



2024 Learning Survey for the CASS First Nations, Métis & Inuit Education Gathering Executive summary

The eighth [CASS First Nations, Métis and Inuit Education Gathering, “Decolonizing Education: Truthing Our Way Forward”](#), took place April 24-26, 2024, at the Fantasyland Hotel in Edmonton.

Three hundred ninety-five people attended and survey results indicate that the 4 goals of the Gathering were met with a very high level of satisfaction from participants. CASS also received thoughtful feedback and recommendations from participants for future planning of the Gathering including 46 responses from those willing to share their work in Indigenous Education.

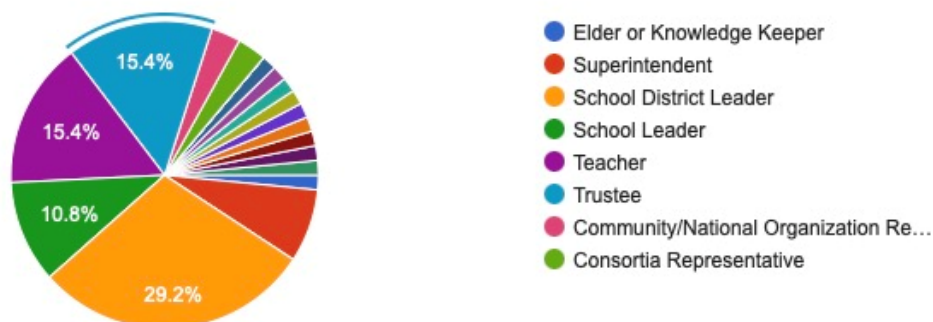
Goals for the First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Education Gathering include:

- an increase in understanding 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.

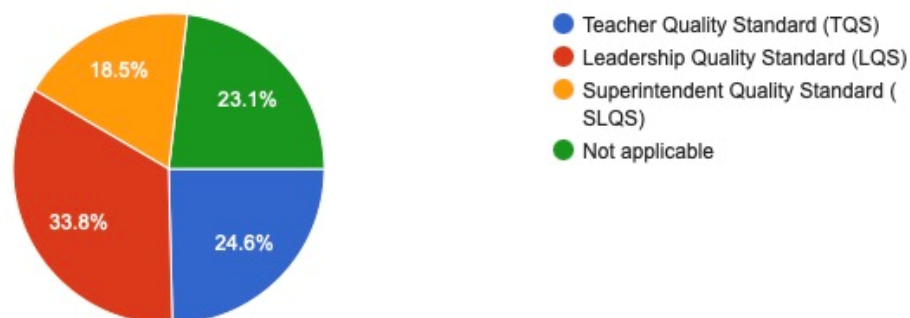
Below are the highlights of the 2024 survey findings to inform the 2025 Gathering. In 2025, the Gathering will be held at the Wyndham Hotel and Conference Centre in Edmonton (4440 Gateway Blvd NW, Edmonton).

For additional information please contact Dr. Dianne Roulson, dianne.roulson@cass.ab.ca.

Please indicate your position.



Which professional practice standard are you focused on addressing?



REFLECTIONS ON MY LEARNING:

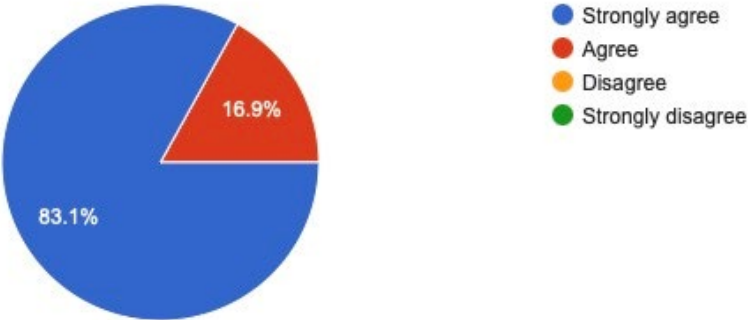
The Alberta Professional Practice Standards: [Teacher Quality Standard \(TQS\)](#), [Leadership Quality Standard \(LQS\)](#), and the [Superintendent Quality Standard \(SLQS\)](#) include a focus on Indigenous Education.

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

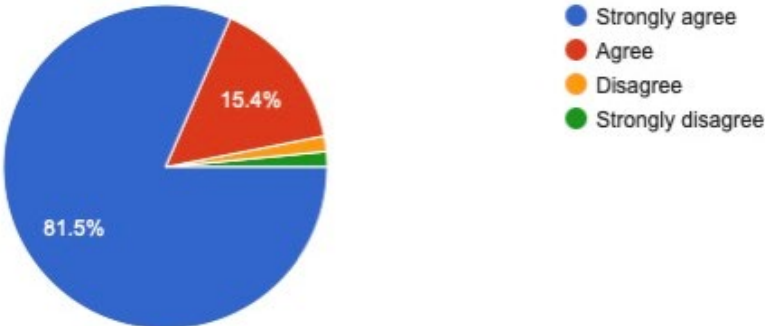
Participants had a great deal to say and provided detailed responses. They were inspired by the theme, “kinship relations for student success” and talked about how their understanding of kinship was deepened. Participants described how much they valued learning from Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and Indigenous educators. The strength of Indigenous voices at the Gathering was noted repeatedly. This was tied to many comments about how important it is to learn *from* and *with* (not only *about*) First Nations, Métis and Inuit. Respondents recognized the importance of including Indigenous knowledges and perspectives in all aspects of their work. They appreciated the opportunity to learn about the uniqueness and diversity of First Nations,

