

## **Exploring Chronic Student Absenteeism in Northern Saskatchewan**

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### **Abstract**

Chronic student absenteeism is a common phenomenon that education staff in northern Saskatchewan experience. Eighty-eight percent of the students who attend publically funded schools in northern Saskatchewan self-identify as First Nation, Metis, and Inuit (FNMI), and a likelihood exists that many students are descendants of residential school survivors. A phenomenological research method was selected to explore whether current student attendance patterns could be an additional expression of intergenerational trauma experienced by those who attended residential schools. Data were generated through qualitative, in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a snowball sample of three individuals who self-identified as Indigenous, have lived in northern Saskatchewan, and are somehow connected to the residential school system in Canada. Causation coding was used to analyze how participants believed antecedent conditions eventually led to certain outcomes. Findings are summarized in a causation map that establishes plausible causation sequences and how multiple contextual factors may influence certain outcomes. Findings suggest that chronic student attendance patterns are a plausible consequence of the attempted cultural genocide through assimilation that took place in residential schools. Indigenous parents also expressed disappointment and dissatisfaction regarding the broken education system in Saskatchewan. Intensive intervention programming is needed for parents and students to begin healing and making positive progress. Educational leaders ought to consider re-designing instruction and developing tailor-made attendance intervention models.

*Keywords:* residential school system, intergenerational trauma, chronic student absenteeism; First Nations, Metis, and Inuit; Indigenous

### **Exploring Chronic Student Absenteeism in Northern Saskatchewan**

Many Canadians anecdotally and amusingly refer to Saskatchewan as “the flat province,” which is true in southern areas. However, the north is quite different. Northern Saskatchewan is a vast region of the province that is mostly covered by thick boreal forests, lakes, and river systems. Mining drives the northern economy. For individuals who like adventure and exploring new places, northern Saskatchewan provides opportunities to hike, fish, hunt, and participate in traditional Indigenous ceremonies and activities (Northern Lights School Division [NLSD], 2022). Individuals can explore a total of 70 northern communities. Only 3% of the entire province’s total population lives in northern Saskatchewan (Government of Saskatchewan, n.d.). Moreover, while some communities can only be accessed by plane, many communities can be accessed by road despite significant geographical distances (NLSD, 2022).

The Northern Lights School Division No. 113 (NLSD) covers approximately the entire northern half of the province of Saskatchewan. There are 22 schools located in 17 communities (NLSD, 2022). In the 2021-22 school year, 88% of the students in the school division self-identified as First Nations, Metis, and Inuit [FNMI] (NLSD, 2022). Student absenteeism is a chronic issue that education staff experience on a daily basis in northern Saskatchewan. Current attendance patterns are genuinely perplexing and many school staff struggle to understand the phenomenon.

The Government of Saskatchewan (2022) released attendance data from September 2013 to June 2019. In the 2013-14 school year, the percentage of FNMI students with at least 80% attendance (from kindergarten to grade 12) was 68.4% which means that 31.6% of the FNMI student population had lower than 80% attendance. In the 2018-19 school year, 65.9% of FNMI students from kindergarten to grade 12 had 80% attendance or higher. Therefore, 34.1% of the

FNMI student population had lower than 80% attendance in the 2018-19 school year (Government of Saskatchewan, 2022). In Saskatchewan, there are officially 200 instructional days in a school year (Education Act, 1995; Education Act, 1995/2019). Therefore, a student that has at least 80% attendance has attended a minimum of 160 instructional days. In contrast, students who had 80% attendance or less had missed a minimum of 40 school days. Interestingly, the decline in attendance began prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Absenteeism is one of the first significant indicators of dropping out of school (Government of Alberta, 2014). Attwood and Croll (2015) argue that chronically absent students have higher unemployment rates and are socially and economically disadvantaged by the age of 20. As well, these students are more likely to have mental health concerns (Kearney, 2008; Attwood & Croll, 2015; Fowler et al., 2020). Gentle-Genitty et al. (2020, p.1) also conclude that non-attenders seriously impair their mental, cognitive, and socio-economic outcomes. Both Birioukov (2016) and Kearney (2008) posit that individuals may also be more likely to engage in risky behaviors such as drug use, outbursts leading to suspensions/expulsions, and criminal activity. Many chronically absent students cannot reach grade-level educational outcomes because their absence has prevented them from keeping up with their peers. Strained relationships exist between chronically absent students and teachers. Chronic absenteeism remains a serious problem that can have a significant impact on an individual for the rest of their life.

Since 88% of the students who attend NLS D schools self-identify as FNMI, a strong likelihood exists that many students in northern Saskatchewan are descendants of survivors who attended the residential school system. The residential school system is no longer in operation but was originally designed and carried out by the local churches and government to forcefully

remove Indigenous children from their families without parental consent. The goal of residential schools was to assimilate Indigenous children into mainstream society (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRCOC], 2015). The current FNMI population in Canada has survived attempted cultural genocide. Consequently, students and parents may have an undercurrent of distrust, fear, and anxiety toward the K-12 public education system in Saskatchewan. Current student attendance patterns could be an additional expression of intergenerational trauma experienced by those who are connected to the residential school system. Attempting to research the potential connection between student attendance patterns and the impact of the residential school system may provide educational decision-makers with strategic ways of helping students, families, and communities heal from the trauma previously inflicted upon them, as well as developing innovative ways of improving student attendance.

### **Literature Review**

Birioukov (2021) defines absenteeism as a part- or full-day absence from school that is not condoned by the school and/or family. The Office of the Child and Youth Advocate [OOCYA] (2019) in Newfoundland and Labrador provides a similar definition of absenteeism wherein if a student has more than 18 unexcused absences (or 10% of the school year), they are considered to be chronically absent. Rahman et al. (2023) also indicate that a chronically absent student needs to have missed at least 18 school days. Davison and Hawe (2012) simply argue that absenteeism is the total disengagement from curricular and extracurricular activities hosted by the local school community. Kearney (2008, p.452) defines student absenteeism as both the excused and unexcused absence from either elementary, middle, or high school. However, unexcused excessive absences prevail as the major concern. Unexcused excessive absences are considered to be a withdrawal from school where parents deliberately keep students home for

economic purposes, conceal potential neglect, prevent abduction from a concerning family member, or protect a student from a perceived threat (Kearney, 2008). Students may also have unexcused excessive absences due to school refusal behavior which is child-motivated refusal to attend school based on some form of anxiety or linked to the concept of fear (Kearney, 2008). Clearly, there is not a widely agreed-upon definition of behavior that qualifies as chronically absent.

Chronic student absenteeism is a complex issue with different perspectives. Some researchers do not agree on the length of time that ought to be labeled as considered chronically absent, and others do not provide a clear indication as to whether excused or unexcused absences are lumped into the same category (Kearney 2008; David & Hawe, 2012; Attwood & Croll, 2015; Birioukov, 2016; OOCYA, 2019; Fowler et al., 2020; Gentle-Genitty et al., 2020; Birioukov, 2021; Rahman et al., 2023). In an attempt to provide a definition, the NLSD (2020) defines a student as chronically absent if they have unexcused absences for at least 10% of the total amount of instructional days in the year which is used as a procedural practice for working with students who are not attending school. NLSD's definition is similar enough with the aforementioned research, and also aligns with the *Education Act of 1995* in Saskatchewan (NLSD, 2020). Gentle-Genitty et al. (2020) argue that regardless of the inconsistencies in the definition of chronic absenteeism, attendance patterns remain extremely concerning.

