

Thursday, November 28, 2019

Greater Victoria School District Hosts Diversity and Inclusion Forum

Victoria, BC – The Greater Victoria School District hosted its first-ever Diversity and Inclusion Forum today. The District brought together key stakeholders and subject matter experts to share insights, perspective and expertise on how to support, promote and nurture various communities and student populations within District schools.

“Diversity and inclusion are fundamental values of the District, and must be actively pursued and practiced on an ongoing basis,” said Board Chair Jordan Waters. “The District sees inclusion as a way of thinking and acting, grounded in the belief that, with the right supports, every learner can be successful in their classroom and school.”

“We embrace the value of diversity and see our difference as strengths,” said Superintendent Shelley Green. “The District wants all students to develop to their full potential, and to have an authentic sense of belonging in their school community.”

The forum was specifically created to generate dialogue and increase shared knowledge of a spectrum of topics under the umbrella of diversity and inclusion. A wide range of participants took part, including representatives from the Metis and Songhees Nations, the provincial government, advocacy groups, leading academics, not-for-profit organizations, parent groups, students, District administrators and more.

The forum was led by Dr. Leyton Schnellert, Associate Professor, Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy at UBC’s Faculty of Education, who highlighted that diversity in our schools is a strength; it leads to creativity and critical thinking that is essential to student success. He also reviewed the benefits of inclusion, which end up benefitting everyone, and the value of bringing student voices into discussions.

District Administrator of Indigenous Education Administrator Shelly Niemi focused on the goal of academic achievement as a key indicator to ensure the system is creating an environment of belonging for Indigenous learners.

Dr. Wendy Carr, Professor of Teaching and Dean’s Senior Advisor, UBC’s Faculty of Education presented on how SOGI programming and resources can better expand our language to be inclusive of LGBTQA+ students.

Together the group developed a set of guiding Diversity and Inclusion Principles. Below are some of the highlights of which to include and what to believe:

- That our children/youth are valuable agents of change and we can make space for their voice
- In the importance of connecting and communicating with all community stakeholders to ensure that we can identify what individual needs and how we can support them
- That parents and families need to be included in the discussion and need a space to come forward to do so
- In paying attention to creating positive relationships we create opportunities for positive collaboration, communication and change
- That we can be more aware, value and deeply understand the lived experiences that students, families and communities bring to the school from birth forwards
- That we can build relationships that support belonging, awareness, of self and others, emotional, physical and educational needs through common messages, systems and vocabulary
- That we should see diversity as the norm
- In empathizing with others' perspectives and asking "what is my responsibility"?

The District will continue to consult on this topic, using these guiding Diversity and Inclusion Principles as the foundation for broader public consultation and a community survey on the topic, scheduled for early 2020.

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