Métis, and Inuit and the range of keynotes and presentations. They highlighted the profound impact particular presentations, teachings, and learning opportunities had on them and their understanding of this distinctness. They described feeling encouraged, challenged, and inspired to take action. Many mentioned that they were moved by the experience and said they needed more time to reflect and absorb their learning. They expressed gratitude for all who presented and shared their time and knowledge.

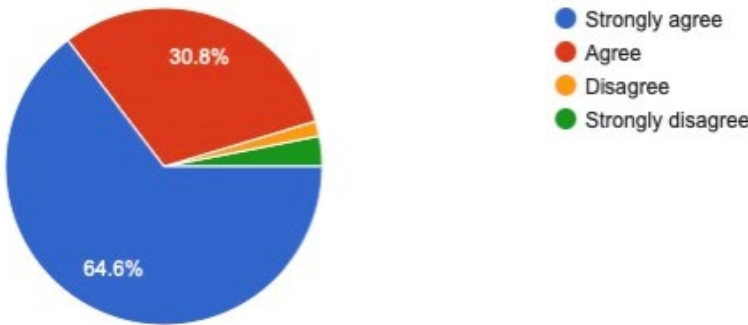
2. I commit to applying my learning (awareness and understanding) in my role/practice.



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



4. This professional learning opportunity provided ideas about how to lead and incorporate strategies/action into my work.



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

Respondents identified many commitments to action that were inspired by their experience at the Gathering. These included: **sharing** their learning with others; **refuting and challenging** systemic cultures and structures that prevent equity and change; **carrying and living up to** the teachings of the Elders and Knowledge Keepers; **nurturing relationships** that were established at the Gathering; **taking time to reflect** individually and as team members; **becoming better listeners; encouraging others** in their learning journey; **reaching out** to those who shared their knowledge at the Gathering; **exploring the resources** that were introduced; **supporting Indigenous staff** and teams in their own workplaces; creating opportunities for staff and students to **learn from/with Indigenous educators; centering Indigenous voices and knowledges**; continuing to **nourish relationships** with local Indigenous communities; exploring and increasing opportunities for **land learning**; and, supporting learning opportunities for students and staff related to **Indigenous languages**.

6. Please identify one learning related to “Kinship Relations for Student Success” that made the 2024 Gathering meaningful.

Responses were extensive in this area and detailed learning related to the theme, keynotes, sessions, ceremony, time to visit/network, and resources. In particular, the following topics/ideas were noted as key areas of learning: including and honouring **First Nations, Métis and Inuit knowledges** and perspectives alongside western Canadian ones; **working side by side**, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, from the beginning of any effort (nothing for/about us without us); **young people** are already ‘made’ for connection and kinship; we are all **related**; kinship involves everyone and the **natural world**; lead with your **spirit and heart**; kinship is key to **healing**; we **inherited** our collective history, we can make a difference by **accepting responsibility** to learn and work together; **truth** must always be part of reconciliation; there is **distinctness and connection** between and among Indigenous knowledges; we are all in a different place in our **learning journey**; **land learning** is a strong and healing kinship relationship; treaty education is about **making relatives**; **world views** can live respectfully side by side; and, the way forward is **together**, in true partnership.

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

Overall, participants were very appreciative of the organization of the Gathering and the excellent program offerings. They offered thoughtful suggestions that would further strengthen the Gathering.

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

Feedback related to **the facility** included: the slow elevators; the long distance to travel between the ballroom and meeting rooms; the feeling of being crowded at times; the limited rooms available on site for accommodation; limited seating in some break-out rooms; providing a more up-to-date

and cost-effective venue; and, easier access to the artisan market and visibility for it. As well, a suggestion was made to hold the Gathering at an Indigenous-owned and operated site. Some people recommended rotating the hosting of the Gathering in different Treaty areas.

Some of the feedback related to **the schedule** included: having paper copies of the program available; including QR codes around the venue for easy access to location and session descriptions; starting a bit later in the morning; and, having fewer offerings each day. Removing the lunchtime keynote seemed to make a difference in terms of the days feeling less jam-packed. People still found the days very full and said they would appreciate more time to reflect on their learning and connect with others.