Absenteeism is an issue that extends beyond the barriers of a school or classroom. The effects of absenteeism can be felt in other areas of society. In fact, the OOCYA (2019) argues that chronic absenteeism is a manifested symptom of something deeper that ought to be explored and addressed.

The reasons why some students are not regularly attending school can be divided into two major categories: School-based and life-based reasons. With respect to school-based reasons, Birioukov (2016) reports that students who do not attend school regularly may perceive the school itself to be uninviting, overcrowded, and/or experience hostile behavior from other students. The adjustment to new curriculum or learning outcomes can also be a deterrent especially when those students are not being adequately supported to succeed. In addition, violent crimes such as rape, sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault are also committed against students while at school which ultimately motivates students to remain at home (Kearney, 2008; Davison & Hawe, 2012; Rahman et al., 2023). In Attwood and Croll's (2015) study, students self-reported that some of the reasons why they did not attend school were that they were bored with the lessons, a general dislike for school, or they did not like their teachers. In fact, participants in the Stelmach et al. (2017) study believe that the connection between the teacher and student is very important to student success, and if students are having a difficult time building relationships with their teacher, then keeping already-vulnerable students in the building will be challenging.

In terms of life-based circumstances, some students do not attend school due to poverty. Specifically, major barriers for students include frequent relocation, inability to access transportation, inadequate clothing and school supplies, and food security. In fact, students in lower socio-economic levels will likely miss more school than students in higher socio-economic levels. Females also cite that teenage pregnancy is a significant reason why they do not attend school and ultimately drop out (Kearney, 2008; Davison & Hawe, 2012; Rahman et al., 2023). Some students who come from particularly low socio-economic levels of society have work commitments because they have to provide financial support to their family, are involved in the

criminal justice system, and come from unstable home life (Davison & Hawe, 2012; Birioukov, 2016). Rahman et al. (2023) find that parents who do not consistently support or demonstrate an interest in their child's academics influence attendance patterns in a negative way. Additionally, students who are of visible minority may experience more instances of racism; they might be perceived as not being academically capable, a member of a gang, and/or labeled as a troublemaker. Visible minority students confirm that they do experience real pain because societal racism contaminates relationships with people both in and outside of the school community (Stelmach et al., 2017). Among the visible minority population are Indigenous students which are not widely reflected in the literature.

Defining *indigenous people* as a collective is complex because the term does not adequately articulate the distinct differences among FNMI people. The word *indigenous* does not necessarily acknowledge people (First Nations, Inuit, and Metis) having their own histories, cultures, governance, and languages. However, in the broadest sense, the word *indigenous* is an inclusive term (Kovach, 2021). Wilson (2008) believes that the word *indigenous* is used as an identifier to help clarify those who self-identify their ancestry as the original inhabitants of Canada. According to the Government of Canada (2024), those who self-identify as FNMI represent approximately 5% of the total national population. Interestingly, the Indigenous population is the fastest growing and also the youngest (Government of Canada, 2024). In an attempt to capture as many self-identifications as possible, the term *Indigenous* will refer to FNMI people having common ancestry with the original inhabitants of Canada.

The Indigenous population has experienced significant historical trauma due to attempted cultural genocide by forcing children to attend residential schools. The residential school system in Canada was a coordinated effort between local churches and the government to separate

Indigenous children from their families, often very far away from their homes, in an effort to break the link between their culture and identity (TRCOC, 2015; Matheson et al., 2022; Weiss et al., 2023). The government attempted to break the link between culture and person because the assimilation policy failed to recognize Indigenous people as distinct and to absorb them into mainstream Canadian society against their will. In 1920, Deputy Minister of Indian Affairs, Duncan Campbell Scott, stipulated that the goal of the legislative committee overseeing assimilation was simply to continue until there was not a single Indian in Canada not integrated into mainstream society. Indigenous languages and cultures were significantly suppressed, and discipline was harsh toward children (TRCOC, 2015; Matheson et al., 2022; Weiss et al., 2023). Matheson et al. (2022) report that some schools engaged in human experimentation where children were provided vitamins and supplements to see whether they would reduce the effects of purposefully introduced malnourishment. Children in these schools were often neglected and unsupervised which created situations where students were subject to sexual and physical abuse. Many children were murdered (TRCOC, 2015; Matheson, et al. 2022; Weiss et al. 2023). Recently, unmarked mass graves of Indigenous children have been discovered by archeologists in Canada (Cooper, 2023). Although the residential school system has since been decommissioned and Indigenous students today have not physically attended residential schools, many of their parents and/or extended family members did. Both current Indigenous students and their family members are survivors of attempted cultural genocide through assimilation by the church and government.

The TRCOC (2015) writes that the first church-run residential school was opened in 1828 in Brantford, Ontario. Not only did the system expand steadily into more regions of pre- and post-confederation Canada, but the system was in full operation until the 1980s when many of

the schools began to close. In 1969, the churches relinquished their involvement with these schools and the government took entire responsibility for their operations (TRCOC, 2015). In the 1990s, only eleven remained open, and at that point, many of the school operations had been transferred to local Indigenous bands and councils. Notably, 7 of the eleven remaining schools were located in Saskatchewan. The last residential school in Canada closed in 1998 which was also located in Saskatchewan (TRCOC, 2015). The closure of the residential schools remains a very recent history (especially in Saskatchewan), and many Indigenous people are still recovering from the direct impact of the trauma experienced there.

The trauma from the residential school system is undeniably significant, and the impact can be felt not only in those who survived but the descendants of the survivors as well, which is often called intergenerational trauma. Weiss et al. (2023) propose that survivors of the residential school system are more likely to have increased mental health concerns, substance abuse, reduced trust, increased silence, and deteriorated social values. To further support these claims, Matheson et al. (2022) argue that parents who experience significant traumatic stressors (such as experiences in residential schools) are more likely to have disturbed/negative parent-child interactions, neglectful behaviors towards children, and general disengagement from the parenting process. Thus, descendants of residential school survivors are more likely to encounter Adverse Childhood Experiences [ACEs] as they are growing up (Matheson et al. 2022). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC] (2023) define ACEs as potentially traumatic situations that occur in children between infancy and 17 years old. ACEs may include situations like witnessing or experiencing violence at home, attempted suicide, substance use problems, mental health concerns, and instability due to the separation of parents and children. Ultimately, ACEs undermine a child's sense of safety, stability, and ability to bond (CDC, 2023). Moreover,

Matheson et al. (2022) propose that children who experience ACEs may have difficulty trusting others, difficulty forming and maintaining close relationships, trouble regulating emotions, developing psychological disorders, and disruptions in school performance. Disputing the idea that trauma from the residential school system has a cascading effect on subsequent generations of Indigenous children is challenging.

