



# Speaking Across Barriers: How Parents in a Canadian Public School System Learn About Their Children's Diversity Education

UVic HREB #22-0136



"New SD62 Board of Trustees" by T.L. Renken-Sebastian © 2022

*I acknowledge with greatest respect that I live, work, and study on the traditional territory for many Coast Salish peoples including the W̱SÁNEĆ, the Esquimalt, the Songhees, and the Sc̱ianew. Without their stewardship of the land, what I will accomplish during my life here will not be possible.*

## General Problem and Study Focus

Sooke Schools 62 (SD62) launched its [second strategic plan \(2021-2025\)](#) in September 2021 after a year-long evaluation of the outputs and outcomes of the first strategic plan (2018-2021). As part of this evaluation, the district conducted a survey in April 2021 which was completed by 1,095 people, with 892 people (81.5% per cent) identifying as parents and 58 people (5.3% per cent) identifying as Indigenous (First Nations, Métis, or Inuit). A key finding from the survey was that the language within the strategic plan needed to be able to be understood by everyone to whom it applied. Another finding was that there should be a focus on increasing understanding about diversity, equity, and inclusion within the underlying vision of the strategic plan.

The intent of this research project *Speaking Across Barriers: How Parents in a Canadian Public School System Learn About Their Children's Diversity Education* (University of Victoria HREB #22-0136) is to aid SD62 in developing communication strategies and language which will help the parents, guardians, and caregivers of SD62 students and the greater SD62 community understand and support the inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility (IDEA) objectives and outcomes within the 2021-2025 strategic plan.

## Primary Research Question

How can parents, guardians, and caregivers of children in public schools be informed and engaged about the progress by which their children are developing skills or competence in recognizing, conversing about, and handling issues relating to inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility (IDEA)?

## Secondary Research Questions

How will school administrators ensure that parents, guardians, and caregivers understand the rationale behind their strategic plan's objectives with regards to IDEA?

In what way will parents, guardians, and caregivers be consulted regarding changes to how their children learn about issues regarding IDEA?

How do school administrators determine whether their strategic and operational plans are effective in increasing the ability of students to understand IDEA issues?

## Ethical Review Submission Timeline

I received conditional approval from SD62 Superintendent of Schools on 15 February 2022, and the University of Victoria (UVic) Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) granted their full approval on 16 December 2022 (see Appendices A & B). The final part of the ethical review process is for me receive final approval from SD62 to recruit individuals from specific stakeholder groups listed below in Table 1 to become research participants and/or to provide background information on the strategic and operational planning processes.

Name of Stakeholder Group	Definition	Type of Research Participation
Parents, Guardians, and Caregivers of Students (Group 1)	Individuals who provide care for and/or have legal authority over students within a specific geographic region	Survey (Phase 1) Knowledge-Sharing Session (Focus Group) (Phase 2)
School Board of Trustees (Group 2)	Individuals who are elected by the public to advocate for education within a specific geographic region	Knowledge-Sharing Session (Focus Group) (Phase 2)
District Executive and Individual School Administrators (Group 3)	Individuals who are appointed by the Board of Trustees to oversee the administration of all staff, services, and programs within the district as well as supervise the requirements within the provincial School Act	Knowledge-Sharing Session (Focus Group) (Phase 2)

*Table 1: The names of three of the stakeholder groups within a Canadian public school district, a definition of their characteristics, and their level of participation in this research project.*

With Group 1, I plan on hosting knowledge-sharing sessions (focus groups) with parents whose students embody these social identities either individually or in combination:

- Indigenous (First Nations, Métis, and/or Inuit) students
- Students of color (BPOC) and/or students who are learning English for the first time (English Language Learners, or ELLs)
- Neurodiverse students and/or students whose medical conditions make consistent and/or safe school attendance difficult
- Gender-diverse and/or sexuality-diverse students

I am especially interested in hearing the perspectives of the parents, guardians, and caregivers for these groups of students because they are the students who will be the most positively affected by the IDEA-related outcomes if the district is successful in achieving its objectives.

# Data Collection Timeline

Due to the nature of the SD62 Non-Board Initiated Research Project approvals process, all dates mentioned are relative to the date approval for the project has been received from Superintendent Scott Stinson and includes a 2- to 3-business day delay. The time period range marks how long it is anticipated it will take to complete each step in the process.

As seen in Figure 1, Knowledge-Sharing Session recruitment for Groups 2 and 3 will begin earlier than for Group 1, as will the data collection from the Survey instrument. This research design ensures that the stakeholder group of parents, guardians, and caregivers will be asked questions during their KSS sessions which are relevant to SD62's efforts in communicating about the success of their strategic and operational plan initiatives around IDEA.

## Benefits and Risks

All the objectives and outcomes in *SD62 Strategic Plan (2021-2025)*, if achieved, would be of great and direct benefit for increasing the awareness and understanding of the importance of IDEA for SD62 students. With this research project, I hope to make recommendations which will help SD62 district leadership make further progress on their objectives and engage SD62 parents, guardians, and caregivers more fully into helping those objectives become a reality for their children who may have different social identities than those of their peers.

