

What can Effective Band-Operated Schools Can Teach Us

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British Columbia's student record system, reaching back more than 20 years, offers a unique opportunity to study the performance of some 100 band operated schools in the province and to distinguish between band schools that are effective in raising aboriginal student performance and those that are not.

In British Columbia, many on-reserve students eventually attend a provincial public or independent school following their early education in a band school. Records show when and where they first become part of the public system and they are given a provincial education number that allows their progress through the school system to be tracked. The provincial record system also enables us to identify whether students are living on reserve or not because students living on reserve have their tuition fees paid to public or independent schools by INAC through their band.

Over time, some students will prove to be successful in British Columbia public or independent schools, others will not, often dropping out or demonstrating low levels of achievement. Levels of success, we believe, vary in accordance with the band-operated schools they first attended and can be differentiated by analysis of student performance data along with qualitative evidence gleaned from interviews with staff members in relevant public schools.

Our investigation aims first at identifying clusters of high performing and low performing band schools based on student records. Following this, we will visit school sites and conduct interviews with school personnel and community members in band schools associated with producing successful students. From these interviews, and from an analysis of school-level practices, we will attempt to identify the strategies used by these schools, and their communities, to promote student success. These results will be shared, so that underperforming schools can improve their effectiveness by "Learning from the Best."