Even though the definition of chronic student absenteeism is inconsistent in the literature, researchers generally agree on the reasons why students are not in school. As well, researchers agree that there are significant potential lifelong impacts from students avoiding school (Kearney 2008; David & Hawe, 2012; Attwood & Croll, 2015; Birioukov, 2016; OOCYA, 2019; Fowler et al., 2020; Gentle-Genitty et al., 2020; Birioukov, 2021; Rahman et al., 2023). To contextualize chronic student absenteeism in northern Saskatchewan among Indigenous students, the impact that the residential school system has had on the Indigenous population must be considered. The added dimension of the residential school system could be a significant contributing factor as to why teachers and school staff currently experience concerning attendance patterns. Only one study explicitly mentions that there could be a connection between absenteeism and the emotional barrier caused by the residential school system (Fowler et al., 2020). However, no further details are provided, and the potential connection is not further discussed. Moreover, Rahman et al. (2023) argue that there is no global or regional evidence to demonstrate how violence, mental health, and parental support might predispose students to chronic absenteeism. Given that the Indigenous population is the youngest and fastest growing population in Canada and is the survivor of cultural genocide, intentional research ought to be done to begin understanding how Indigenous students and families feel about education so potential solutions can be developed.

## Method

### Research Design

While there is considerable evidence regarding the reasons why students are chronically absent from school, the literature is unclear if similar events like the residential school system in Canada are plausible precursor conditions that may alter student attendance patterns in future generations of students. The attempted cultural genocide through assimilation is truly distinct to the Indigenous people, which no other population in Canada has directly experienced. Moreover, authentic commentary can only come from the Indigenous population based on their lived experiences. Thus, a phenomenological research approach was selected to investigate the perceptions, beliefs, and feelings of Indigenous people in northern Saskatchewan with respect to the potential connection between the fallout of the residential school system and current attendance patterns. In accordance with a phenomenological research approach, lived experiences of Indigenous people were explored through in-depth interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2023; Marshall et al., 2022; Kovach, 2021).

Causation coding was selected to analyse interview transcripts by investigating whether current attendance patterns are a plausible result of the impact of the residential school system. Specifically, participant narratives were re-organized into a sequential linear map of events beginning with the antecedent conditions (starting conditions), mediating variables (potential links between the starting conditions and the outcome), and the outcomes (Roy et al., 2017; Saldana, 2021). Saldana (2021, p.362) indicates that causation coding is appropriate for “recent histories, interrelationships, and complexity of influences and the effects on human actions and phenomena.” Roy et al. (2017) supports Saldana’s (2021) definition by explaining that causation

coding is used to understand cognitive processes that participants may use to rationalize how and why particular events occur.

### **Data Sources**

Indigenous voices and perspectives were central in attempting to understand the potential connection between the impact of the residential school system and the current attendance patterns of students in northern Saskatchewan. The sources of data were the experiences, thoughts, feelings, and attitudes of Indigenous people from northern Saskatchewan. Two individuals interviewed self-identified as Denesuline and 1 individual self-identified as Cree. All individuals were born, raised, and have lived in northern Saskatchewan for a significant part of their lives. All participants are fluent in both English and their respective Indigenous languages. Moreover, each participant has some sort of personal connection to the residential school system, which authentically influenced responses to the interview questions.

### **Participant Selection**

Initially, an ideal scenario involved interviewing 5 participants but due to time constraints and some people ultimately withdrawing, only 3 individuals were interviewed. Despite not achieving the goal of interviewing 5 participants, according to Marhsall et al. (2022) phenomenological studies generally have 3-4 participants. In terms of inclusion criteria, each participant must have self-identified as Indigenous, lived in northern Saskatchewan, and had some sort of personal connection to the residential school system in Canada. Having a personal connection to the residential school system did not necessarily mean physically attending a residential school. Rather, a personal connection to the residential school system could have been a parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, or friend who attended. Participants having a personal connection to the residential school system creates a unique frame of reference that could

authentically provide commentary on the impact that the residential school system has had. No other populations in Canada could provide this perspective.

Individuals were selected through snowball sampling, meaning that a small number of individuals were invited to participate due to possessing particular knowledge and frame of reference as well as having some sort of pre-existing relationship with the researcher (Kovach, 2021). All individuals were formally invited to participate through face-to-face conversations and phone calls. If interest was expressed, participants were provided with the participant letter and informed consent to review and sign (see Appendix A). Due to the large geography and challenging accessibility of northern Saskatchewan communities, some participants were invited through email, text message, or *Facebook Messenger*, but a follow-up phone call usually took place after the initial connection was made.

Indigenous populations are considered vulnerable (Government of Canada, 2022), so additional ethical assurances were implemented. Firstly, approval from a local Elder in northern Saskatchewan was required due to the sensitive information that could be disclosed by participants during interviews. As a highly respected individual, the Elder would have a much deeper understanding of how local individuals might feel if they were approached to participate. The Elder was briefed on the purpose of the study, the interview questions that participants would be asked, the ways that participants could stop participating, how participants would remain anonymous, how the findings would be disseminated back to participants once the project was complete, and the impact that the results of the study could potentially have. More importantly, the Elder was informed that the research would not begin if she felt that the intent was inappropriate. Thankfully, the Elder agreed to support the project and felt that understanding the phenomenon of student absenteeism would be beneficial for parents, education workers, and

community members. A specific Elder consent form was created to formalize approval which can be found in Appendix B.

Secondly, the participant invitation and informed consent form placed an emphasis on voluntary involvement and anonymity. Furthermore, participants were free to withdraw from the project at any time without consequence. If participants did not wish to proceed with the project, they did not have to provide a reason. Also, individuals who agreed to participate were asked to determine a pseudonym that would be used throughout the project to keep identities private. Access to the original interview recordings was limited to the researcher.

Thirdly, the interview protocol was adjusted to accommodate a vulnerable population. Before the interviews began, participants were reminded that the entire project was approved by a prominent and respected Elder in northern Saskatchewan. Each participant was also reminded that their involvement was completely voluntary, and they could withdraw at any time without a reason. Declining to answer a specific interview question was also permitted without consequence. Due to the sensitivity of the subject matter, participants were informed that if an experience or memory was emotionally triggering, they could stop the interview at any point and that the interview would only proceed if they wished. Moreover, individuals were informed of relevant counseling services in the area that they could access if they chose to. Specific interview protocol can be found in Appendix C. Once the aforementioned ethical assurances were satisfied, approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Niagara University was obtained.

