



To: Board of Trustees, Greater Victoria School District 61

Dear Trustees,

At the May 10th Operations Committee meeting, slides about the 2021/22 budget proposal displayed racist and ableist scapegoating, suggesting that because Indigenous and vulnerable/at risk learners may not often access music programs (an assertion not supported by any shared data), this is a reason to eliminate these programs.

These continued incidents suggest that as a Board you need to take more concrete action. First with your staff who have on two occasions in the last month put out slides with racist/ableist content, as well as two surveys that have the same discriminatory issues. And second, with yourselves, as there have been issues on more than one occasion of serious missteps over just the last year. More than an apology is needed at this point.

There is actually nothing in the proposed 2021/22 budget that moves money specifically over to Indigenous student success. In fact the district proposes cutting a family liaison position from George Jay Elementary that supports Indigenous families, and vulnerable/at risk families.

Throughout this process, the presentations have attempted to say that the proposed cuts will help the District to better meet their strategic goals, but there has been no actual connection made between, for example, cutting \$400K from the EA budget and supporting inclusive education.

What we learned from this global pandemic is how important education is to society as a whole and especially to vulnerable and at risk learners. How can we not take these lessons to heart and strengthen, rather than erode, supports that allow these students to equitably access education?

I want to speak to music in particular as it's a good example of looking at schools more broadly as wraparound support hubs for students and families. This program is known to support mental health and you have received over 600 letters which likely have the research to show it.

It is true that some students with disabilities as well as some other vulnerable learners have not been able to access it. Other such students thrive in these programs and they are better engaged with school because they are able to participate in them. There are other school and district programs not mentioned in these proposed cuts that are also inaccessible to some vulnerable and at-risk students.

But the solution to inequity is not to eliminate programs that are helping some, it is to expand supports so that all learning opportunities are accessible to all.

This means providing more educational assistants, not fewer. It means expanding family liaison workers to more schools, not eliminating them. It means considering making music a timetable class rather than keeping it outside of the core curriculum. It means adding more literacy supports rather than taking away those that are working for some (and adding structured literacy as well for those students who need it).

There is no question that we recognize that funding constraints make this difficult. But we categorically refuse to accept cuts that directly impact students' human right to equitable access to education as well as the specific education rights of Indigenous Peoples.

As a Board you should not be accepting this either. You should not be changing a system of accounting in the middle of a pandemic. You should be advocating in the strongest possible manner to the Ministry of Education for more funding to address any shortfalls. We will support you in this.

Systemic discrimination has been evident in many recent Board discussions and decisions. The budget is one place where you can show that equity truly matters, and start to turn this around.

Sincerely,

Tracy Humphreys, chair and Executive Director

BCEdAccess Society