SD62 parents, guardians, and caregivers will be asked about their understanding of the IDEA concepts and of the specific objectives in the strategic plan concepts which are directly related to them. They will also be asked whether they feel education about IDEA concepts should take place within the public education system. Parents, guardians, and caregivers will be asked about their perspective on how well the district shares information about their strategic planning progress and to provide information about social identities with which they or their children identify that can be considered a minority population within the SD62 community.

Members of the SD62 Board of Trustees and district and individual school administrators will be asked about the strategic planning process, the annual operational planning process, and their perspective on the progress the district is making in achieving the objectives related to inclusivity, diversity, equity, and accessibility in SD62 Strategic Plan 2021-2025.

None of the questions asked in the Survey or the Knowledge-Sharing Sessions are intended to call into question either an individual's skill in caring for their student or the professional judgment of a Trustee, a district executive, or an individual school administrator; however, feelings of hurt and vulnerability may still occur. Information regarding harm mitigation will be provided in the informed consent letters which will also be publicly available to read on [the research project's website](#).

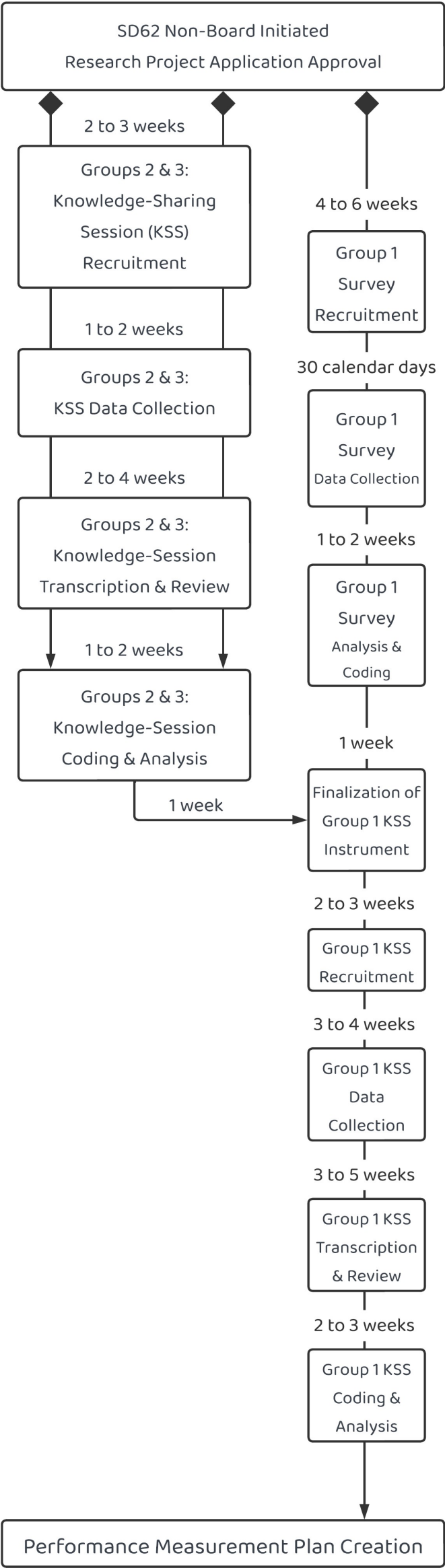


Figure 1: Timeline of capstone project data collection



## Preliminary Literature Review Findings

My preliminary literature review findings show that there has not yet been much academic research into how public-school boards operationalise their commitment to IDEA for everyone within the entire school district community. Effective strategic planning, effective strategic communication, and the importance of IDEA in education are considered important issues, but the amount of research being conducted into the merging of these topics has been limited. The significance of this study is that it will add to the academic stocks of knowledge regarding how progress in these kinds of initiatives can be made for similar public school district communities throughout British Columbia with respect being shown to all research participants.

## Questions or Concerns

If you have any questions about participation or concerns about how this research is being conducted, you may contact members of the supervisory team using the information below:

## Research Design and Methodology

Members of Groups 2 and 3 and some members of Group 1 were introduced to the research project at the Education Policy Committee held on *1 March 2022*. More members of Group 1 were introduced to the research project during a presentation during the monthly Sooke Parents' Education Advisory Council (SPEAC) meeting on *20 April 2022* and the monthly meeting of the École John Stubbs Memorial Parents' Advisory Council (PAC) on *11 May 2022*. A filmed version of the SPEAC presentation can be found at [this unlisted link](#).

From June to August 2022, I met with representatives from some of the First Nations bands and family and community service groups within the SD62 Na'tsa'maht Indigenous Education Advisory Council (NIEAC) to introduce my research project, hear their feedback on data collection instruments, and begin to build a meaningful research relationship in accordance with ethical and respectful Indigenous research procedures.

I have also begun to reach out to other family and community service organisations to engage them to be co-hosts for any in-person knowledge-sharing sessions so that research participants will not feel pressured by their surroundings. These consultation conversations have aided in refining the Survey instrument prior to its distribution to parents, guardians, and caregivers as well as help guide me in how to perform and share my research results with the SD62 community.

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Table 2: Contact information for supervisory team