### **Data Collection**

To explore the possible connection between current student attendance patterns and the impact of the residential school system on Indigenous peoples in northern Saskatchewan, data collection was completed through in-depth semi-structured qualitative interviews (Marshall et

al., 2022; Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The interviews were conducted face-to-face in a location that was convenient for the participant. A series of 7 open-ended questions were asked and participants had an opportunity to discuss their feelings towards the current education system in Saskatchewan, how they think students and parents feel about attending school, and how to get students back in the classroom regularly. Probes were embedded into the interview structure to allow for more elaboration and timely clarification (Marshall et al., 2022; Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The timing of the interviews depended on the amount of detail provided by the participants, but interviews ranged from 36 to 49 minutes with an average of 42.33 minutes. For transcription, interviews were recorded and then the audio files were uploaded to a software program called *Otter.ai*. Field notes were also taken during the interviews to cross reference and clean up transcription mistakes.

### **Analysis**

To investigate the potential connection between current student attendance patterns in northern Saskatchewan and the impact that the residential school system has had on the Indigenous population, causation coding was selected. Saldana (2021) recommends that causation coding ought to be used when trying to understand the reasons or causal explanations as to why particular outcomes come to fruition. More specifically, causation coding is used to “uncover what people believe about events and their causes” (Saldana, 2021, p.242). This type of coding analysis builds participant mental models by decoding participant narratives. Mental models are built by determining chronological sequences based on the lived experiences of participants beginning with antecedent conditions that lead to a specific outcome. There are also mediating variables that link the starting conditions with the outcome. More specifically, varying degrees of contextual influences act as mediating variables between antecedent conditions and

the outcome (Roy et al., 2017;). Therefore, causation coding attempts to map mental models in a triplet coding sequence as CODE 1 (antecedent event) → CODE 2 (mediating variable) → CODE 3 (the outcome) (Roy et al., 2017; Saldana, 2021).

However, chronological sequences are not always evident because participants do not usually speak in linear sequential ways. Therefore, a thorough decoding of transcripts was needed by paying attention to specific phrases or words that imply sequential connections like “since,” “and that’s why,” “because,” and “as a result of.” Non-linear conversations with participants reverberate back and forth between mediating variables, the outcome, and antecedent conditions. Saldana (2021, p.243) states that “deducing these processes is like a childhood exercise in logic in which we had to determine from randomly arranged pictures what happened first, then second, then third.” Also, some participants may entirely omit mediating variables, which then need to be plausibly inferred so that a sequence between antecedent conditions and the outcome can be determined (Saldana, 2021).

Once the audio files were transcribed using *Otter.ai*, the raw transcription data was exported to *Microsoft Word* and no other computer software programs were used for analysis. To keep the transcription documents organized, data were arranged based on the interview questions and a column on the right side of the page was reserved for triplet coding. Triplet coding was completed, and a coding map was developed with three columns to differentiate between antecedent conditions, mediating variables, and outcome codes while still chunked by interview questions. The coding map was designed to separate and re-arrange original codes from the raw data, compile codes from different transcriptions, categorize codes based on similarities, and examine plausible chronological sequencing of the narratives (Saldana, 2021). Once re-organized into the coding map, data was further analyzed by assessing similarities and differences among

codes within antecedent conditions, mediating variables, and outcomes so that categories could be determined. Once the categories were established, themes were synthesized based on the similarities and differences of the categories.

Ultimately, the themes were used to create a causation map. The causation map was created to see how all major themes from antecedent conditions, variables, and outcomes could be plausibly connected. The causation map was created to assist with codeweaving. Saldana (2021, p.64) argues that codeweaving is a way to “view and interpret how the individual components of the study fit together” as well as develop networking and process diagrams. Rather than view each individual aspect of analysis as an isolated situation, codeweaving is a means to analyse influences and effects from a macroscopic level as well as examine if combinations of factors through codeweaving may influence the fruition of several different outcomes. Saldana (2021, p.251) also advises that codeweaving is a prudent way to “remain grounded in the data and to not rely as heavily on speculation.”

## **Findings**

### **Antecedent Conditions**

Five major antecedent condition themes emerged from the data. The themes included historical traumatic events, current family dynamics, the disposition of teachers, the current state of the education system in Saskatchewan, and possible pathways to positive progress. All participants acknowledged that the historical traumatic events cannot be ignored. Sally, Mary, and Ruby all discussed, in varying degrees of detail, the historical traumatic events that the Indigenous population in Canada has experienced. Sally explained that current communities are deeply damaged and sick due to Indigenous children being “*separated from parents by nuns, priests, and the [Royal Canadian Mounted Police] RCMP.*” As well, Sally stated that children

were forced into institutions where *“they were physically ... mentally abused and siblings were not allowed to talk to each other ... [they were kept] separate.”* Ruby also shared that *“parents did not have a choice whether they wanted to send their kids to school or not.”* Mary ultimately summarized that *“[residential schools] hurt a lot of people ... I know people are still struggling with a lot of things that they lived through ... and that hurt is generational.”*

All participants shared concerns about the current state of the K-12 education system in Saskatchewan. Despite recent efforts related to truth and reconciliation, Ruby believes that the education system is still *“designed by white privilege.”* Ruby further explained that the education system is focused on gathering data, not the holistic development of students, and that the *“driving force behind the K-12 education system is the curriculum.”* Moreover, Ruby argued that policies are inadequate to address the needs of Indigenous students and the expectation on teachers to differentiate their instruction is overwhelming and unrealistic. Additionally, Mary believes that the system is lacking failure because her daughter *“can’t fail, no matter how poorly she does ... she’s being pushed through a system.”* Elementary students are admitted to the next subsequent grade despite not developing foundational knowledge. Students do not experience real failure until they reach high school because they must earn the required credits for graduation. Furthermore, Sally shared that there is a blatant lack of interest evidenced by *“...people in the provincial education system don’t understand where our kids are coming from”* and there is a *“huge gap in knowledge”* with respect to Indigenous students.

All participants commented on the current family dynamics that they witness in Indigenous communities. Participants unanimously agreed that students who experience strong parental support understand that education is important. However, participants spoke more specifically about current negative parent and student behaviours and attitudes. Sally explained

that some parents struggle with addictions, experience financial frustrations, and are sexually, physically, and mentally abusive towards their children. Thus, the abused children demonstrate avoidance and hopelessness. As well, these children are high-needs and high-risk in the classroom due to significant gaps in basic knowledge. Additionally, Ruby believes that some parents have a misguided belief that teachers are “*magic*” meaning that a student would suddenly change their behaviour or attitude for the better if a teacher had a conversation with them. According to Ruby, believing in “*magic teachers*” places an unrealistic and incredible burden on education staff.

Teacher dispositions were an important theme that emerged. All participants agreed that a teacher’s ability to build relationships with students is important. Mary was particularly vocal about this concept. She shared that an important skill a teacher must possess is the ability to resolve conflicts and be accountable. Also, Mary believes that some teachers have a “perceived softness” of children, meaning that “*if we challenge them, if we hurt their feelings, we’re just gonna break them. And no, we’re not.*” Teachers’ ought to abandon notions of “*perceived softness.*” Moreover, Mary believes that Indigenous communities need more caring teachers and encourages them to embody the idea that “*just because they can’t fail, doesn’t mean you shouldn’t be teaching them properly.*” Sally shared that, unfortunately, there are some “*poor teachers that are just giving seat work.*” Instead, teachers need to “*have empathy, are nurturing, and not there for the paycheque.*” As well, in Sally’s opinion, “*teachers need to enhance the [curriculum] outcomes.*” Additionally, Ruby argued that exhibiting passion forges deeper relationships with students.

