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Institutional and Systemic Barriers in Indigenous Teacher Education

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Study Objective

Understand the barriers that Indigenous students face in teaching education programs and provide recommendations to address them.

242 former recipients of Indspire's Building Brighter Futures program, previously or currently enrolled in a teacher education program, reported the barriers they faced during their time in the program:

Curriculum and cultural disconnection (66%): a lack of authentic representation of Indigenous perspectives.

Financial support barriers (58%): complex funding processes and lack of awareness of financial aid options.

Inadequate support services (40%): lack of spaces for cultural connection and access to Indigenous mentors.

Systemic racism and discrimination (38%): systemic discrimination in the curriculum design and hiring process.

Institutional policy issues (34%): institutional policies fail to accommodate Indigenous peoples' unique needs.

Geographical barriers (29%): relocating from rural to urban areas can produce financial and personal stress.

34 participants took part in focus groups to provide recommendations for supporting Indigenous students. Insights from these discussions informed the development of the dual-framework *Strengthening Indigenous Teacher Education (SITE)*.

Transforming Systems Framework

The first framework centers around reducing barriers in education systems:

Strengthen Indigenous Representation: strengthen partnerships between Indigenous communities and schools; make Indigenous voices central in policy-making; develop culturally responsive curricula, policies, and support services by collaborating with local Indigenous communities.

Integrate Indigenous Knowledge in the Curriculum: integrate Indigenous knowledge and assessment methods; include Indigenous teachers, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers in developing and delivering curricula; incorporate land-based and experiential learning; and collaborate with local Indigenous communities for curricula to reflect regional knowledge and tradition.

Create Respectful and Inclusive Environments: mandatory cultural safety and anti-racism training for staff and students; policies addressing systemic discrimination; training to incorporate Indigenous content into curriculum and instruction; and require students to complete courses on Indigenous cultures and develop courses in collaboration with Elders and Knowledge Keepers.

Establish Culturally Informed Policies: flexible policies that accommodate Indigenous needs; foster Indigenous specific programs and initiatives; establish Indigenous education frameworks and Indigenous advisory councils; and recognize post-secondary as a treaty right, eliminating tuition and application fees.

Encouraging Growth Framework

The second framework centers around improving supports for Indigenous educators:

Provide Accessible Pathways to Education: hire Indigenous advocates to guide students through institutional systems, alternative admissions qualifications which consider Indigenous students' lived experiences, academic support tailored to Indigenous students' professional needs; and provide experiential learning grounded in Indigenous practices.

Expand Indigenous Spaces and Services: establish dedicated Indigenous spaces and services; create Indigenous student groups and mentorship opportunities with Indigenous alumni or educators; comprehensive orientation programs; and provide access to mental health services with Indigenous counselors.

Enhance Financial Support and Funding: consistent and increased funding to reflect rising costs; extend financial aid to cover graduate and part-time studies and tailored support for parents and male Indigenous educators; coordinate funding from post-secondary institutions and Indigenous funding bodies; and simplify and centralize funding application processes.

Increase Availability of Student Resources: comprehensive financial support beyond tuition to include supplies and transportation; improve communication, visibility and guidance for funding applications; provide accessible and affordable childcare and housing options; and providing a list of housing options and budgeting with implemented safety measures, particularly for Indigenous women.

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The recommendations from this report provide actionable ways for institutions to support Indigenous students' success in teacher education programs, thus increasing the representation of Indigenous educators in Canada's K-12 school system.

