What specifically would you be willing to share about how you and your school authority are having a positive impact on Indigenous education?**

Fifty-six participants indicated they are willing to have a conversation about their response to #10. Many shared specific details about the work they are undertaking and others expressed openness to being contacted.

It is inspiring to see the depth and breadth of work that is unfolding across the province and how willing people are to share the work they are doing on behalf of students. The areas they

highlighted include: access to **cultural practices** for students; creating space for **Indigenous voices** at Board tables; building **kinship**; **language** revitalization, teaching & learning; **student success** stories; working with **Indigenous scholars** (e.g., Dr. Dustin Louie, Dr. Dwayne Donald); **land** as teacher; Knowledge Keeper **partnerships**; **language and cultural teachings/studies**; new **Indigenous education** department; **visiting** former residential school with Elder; monthly **Elder Circles**; changing the system from the **top down**; sustained **district-wide** professional learning to advance success for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students and for the benefit of all students; **curriculum development** that includes Indigenous language, values, history and culture; **building relationships** with families, community and closest Nations; **anti-racism** education; nurturing student **pride and identity**; and, **sacred sites** visits.