Participants organically brainstormed what students and parents currently need to begin building a pathway toward positive progress. Sally, Mary, and Ruby all agreed, without question

or hesitation, that students need strong parental support to be successful. Students also need a friend group, love, nurturing, and someone to listen which may help develop a desire to attend school and graduate. Parents need to determine their own livelihood so that they reduce dependence on social assistance programs which may help reinforce the importance of education. Additionally, all participants discussed, at various points, that parents require intensive support.

### **Mediating Variables**

Different personal outlooks, attempted cultural genocide through assimilation, different parenting styles, micro and macro educational issues, interventions needed for success, and belief in one's own abilities were the themes that emerged from analyzing mediating variables. Ruby discussed the realities of individuals having different "*outlooks on life*" as well as "*passions.*" Essentially, attitudes towards life and different passions may change how people interact and build relationships. Ruby also suggested that "*people choose to carry and handle their trauma in different ways*" which can also impact how individuals view life.

All participants suggested that parents choose to employ different approaches to parenting which ultimately emerged as a standalone theme. Students are exposed to varying degrees of different parenting styles at home. Parenting styles discussed in the interviews can be grouped into positive or negative parenting styles. Components related to negative parenting styles included lack of consequences, lack of support for the child(ren), few expectations, not enough encouragement, using drugs and alcohol to cope, dealing with unemployment, minimal respect for teachers, and seeing no value in education. Mary explains that all of the components related to negative parenting can build frustrations and "*then it turns emotional, and mental. And it can turn physical in some families.*" Ruby believes that some parents do not fully understand

that supporting their child “*requires effort, time, consistency, and discipline*” and that “*the importance of education is not emphasized at home.*” Both Mary and Ruby seem to believe that many of the parents who employ a negative parenting style rely on social assistance programs because they do not possess the basic skills and training needed for gainful employment. In terms of the components related to positive parenting styles, participants think that pushing attendance at school, more encouragement, modeling, guiding, disciplining, seeking employment, rejecting excuses, and facilitating dreams are important for Indigenous children to experience. Ruby feels that identifying students who come from positive homes is fairly easy because their “*parents have gone through the education system, graduated, went on to post-secondary and now have sustainable jobs.*” Additionally, Mary explains that children need to know:

*as you get older, you have an actual job, where if you don't show up you don't get paid ... you don't get anything. And you say this is hard? And, like, life gets harder. You're gonna have really, really, crappy days and more responsibilities. Like, this is easy. Just go and try your best. Get the work done.*

Mary believes that being transparent with children about how hard life can be but modeling perseverance, all while encouraging effort and discipline, is important.

The Indigenous population in Canada experienced attempted cultural genocide through assimilation during the historic traumatic events. Individuals who survived residential school experienced horrific events while they attended, and some eventually perpetuated the abuse in their own children. Sally's parents attended residential school and:

*learned nothing ... never had no loving, nurturing, never learned any parenting skills ... were just a number ... they were physically, sexually, mentally abused ... you didn't learn anything because they didn't provide a proper education because they weren't teachers.*

Sally also shared that one of her uncles went to a residential school and eventually had his own children. Sally's uncle's children:

*grew up being called all kinds of names and stupid and getting scorned ... getting sexually abused and physically abused and mental abuse ... let's turn to drugs and alcoholism to cope ... so then they started having sex.*

Ruby also shared that many who attended residential schools eventually turned to drugs and alcohol as a means of coping.

The belief in one's own ability to attempt to complete a task (otherwise known as self-efficacy) emerged as a mediating variable. In some cases, participants discussed instances of either positive or negative self-efficacy. In terms of negative self-efficacy, Ruby would rather avoid trying something new because she is afraid of failure, and she felt that she is not worthy. Ruby expressed that she feels intimidated to exist in society being Indigenous and that she had to *"work on her own confidence because her capabilities are constantly being challenged."* Interestingly, Ruby shared that her son also expressed similar feelings of avoidance and fear when he was selected to try out for a competitive provincial volleyball team. Ruby's son did not want his mom to waste her time because he felt as if he was not going to make the team simply because he is Indigenous. He felt nervous about this experience and felt that he would not be good enough. Ruby was puzzled by his reaction and questioned where he would have learned this from because she *"does not share that kind of perspective with her kids."* On a positive note, Ruby's son made the provincial volleyball team. Upon reflecting, Ruby believes that her sense of self-efficacy and confidence may be linked to her upbringing because she *"had no family who graduated ... no family went to university ... [she] had no background or prior knowledge."* In contrast, Mary believes that there are some students who attend school regularly that have

positive self-efficacy. Specifically, Mary believes that students who have positive teacher relationships generally want to learn, enjoy reading, are open minded, and are hands on in the classroom. Students enjoy school because they like their teachers and have a solid friend group they can connect with.

Challenges within the education system can be classified as either micro or macro. Micro issues pertain to what occurs inside the walls of a classroom or a school and includes the students themselves. Ruby and Sally argue that many students are high needs, possess insurmountable gaps in their knowledge, cannot achieve curriculum outcomes, and require too much support. Some students may have undiagnosed conditions that education staff are unaware of. Ruby also believes that classrooms are beyond their intended capacity and there are too many different needs and personalities for teachers to effectively manage. Additionally, Sally thinks the poor physical environment of the school can be challenging to address. Sally witnessed a school temporarily shut down due to the strong smell of feces in the ventilation system. During heavy rainfall, Sally also had to help *“put buckets all over the place because the water was coming in”* which ultimately displaced certain classrooms. Sally had to move her grade 12 students by *“take out our library, knock down walls to create a classroom.”*

In contrast, macro issues pertain to concerns with the greater provincial education system. Staff training appeared to be a common concern for two participants. Varying levels of training exist among school staff which can impact how well a student is supported. Two participants also expressed concern related to the idea that students are *“pushed through the system”* until they get to high school. Therefore, students may not possess basic skills that ought to have been developed in elementary school to earn high school credits because they have not failed. Consequently, students experience failure fairly late in their educational career which is built

upon a pre-existing false sense of success from earlier grades. Furthermore, Ruby expressed concern about maneuvering within policies that are in place and working collaboratively with the *“movers and shakers to change those policies to meet the needs of our students.”*

All participants agreed that interventions need to be implemented for many students and parents. Parents require support by obtaining basic education, employability, understanding child development, addiction support, working through trauma and emotions, dealing with peer pressure, and managing finances. Students require support in building literacy and numeracy skills. Sally shared an example of building numeracy and literacy with grade nine students:

*I brought in a program, math antics. And it teaches you every outcome from grade one, all the way up to grade nine, every outcome. So that teacher ... we split the students up. In the morning, the first half of the morning focused on numeracy. The second part of the morning was on literacy. So then, all morning the students would learn, like every outcome ... because there's gaps in their education.*

As well, participants believe that students also need help establishing routines and expectations, accessing doctors and counsellors, and being involved in traditional Indigenous activities.