In terms of **the program**, suggestions included; providing access/connection to the land and **land learning** opportunities; offering **hands-on** and **cultural learning** experiences; providing **pipe teachings** before the pipe ceremony; setting the tone in each session by inviting people briefly to **introduce** themselves to one another so they know who is in the room (e.g., could be in table groups, or simply to the person next to them if group is large); providing a **smudge space** for participants; changing the length, timing, and content of **political speeches**; making sure **Elders and Knowledge Keepers are identified** (e.g., different colour or type of nametag); including First Nations, Métis and Inuit **cultural arts**; including more sessions from Indigenous educators or leaders with **practical applications** for teaching and school or district leadership practices; **balancing** First Nations, Métis and Inuit offerings; expanding opportunities for **discussion and reflection** (e.g., sharing circles); **reviewing** the process for Elder Circles and holding **smaller ones** and potentially offering throughout the program; keeping **witness to the gathering** brief, high level and, possibly, followed by time for small group reflection; ensuring a **break** in the two-hour sessions; having **microphones** for Elders and Knowledge Keepers; continuing with **youth Elder Helpers**; offering **Elder Teachings** by topic; providing time for participants to sit and **visit with Elders**; continuing to have more **Elders and Knowledge Keepers** speak; having **more local Indigenous** created resources and arts available.

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: **building and nurturing respectful relationships** with local Indigenous communities; time for **reflection**; **language learning** opportunities; digging into the **resources and concepts** provided; more **Métis and Inuit** education/foundational knowledge; **teachings about ceremony** before participating in ceremony; **balancing** Indigenous knowledges with western Canadian knowledge as part of their practice each day; **land learning**; **hands-on** and **cultural learning** opportunities; **time with** Elders and Knowledge Keepers; relevant, practical **curriculum connections**; provincial database of **resources**; **practical learning** that can be implemented right away; **increased attendance** of senior leadership teams and those who have decision making authority; and, **collaborating** with others with similar roles.

Participants highlighted how much they valued learning from and with Elders and their deep respect and regard for these teachings. This year, 46 Elders and Knowledge Keepers attended the Gathering, 10 of whom were sponsored by CASS. Twenty-seven Elders attended the Gathering in 2023. The number of Elders attending each year has been steadily increasing, demonstrating a growing relationship between system education authorities and Elders/Knowledge Keepers.

9. Please share comments/suggestions regarding future CASS Gatherings.

Overall, feedback was extremely positive and many expressed gratitude for the organization, program offerings, communication, and smooth running of the Gathering. Of note this year were the number of comments about the ‘good feeling’ at the Gathering and the laughter and love. Most of what was shared in this section has already been highlighted in response to the other questions.

In summary, feedback related to the **program and structure** of the Gathering was to consider including more time for reflection, reducing participant numbers in Elder sessions, revisiting the structure of the Elder Circles (e.g., shifting to Elder Teachings by topic), and offering Elder sessions throughout the program. People appreciated time to visit at lunch on the full day (rather than having another keynote scheduled). Participants highlighted the importance of including land learning, cultural teachings, and hands-on learning opportunities (e.g., arts, music, dance, carvings, other skills).

As already noted, feedback about the **facility** included: crowding in ballroom and space for artisans; dated venue; capacity/slowness of elevators; and, long distances between ballroom and sessions rooms. Participants mentioned the importance of a site where they had opportunity to connect with the land (during both structured and unstructured time). Suggestions also included holding the Gathering at an Indigenous owned and/or operated venue where there is greater capacity for and access to the land and land learning opportunities. There were also suggestions about rotating Treaty areas in terms of the location of the Gathering and the need for more rooms available on site.

There were several comments about the importance of providing **honoraria** for Elders and Knowledge Keepers who are sharing their time and knowledge. Several people talked also about the importance of honouring the knowledge of others presenting at the Gathering who are not being compensated by an employer (e.g., students, community members). Some registrants also talked about the registration and accommodation **costs** being prohibitive. They mentioned as well the added costs of substitute coverage for teachers.

10. What specifically would you be willing to share about how you, your school authority, and/or organization are having a positive impact contributing to Indigenous Education?

Forty-six people responded to this question and 34 shared their contact information and indicated they would be willing to have a conversation. It is inspiring to see the depth and breadth of work that is unfolding across the province, the number of school authorities working side by side with

local Indigenous communities, and how willing people are to share the work they are doing on behalf of students.

The areas they highlighted include: **language** revitalization; **anti-racism** education; **hosting** ceremony and cultural events; **land learning**; **balancing and honouring** Indigenous knowledges alongside western Canadian knowledge; including Indigenous knowledges, language, and cultural teachings in **program offerings** for students; taking action on **student voice**; creating systemic conditions to advance **Indigenous student success**; having **difficult and uncomfortable conversations**; **partnering** with local Indigenous communities; **educating** decision makers (e.g., senior leaders and trustees); building understanding about Indigenous student success **data and grant accountability**; establishing **respectful and reciprocal** relationships with local Indigenous communities; **co-developing resources** with Indigenous people; **hiring practices** and support for Indigenous staff, teachers, and leaders; access to **cultural practices** for students; working with **Indigenous scholars**; **sustained at-scale professional learning** to advance success for First Nations, Métis and Inuit students and for the benefit of all students; and, **building respectful relationships** with families and community.