



Board of Education

School District No. 61 (Greater Victoria)
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December 4, 2024

Esquimalt Nation

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Victoria, BC
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BY EMAIL: Jerome@esquimaltnation.ca

Songhees Nation

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Victoria, BC
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BY EMAIL: ronsam@songheesnation.com

ATTENTION: Chief Jerome Thomas and Council, Esquimalt Nation
& Chief Ron Sam and Council, Songhees Nation

Dear Chief Thomas and Chief Sam:

RE: Safety Plan Feedback dated 6 & 12 November 2024

We write further to your feedback on the draft Safety Plan that was provided to us on 6th and 12th November 2024 respectively, and in response to your remarks made to Minister Beare on 2nd December 2024. Songhees Nation and Esquimalt Nation are valued Rightsholders in our school district. We appreciate you sharing your feedback on the draft Safety Plan. We note your feedback was focused on the deployment of Constable Cole Brewer of the Westshore RCMP. We wish to clarify that our school district does not make decisions about who the Westshore RCMP recruits and deploys to provide police services in community which includes our schools. We acknowledge the need for further dialogue and we are committed to working together to ensure your concerns are heard. For your information, in our response to the Minister of Education and Child Care we highlighted our concern that we have not been able to engage sufficiently with all of the Four Houses, including appropriate further dialogue with Esquimalt Nation and Songhees Nation.

We understand that having Constable Cole Brewer of the Westshore RCMP as an Indigenous Liaison Officer available to Indigenous students in two elementary schools and one middle school in our school district is a priority for you. Our staff have confirmed they continue to call on Constable Brewer or the non-emergency line, and that when they've called, Constable Brewer has been attending to those calls (911 continues to be used in an emergency). Further, as you know Victoria and Esquimalt Police have not had SPLOs in Esquimalt schools since 2018.

We take your feedback seriously and remain open to dialogue with the Esquimalt Nation and Songhees Nation to work towards a solution that addresses concerns. Since we met with you last year, and as part of our engagement efforts with regional police services, we have been working to establish a communication protocol with all four police services operating within the boundaries of the Greater Victoria School District to clarify roles, responsibilities, and service delivery so we can move forward in a productive manner. The Board's decision in no way reflects on any particular police service or officer. We recognize that there are numerous officers who have made valuable contributions through their involvement with our school community.

The draft Safety Plan that our Indigenous Education Department shared with each of the Four Houses along with a request to provide feedback to us includes the draft communication protocol. The communication protocol sets out our request that police send police personnel with enhanced training focused on supporting vulnerable populations such as youth, to attend our schools. Enhanced training may include restorative justice principles, anti-racism training, threat assessment, crisis de-escalation training, sexual exploitation, cyber exploitation, youth interviewing, trauma informed practice, and cultural sensitivity training. The school district is responsible for coordinating services received by students. For instance when police services are required, we have asked police to send police personnel appropriately trained in trauma informed practice, critical incident response, de-escalation, cultural awareness, restorative practices and further enhanced training for those working directly with high risk or vulnerable populations such as youth in care, youth with a disability or diverse ability, and minoritized youth.

As set out in the Safety Plan submitted to the Minister of Education and Child Care when working with students, particularly high-risk youth, missing youth, youth living in care, or youth on probation, we endeavor to provide students with holistic, wraparound supports and services. Police services may be invited to work alongside service providers providing wrap around supports in community, the Esquimalt Nation, Songhees Nation, Métis Nation, Victoria Native Friendship Centre, Surrounded by Cedar, or other community supports such as Ministry of Children and Family Development, Integrated Mobile Crisis Response Team, Mobile Youth Services Team, or Children & Youth Mental Health staff.

In submitting the Safety Plan to the Minister of Education and Child Care, the Board reiterated that it does not support the use of police services to manage student behavior or discipline in our schools, unless the behavior constitutes criminal behaviour on the part of the student. Appropriate qualified school district staff are responsible for managing student behavior and student discipline. School district staff are expected to contact Police services to address safety and policing matters, when warranted and in accordance with the communication protocol, our existing safety protocols and the applicable law. To be clear, the Board is committed to ensuring the safety and best interest of our students. As such our focus is on who is best placed to provide services to students.

We understand that you have concerns about the unanimous Board decision in May 2023 to move away from the use of SPLOs in our schools. Victoria and Esquimalt Police removed SPLOs in 2018. The previous Board directed that a review of the use of SPLOs be undertaken. After a multi-year review we learned that the “program” was limited to the provision of a police officer to serve as a resource officer to groups of schools. The Board had no oversight over, and had no input into, the goals and activities of the Police Liaison Officers. There was no mechanism to meaningfully address the activities or conduct of police, since Police Liaison Officers are employed by the regional police services and not the Board of Education. The approach taken by these officers varied considerably from officer to officer, school to school and municipality to municipality. No documentation exists regarding how and to whom the individual police officers provided services. Prior to the multi-year review the activities of Police Liaison Officers had not been evaluated by the school district. The anonymous survey conducted as part of our multi-year review and feedback received during review committee meetings and speaker’s series surfaced negative interactions with police, including allegations of police misconduct. Further information is available via the SPLO Frequently Asked Questions on our website: <https://www.sd61.bc.ca/splo-faq/>.

It appears to us from the concerns you expressed and from our own experience that the current communication mechanisms are not fully meeting our respective desires for engagement. To this end, at the will of Chief and Council we commit to meet to address the current communication mechanisms, and how we may further activate the respective Local Education Agreements (LEAs) including for instance sections regarding Vulnerable Student Placement, Student Conduct, Student Safety, Reporting, Communication, Implementation, Monitoring, Review, and Dispute Resolution. Additionally, as outlined in our Safety Plan the school district will collaborate with the Indigenous Education Advisory Council (IEAC) on matters involving safety that impact Indigenous student education and support services in our school district.

In providing the Minister of Education and Child Care with our Safety Plan we communicated our concern that the limited time available, given the 15th November 2024 deadline, impaired our ability to meaningfully collaborate with Rightsholders. We made our best effort to actively engage with Rightsholders and all interested parties, but do acknowledge that the deadline impacted the quality of engagement that was possible.

We regret we were unable to offer more than a request for feedback on the draft plan, and pending the current Minister's direction on the matter, commit to prioritizing our engagement with Songhees Nation and Esquimalt Nation as a next step.

Sincerely,



Nicole Duncan
Chair, Board of Education

cc: Board of Education, School District No. 61
Deb Whitten, Superintendent, School District No. 61
Katrina Stride, Secretary-Treasurer, School District No. 61
Kalie Dyer, Director of Education, Esquimalt Nation
Erin Olson, Director of Education, Songhees Nation
Honourable Lisa Beare, Minister of Education and Child Care
Honourable Christine Boyle, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation
Honourable Darlene Rotchford, MLA, Esquimalt-Colwood