### **Outcomes**

The major outcomes that emerged from the data are intergenerational trauma, a broken education system, teacher influence, parental role modeling, and student behaviors and attitudes. Intergenerational trauma as a result of the residential school system was discussed by all participants throughout the interview process. The various forms of abuse and general dysfunction were acknowledged by all participants, and these behaviors are now normalized in Indigenous families. Sally believes that many generations of Indigenous parents can be traced from the residential schools and their dysfunction has been passed down because *“they didn't*

*know parenting ... so then you have people that are not equipped to be parents.*” Mary specifically states that:

*the cycle continues because we have people that don't have life skills. They don't have parenting skills. And they struggle themselves. And a lot of that is why I feel things don't improve at all. Because where does it end?*

Mary, Sally, and Ruby all believe that the damage will perpetuate in future generations because many parents are not adequately dealing with their own trauma. The trauma is not managed properly because parents do not have the appropriate knowledge and skills to do so.

The way in which parents conduct themselves in front of their children emerged as a separate theme – parental role modeling. Parental role modeling can be divided into two major categories, which are positive and negative role modelling. Ruby states that *“it's very easy to get into a negative pattern when they're making wrong decisions.”* All participants explain that parents often need a way to cope and numb their pain, so they resort to drugs and alcohol. Mary explains that some parents *“either start selling ... start using [drugs] ... your kids are just watching.”* Sally adds that some parents end up homeless or incarcerated due to their behaviour and children find themselves in foster homes. In addition, Ruby states that many parents who access social assistance programs have no desire to work because *“it is an easier life now ... not so labour intensive ... and everything is paid for.”* Moreover, all participants believe many parents who rely on social assistance programs are avoiding obtaining needed skills for employment, and nobody is motivating them. In contrast, all participants believe that perseverance is a key component of positive role modeling. Ruby argues that *“giving up is so easy,”* and children need to be taught problem-solving and persisting through challenges. In fact, Ruby demonstrated that not giving up and being *“10 steps ahead”* is a way of proving

worthiness, increasing confidence, and being successful. Also, explicitly discussing with children that education will eventually be beneficial is an important strategy that Mary uses in parenting her own daughter.

All participants believe that student behaviours and attitudes are a direct result of what students experience at home. Many students experience low self-efficacy and low self-esteem and ultimately struggle to attend school regularly or drop out completely. All participants explain that many students struggle at school because the value of education is undermined at home, and students cannot keep up with the demands of the curriculum. However, students who do attend school regularly have a positive outlook, and the importance of education is emphasized at home. Regular attenders collaborate with school staff and their voices are heard when principals are making important decisions for the school. Interestingly, Sally shared that many attend because students are seeking respite and refuge from dysfunctional home life. Students feel safe in the view of the school as a “safe haven” and as “*a source of positivity.*” Additionally, there are some students who have historically not been regular attendees but ultimately come back to school because they have an epiphany. Ruby explains that an epiphany is the sudden realization that education is important and the desire to attend school increases. Ruby also believes that the trigger to come back to school partly comes from the idea that “graduating high school will be meaningful to them and that it is a community celebration,” which means that people are watching.

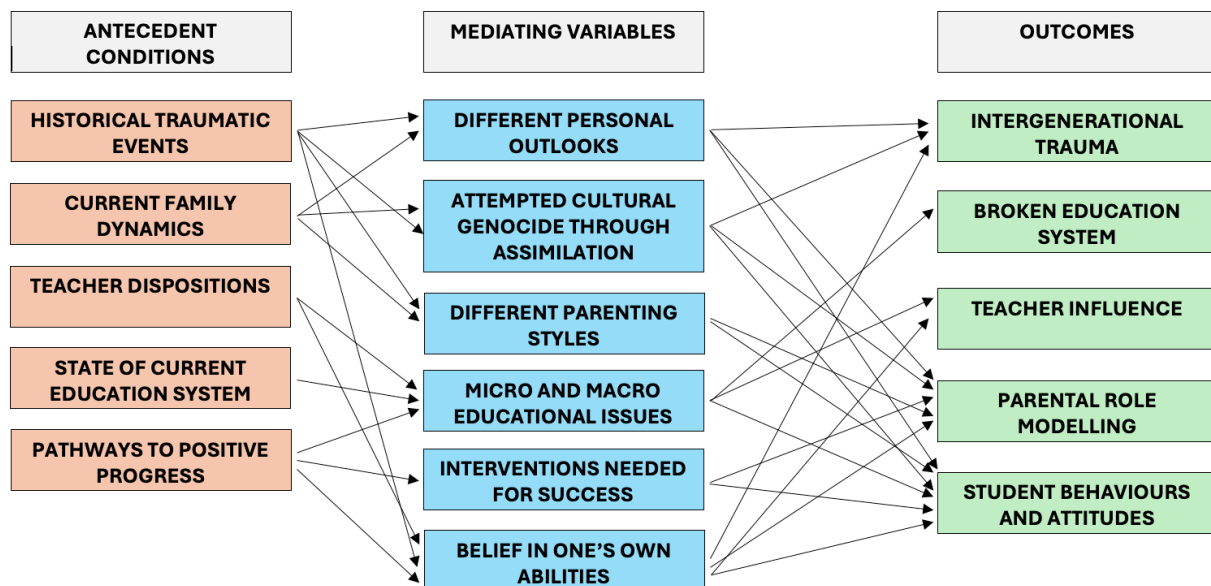
Based upon the micro and macro educational challenges, participants have suggested that the education system is ultimately broken in Saskatchewan. Sally proposes that there are deep disparities across the province depending on where schools are located, and the amount of funding school divisions receive from the government. Teachers experience violent classrooms

because they cannot balance the needs of all their students alone. Eventually, students receive subpar education resulting in minimal student growth because the holistic student is ignored. Ruby states that the education system in Saskatchewan “*prepares students to exist in a colonized society.*” Mary and Sally are concerned with the high number of students who eventually graduate but do not possess adequate levels of skills and knowledge. Sally explains that “*they have that high mark, they’re still passing, and they’re dropping out like flies in university because they don’t have the skills.*” Mary believes that the high number of graduates is questionable and is the result of students being pushed through the system.

All participants agree that teachers have a significant influence on students which emerged as a separate theme during analysis. For teachers to have a positive influence on students, they must be able to recognize what a student needs to be successful, demonstrate care, emphasize the importance of education, and build deeper relationships with students. Teachers can do this by recognizing the skill gaps students have and working on building a basic skill foundation.

### **Causation Map**

In determining plausible causation, all antecedent conditions, mediating variables, and outcomes were summarized in Figure 1. Since the goal of causation coding is to try and determine cause and effect embedded within participant narratives (Roy et al., 2017; Saldana, 2021), showing how all themes potentially link together as a unified system is important. The inspiration for developing a causation map for all emerging themes is based upon a conceptual model in Roy et al.’s (2017, p.150) study. Figure 1 illustrates all major themes that emerged from the data analysis. Arrows (→) should be read as “lead to” and indicate plausible causation.

