

# Sorting, peers and achievement of Aboriginal students in British Columbia

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## Abstract

We use administrative data on students in grades 4 and 7 in British Columbia to examine the extent to which differences in the characteristics of provincial schools attended by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students contribute to the achievement gap between these two groups as measured by standardized test scores. We find that segregation of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students is substantial, and that differences in the distribution of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students across schools account for roughly half the overall achievement gap on the Foundation Skills Assessment tests in grade 7. The substantial school-level segregation of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student across schools means that Aboriginal students on average have a higher proportion of peers who are themselves Aboriginal, and who have disabilities. We estimate the effect of peer composition on value-added exam outcomes, using longitudinal data on multiple cohorts of students together with school-by-grade fixed effects to account for endogenous selection into schools. We find that having a greater proportion of Aboriginal peers, if anything, improves the achievement of Aboriginal students. We find limited evidence that having a greater proportion of peers with disabilities adversely affects the achievement of Aboriginal students.

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Keywords: Aboriginal education, school choice, peer effects

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