



**Sioux Valley Dakota Nation  
Educational Review – Executive Summary  
Prepared by Reg Klassen, M. Ed. and Kevin Van Lagen M. Ed.**

**Context:**

At the behest of Chief and Council from Sioux Valley Dakota Nation, we conducted an educational review of Sioux Valley Dakota Nation Schools from January 28-30, 2025. During this time, we were able to construct a series of observations and have provided subsequent recommendations.

**Observations and Recommendations:**

**Observation: Dakota Language and Culture**

It is clear from the Education Director, administration, and staff that the Dakota language, culture, and land-based learning is being intentionally infused in Sioux Valley education. Staff are expected daily to help students answer the question “What does it mean to be Dakota?”

**Recommendation: A Holistic Approach to Dakota Language & Land-Based Learning**

By integrating an **outdoor classroom** into the new school, Sioux Valley Schools can further support Dakota language and culture while ensuring students have consistent access to land-based learning. This space will serve as a bridge **between indoor learning and the land**, ensuring that traditional knowledge remains central to students' educational experiences.

**Observation: Supporting Students with Specific Learning Needs**

One of the highlights of our observations was the recent implementation of a team of clinicians that serves Sioux Valley students. One of the challenges that currently exists for administration is how to ensure that student specific plans resulting from assessments are being implemented appropriately in the classroom on a student-by-student basis.

**Recommendation: A Coordinated System is Needed**

To maximize the impact of the new clinician team, Sioux Valley Schools must refine the transition **from referral to assessment to classroom implementation. A structured approach, with clear roles, ongoing communication, professional development, and accountability measures**, will ensure that student-specific plans are not only created but successfully put into practice.



### **Observation: Data**

There is little to no consistent data collected to inform absenteeism and student achievement. There is no Student Information System (SIS) being used. In the K-8 school, administrators had no way of knowing absentee rates over a period of time, nor did they know on a daily basis which children were not at school.

### **Recommendation: A Student Information System is Needed**

**By establishing standardized data collection protocols, reintroducing a functional Student Information System (SIS), and providing ongoing professional development,** the school can create a sustainable and efficient system for tracking student achievement and attendance. Sioux Valley Schools can **enhance student outcomes, improve administrative efficiency, and foster a data-informed culture** that supports both students and educators in achieving long-term success through a commitment to an SIS structure.

### **Observation: Absenteeism**

Administration shared ongoing concerns about student and staff absenteeism. It was difficult to ascertain exact absentee rates due to lack of a central data system. Anecdotally, we were told that support staff have higher absentee rates than teachers. In respect to students, we saw differing levels of absenteeism between classes and schools. There were some strong practices in place to minimize absenteeism, but these examples were isolated.

### **Recommendation: A Systemic & Cultural Shift is Needed**

This plan **integrates data tracking, leadership accountability, classroom engagement, family involvement, and community support.** By adopting and scaling the **successful strategies already working, leadership can create a positive cultural shift.**

### **Observation: Teaching Practices**

Many teachers are relying on worksheets as a central piece of their teaching strategy. Assessment of student learning was also sporadic, and reference was made to three reporting periods in conjunction with report cards. UFLI has been implemented this year as a literacy intervention strategy to the early years.

### **Recommendation: A Leadership Shift is Needed**

For real change to happen in the schools:



1. **Leaders must develop a clear instructional vision** that goes beyond cultural emphasis.
2. **Student learning data must be systematically collected and used to drive instruction.**
3. **Teachers must receive targeted support and accountability.**
4. **Leadership must actively observe, analyze, and improve teaching practices.**

The Director of Education must also ensure **leaders are trained, monitored, and held accountable for instructional improvements.**

### **Observation 6: Outside Agencies**

The Education Director of Sioux Valley Schools clearly resisted working collaboratively with any outside agency. This exclusionary philosophy means that Sioux Valley Schools are an entity to themselves both within the Sioux Valley nation and the greater education system.

### **Recommendation: A Balanced Approach to Collaboration**

The goal is to **honor Sioux Valley Schools' autonomy** while ensuring that **students receive comprehensive support**. By **establishing a structured collaboration framework**, implementing a **wraparound student support model**, and **gradually shifting leadership perspectives**, the school can **enhance student outcomes without compromising its independence**.

### **Ongoing Questions:**

Throughout the course of our school review conversation was had on a variety of topics that are not addressed in this report:

- **Financials/Budgeting:** We have not collected enough evidence in this area to create any recommendations. Initial observations did indicate some confusion as to how priorities for budget were created. For example, the 9-12 school could use some support to purchase technology for students.
- **Human Resources:** We saw some evidence of an evaluation process but have not had the time to properly assess its efficacy. Further, we understand that there is a policy or a practice in place to hire Dakota members for leadership positions in the school with little regard to other qualifications. We have concern but would need to investigate further to provide meaningful feedback.
- **MFNERC:** We were told that ties with MFNERC were severed, however, we heard conflicting reports as to whether this has been good for the school and the teachers in all areas that MFNERC was supporting.



- Sports: We did not do a thorough review of an athletic program in either school, but now that grade 7 and 8 are back in a school with a beautiful gym, we would assume that a robust after school athletics program would be organized. We would need to investigate further.

### **Moving Forward for Chief and Council**

We believe there are some simple solutions or easy wins that chief and council could immediately implement as a sign of goodwill towards the learning of the students in the community:

1. Buy each high school student a device (laptop or iPad or tablet) so teachers and students no longer need to go to the computer lab to be online. Students should not need to go to technology, rather technology should accompany students to enhance learning. The ownership of the device becomes the property of the student and is kept upon graduation. Moving forward every grade 9 student would receive a device upon entering high school.
2. Chief and Council could consider supporting awards for high attendance classrooms. The school could determine what some of those prizes could be and what the level of attendance should be. For example, book a box at the Brandon Wheat Kings game, overnight trips into Winnipeg for older classrooms, pizza party, movie, etc.
3. Assigning an office space for Director of Education and former principal outside of the school building. This will allow school administration to become the formal leaders of the school.