**Figure 1***Causation Map of Antecedent Conditions, Mediating Variables, and Outcomes*

*Note.* The causation map illustrates how all major themes from antecedent conditions, variables, and outcomes could be plausibly connected.

## Discussion

Findings suggest that chronic student attendance patterns are a plausible expression of intergenerational trauma experienced by those who attended residential schools. Survivors of residential schools grew up without love and nurturing because they were forcefully taken away from their families. Instead, survivors experienced unspeakable horrific abuse orchestrated by local churches and the federal government. Some survivors eventually had their own children but lacked proper knowledge of how to adequately care for their children because they had not experienced appropriate parental role modeling in residential schools. As well, the trauma experienced by survivors has not been adequately addressed. Unsurprisingly, descendants of survivors also grew up not experiencing adequate nurturing and love because of what their parents experienced. Thus, the cycle of intergenerational trauma continues. Some descendants of

survivors that have become parents have subsequently built unhealthy and problematic environments in their homes, which results in fractured relationships with their own children. Many Indigenous children are subject to ACEs at home. Some parents who lack employable skills seek financial support from social assistance programs, which ultimately negates the desire to seek gainful employment.

Furthermore, some parents have not emphasized to their children that attending school is important, which has resulted in a growing number of students unwilling to attend school regularly. Students avoid school because they lack the parental support to build the efficacy, confidence, and perseverance needed to develop foundational academic skills. Students may not feel worthy of receiving an education. Thus, children fall into concerning patterns of behaviour and poor coping mechanisms develop. Due to substantial inconsistent attendance, students significantly lack foundational academic skills. Parents fail to realize that building foundational skills requires consistent time, energy, and effort. A misguided belief also exists among some parents that teachers can provide an immediate remedy for struggling children. Consequently, teachers are presented with the overwhelming challenge of compensating for everything that is not being provided at home as well as attempting to teach grade-level curriculum. Ultimately, teachers struggle to balance instruction while addressing the various needs that students require which translates into stunted student growth.

Indigenous parents do not harbor feelings of distrust, fear, or anxiety towards the education system in Saskatchewan, but deep disappointment and dissatisfaction exist. Specifically, participants believe that the Saskatchewan education system is broken because the government has not taken a sufficient interest in the needs of Indigenous students. Some schools and classrooms in the north are in disrepair which makes instruction extremely difficult. School

staff are not trained to handle the various and complex needs that many students require support with. Additionally, some school staff struggle to balance empathy and flexibility to the needs of students while also adhering to strict government policies in an environment that focuses heavily on data collection rather than holistic student development. As well, elementary and middle school students are promoted to subsequent grades despite not achieving grade-level curriculum outcomes which creates a false sense of academic ability. Eventually, bottlenecks emerge in the first year of high school because students have not developed the appropriate skills to earn credits required for graduation. Thus, the experience of failure is too overwhelming, so students avoid school, and perseverance skills remain underdeveloped.

### **Implications**

For student attendance to improve, both parents and students require extensive support and healing for positive progress to occur. Intervention programming for both groups ought to be carefully designed in an effort to improve parental role modeling, and overall mental health. Specifically, parents need help developing basic employability and life skills as well as an understanding of child development. Implementing proper parenting approaches would hopefully support the development of efficacy, confidence, and a sense of worthiness both in themselves as well as their own children. Programming for parents could be a coordinated effort between public health, Elders, and employment services. If interventions were created and implemented for parents, eventual follow-up studies and analysis ought to take place to gauge effectiveness.

In terms of students, intensive academic skill-building ought to occur rather than attempting to learn grade-level curriculum while being pushed through an education system that does not fully recognize failure. Ideally, foundational skills can be developed in a non-judgemental caring environment with nurturing teachers who genuinely care about meaningful

academic and personal growth. School leaders in northern Saskatchewan ought to demonstrate to the government that an urgent need exists to deviate from regular curricular programming. Unfortunately, the government may not recognize the value or urgency of the need, so support is not guaranteed. However, the government ought to pay closer attention and fully understand the daily struggles that many northern Indigenous communities face. After all, the Indigenous population in Canada is the fastest growing and youngest (Government of Canada, 2022). Eventually, if interventions are not implemented, the aforementioned issues will continue but on a larger scale which could significantly increase strain on education, health, criminal justice, and social assistance sectors. If new academic programming were implemented, eventual follow-up research and analysis ought to take place to determine effectiveness.

Some studies in the literature mention the implementation of student attendance intervention models that work to address underlying causes of chronic absenteeism (Kearney, 2008; Gentle-Genitty et al., 2020; Rahman, et al., 2023). However, student attendance models implemented in Indigenous communities, with residential schools as historical context, lack in the literature so drawing comparisons or implementing a general intervention model would be impractical. Designing and implementing a student attendance intervention model within Indigenous communities in consultation with teachers, parents, Elders, and other locally elected leaders could be a strategic endeavour. Ideally, a tailor-made intervention model would hopefully provide stakeholders with contextual insight and establish a unique basis to develop additional creative solutions in addressing chronic student absenteeism.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

Despite only having 3 participants, rich data were collected. Participant perspectives were quite powerful and moving. The nature of the interview questions yielded promising insights that

assisted in developing an explanation of the central phenomenon. While additional participants would have been welcomed, data from the 3 participants were sufficient. As well, stronger arguments were made from codeweaving participant narratives. Codeweaving reduced speculation, forced a continuous examination of the raw data to determine plausible combinations of factors leading to causation, and minimized the urge to view participant narratives as singular sequential events (Saldana, 2021). Additionally, determining themes related to mediating variables during the analysis process allowed for thorough decoding of participant narratives by seeking specific words used by the participants during the interviews rather than speculating. Determining themes for mediating variables provided additional clarification of participant thought processes and beliefs related to how certain outcomes came to fruition.

In terms of limitations, snowball sampling resulted in 3 Indigenous participants who have lived in northern Saskatchewan for a significant portion of their lives. The experiences, perceptions, and feelings of participants in northern Saskatchewan regarding chronic student absenteeism may be different than those of Indigenous people who live in other geographic locations within Canada. Thus, findings should not be generalized. Additionally, snowball sampling unintentionally resulted in all female participants. Having male perspectives could have resulted in different findings. Furthermore, having analysis completed by an additional person could have been beneficial to confirm similar (or dissimilar) causation of participation narratives.

## **Conclusion**

Findings suggest that current attendance patterns of students are an additional expression of intergenerational trauma caused by the experiences of those forced to attend residential schools. Moving forward, intensive intervention programming is needed for both parents and

students so that positive progress can begin. Additionally, educational leaders and government ought to reconsider curriculum and instruction as well as build attendance intervention models that acknowledge the distinct issues Indigenous communities face. Intergenerational trauma will likely be perpetuated if coordinated and targeted supports are not developed for students and parents. Students will continue to avoid school and eventually replicate observed parental behavior, resulting in a population of young adults that are becoming increasingly dependent upon many sectors of society. After all, Indigenous students and parents deserve to have a life free of unwanted and unnecessary stress, but breaking the cycle of trauma will require strategic and coordinated action.

