

EDITH LORING-KUHANGA, B. Ed., M. Ed

Speech to the SD61 Board of Education

Date: Monday February 28, 2022

Time: 7pm

Thank you Chair Painter for allowing me to speak tonight. Next, I want to thank Trustees Whiteaker and Duncan for speaking out regarding the Board of Education suspending two trustees, Trustee McNally and Trustee Paynter. Finally, thank you Trustee Duncan for putting forward the motion on February 22nd to release information to the public regarding the suspensions.

I speak in support of Trustee Duncan's motion to release information to the stakeholders and the public on how the Board came to a decision to suspend two trustees. Since school trustees are elected from the six municipalities of Greater Victoria, it is essential that the public is informed on why the majority of the Board thought that suspension was necessary.

Thank you Chair Painter for releasing some information to the public on February 24th regarding the suspension. However, the information was minimal and did not provide sufficient information on what led the board to their decision. And yes, I do understand that some discussion regarding allegations of staff harassment and bullying would be in-camera however, the public has a right to more information that led to the suspensions, especially since it is out of the School Board's mandate.

I have examined the School Act and Regulations and I could not find the term "suspension of trustees". I also went back to SD61 Board By-Laws and policies, and didn't see any reference to suspension of trustees or a process that stipulates how a Board would suspend a trustee.

The majority of the Board do not have the power to remove a trustee from their position. However, the Board does have the authority to censure trustees which is both spelled out in the School Act and SD61 By-Laws.

When people are elected, they are elected because they have convinced the voters that they will represent their interests at the Board table. Trustees come to the table with their own experiences and backgrounds. They also come with their own agenda. However, it is up to the Board Chair to work with all members of the board and to ensure that the Board works together for the best interests of the 20,000 plus students it serves. The Chair has a very critical role in building a team at the board table, despite the individual differences. It is not an easy job if you want to be fair and be respected by all Trustees. I speak from experience. In order for the business of the district to continue, the Chair must not take sides but must work with all members of the team and not only just the majority.

Let me take you back in history. Late Trustee John Young took his own Board, SD61 Board of Education to court because he believed that extra school fees should be eliminated. And we all know that John won his court case in 1997. Don't you think that if the Board had the authority to remove Trustee Young from the Board table, they would have? I am sure that all trustees did not support his ideas, viewpoint, debate and court action. However, they didn't have the authority to remove him as a trustee even though he was suing them. As a result, Trustee Young continued in his role as a trustee and was re-elected many times thereafter.

To my knowledge, no other School Board has suspended trustees. Hence, your action will set a precedent for all locally elected officials. When people are elected as school trustees, mayor and council, regional districts, they are accountable to the public who voted them in.

In 2018, there were 67,273 people who voted for school trustees for the Greater Victoria School Board. Trustee McNally received the second highest votes at 22,790 - 33.88% of the votes cast. Trustee Rob Paynter received 20,103 votes - 29.88% of the votes cast.

As stated at the Board meeting last week, both Trustees Whiteaker and Duncan did not participate in the vote for suspending the two trustees. So tonight I ask the 5 remaining trustees, "Do you feel that your 5 votes have more authority than the 22,790 voters who voted for Trustee McNally and the 20,103 voters who voted for Trustee Paynter?"

I also ask that you please show the public where the Board got the authority from the School Act, Regulations, or SD61 By-Laws or policy to suspend the trustees since they are not able to fulfill their duties as elected officials. The public has a right to know. If you feel that more information cannot be disclosed to the general public because of in-camera information, I ask that you immediately reinstate them so that Trustee McNally and Paynter can continue to carry out their duties to the end of their term. If you choose to censure them in accordance with SD61 By-Laws and policy, then that is the decision of the Board. At least then you are following your own By-Laws and policies that are within your mandate, and not working outside of your mandate. Let's leave it up to the constituents of the 6 municipalities within the Greater Victoria area who will determine who is at the board table in November 2022.

Thank you for your time.

Nox Gyes, Edith Loring-Kuhanga, B. Ed., M. Ed.

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