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## Appendix A

### *Exploring Chronic Student Absenteeism in Northern Saskatchewan*

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

This research project will explore how the residential school system has impacted the way local Indigenous people of northern Saskatchewan feel about the K-12 public education system today. Specifically, I am seeking to understand if current student attendance patterns are an additional expression of intergenerational trauma experienced by the local Indigenous population who are connected to the residential school system.

Indigenous voices, perspectives, and feelings are important to this study. I am looking to interview 3-5 individuals for this project. Interviews will be scheduled at a time and location that is convenient for the participant. The interviews will take place in-person or virtually (i.e. Zoom, FaceTime, Google Meet, etc.).

The interviews will be recorded and transcribed. The interviews will take approximately 1 hour each. Participants will be given an alternate name to keep identities private. Only myself and the participant will be allowed in the interview space. I will be the only person who has access to the original recordings. The recordings and transcriptions will be kept for 5 years in a password protected hard drive and then destroyed.

The rights of privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity of all participants will be respected. Involvement in the project is completely voluntary. Participants are free to withdraw from the research project at any time without giving a reason and you may decline to answer any specific questions during the interview. I will use the data collected for this study for my doctoral studies. I may also use it for scholarly publications, conference presentations, and future research and writing projects. Confidentiality will be maintained at all times.

I believe that your involvement in this project will provide educational decision-makers with improved knowledge about student attendance patterns. You may provide more strategic ways of helping students, families, and communities heal from the trauma that has been previously inflicted upon them. The findings from this project may also help develop creative ways of getting students back in school consistently.

If you understand and consent to participating in this research, please sign below and return to me. The Niagara University Institutional Review Board (IRB) case number for this study is 2024-011. I would be happy to answer any questions or concerns you may have.

Sincerely,

Mitchell Keene, M.Ed.  
Ph.D. Student  
Leadership and Policy  
College of Education  
Niagara University  
[keene@niagara.edu](mailto:keene@niagara.edu)  
(306) 960-3841

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By signing below, I verify that I have read and fully understand the research project. I have had the opportunity to ask any questions before signing. I also know that I can ask questions about the research later. I sign it voluntarily.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone/email

## Appendix B

### Elder Informed Consent Form

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

This research project is seeking to better understand how the residential school system has impacted the way local Indigenous people of northern Saskatchewan feel about the K-12 education system today.

Specifically, I am seeking to understand if current student attendance patterns are an example of intergenerational trauma experienced by the local Indigenous population who are connected to the residential school system.

Indigenous voices, perspectives, and feelings are important to this study. I wish to interview 3-5 local community members that self-identify as Indigenous who have a personal connection to the residential school system. This is a voluntary opportunity and participants can stop participating at any time without negative consequences. No explanation is required.

The interviews will be recorded and converted into text. The interviews will take approximately 1 hour each. Participants will be given an alternate name to keep identities private. The recordings and text interviews will be kept for 5 years in a password protected hard drive and then destroyed.

***You are a highly respected traditional knowledge keeper and Elder in our community. You have an important understanding of how the local community may feel about this project if they are asked to participate. The relationship we have is important to me and this research project will not proceed if you feel that it is not something that should be discussed at this time.***

If I have any further questions or concerns, you can contact Mitchell Keene at [keene@niagara.edu](mailto:keene@niagara.edu) or (306) 960-3841. The Niagara University IRB (Institutional Review Board) case number for this study is 2024-011.

By voluntarily signing below, you fully understand this consent form and approve of this research project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone/email

## Appendix C

### Interview Protocol

***Signed informed consent form will be collected before the interview begins.***

Participant pseudonym: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Introduction/Preamble

The following will be discussed with the participant before we begin:

1. Hello! My name is Mitchell Keene, and I am a PhD student at Niagara University.
2. Thank you for agreeing to be a part of this project – your participation is greatly appreciated!
3. The purpose of this study is to:
  - Explore chronic student absenteeism in northern Saskatchewan.
  - I seek to understand how the residential school system has impacted the way Indigenous people of northern Saskatchewan feel about the current public K-12 education system (if any).
  - I am interested to know if current attendance patterns of students are an additional intergenerational expression of trauma experienced by the local Indigenous population who are connected to the residential school system.
  - You will have an opportunity to talk about your feelings towards the current education system, what you believe to be the motivators of students who do and do not attend school regularly, the motivators of parents who encourage (or do not encourage) their students to attend school regularly, and how they we can get students back in the classroom regularly.
4. This project has been reviewed and approved by Annette Montgrand who is a local traditional knowledge keeper and respected Elder of La Loche, Saskatchewan.
5. I have 7 questions to ask you and it shouldn't take any more than an hour.
6. I will be recording the interview so that I can transcribe it later. I will also be taking notes while we are talking.
7. As a reminder, this is voluntary; you may withdraw at anytime without giving a reason; you may also decline to answer any specific question.
8. If you are triggered for any reason, we can stop the interview. Just let me know. We will only begin again if you wish to keep going.
9. If you are triggered, here are some relevant counselling services in the area that we can get you connected to:
  - Pat Allward – Community Mental Health Therapist – (306) 381-9099
  - La Loche Health Center and Hospital – (306) 822-3200
10. All data will saved and stored in an external hard drive that is password protected; I will be the only one who will have access to the raw data.
11. This research has been reviewed and approved by the Niagara University Institutional Review Board (IRB); if you have any questions, you can contact the IRB chair, Paul Schupp, [pschupp@niagara.edu](mailto:pschupp@niagara.edu).
12. Do you have any questions before we begin?

<b>Interview Question</b>	<b>Response</b>
<p>What are your current thoughts and feelings about the K-12 public education system in Saskatchewan?</p> <p><i>Probe: tell me more</i></p>	
<p>Thinking about the students that come to school regularly, how do you think they feel about school?</p> <p><i>Probe: tell me more</i></p> <p>Follow-up: how do you think their parents/guardians feel about school?</p> <p><i>Probe: tell me more</i></p>	
<p>Thinking about the students that do not attend school regularly, how do you think they feel about school?</p> <p><i>Probe: tell me more</i></p> <p>Follow-up: how do you think their parents/guardians feel about school?</p> <p><i>Probe: tell me more</i></p>	
<p>In your opinion, how has the residential school system impacted the current attendance patterns of students today (if any)?</p> <p><i>Probe: tell me more</i></p>	
<p>How do you think we can get students back in the classroom regularly?</p> <p><i>Probe: tell me more</i></p>	

Closing Remarks

Once the interview is over, the following will be discussed with the participant:

1. Those are all the questions I have for you – thank you so much for participating!
2. Do you have any further questions for me?
3. I wanted to remind and confirm with you that this is confidential. Your identity and the thoughts that you have shared will be kept private. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask.
4. If I need to contact you during the transcription process because I don't understand something, do you give me permission to contact you again to clarify information?