



January 30, 2025

Ref: 304877

To: School District 61 Parents and Guardians

As Minister of Education and Child Care, I am reaching out to share an important update regarding School District No. 61 (Greater Victoria).

Students are at the centre of every decision I make. Student safety is one of my top priorities, as a Minister, as a mom and as a former school trustee. Over the past number of years, there have been conversations around an increase in safety incidents and gang related activities in and around schools in School District 61. To address these concerns, in fall 2024, the Ministry required the Greater Victoria board of education to create and submit a proactive and coordinated safety plan.

In early December 2024, I appointed Dr. Kevin Godden as a special advisor to assist the board in improving and revising the safety plan that was submitted and developing an implementation plan. This appointment is a power available to the Minister under the *School Act* and it requires that the board and its employees assist the special advisor in carrying out their duties. Most importantly, the special advisor was required to convene a working group comprised of local First Nations, police, school staff and safety experts to help develop the revised safety plan; community collaboration was important to ensure all voices are part of this work.

In early January 2025, I received three different revised versions of a safety plan from the board as well as a draft implementation plan. Two of these safety plans were submitted without the support of the special advisor or working group. Ministry staff have carefully reviewed the submissions, and I have met with many partners including two meetings with the local Parent Advisory Committees within the District. I have also received a [report](#) from the special advisor which is linked for your review.

Our government has given the board multiple opportunities and supports to build a safety plan that is responsive to their community's needs and reflects the many voices and perspectives of this district. I want to advise you that effective immediately, Sherri Dee Bell has been appointed as an Official Trustee under section 172 of the *School Act* to conduct the affairs of the Greater Victoria School District. Ms. Bell is assuming the powers and duties of the board of education for School District No. 61 and all elected trustees have ceased to hold office. Ms. Bell brings a wealth of knowledge to the role, having previously served in senior leadership positions as the Superintendent of Schools in Victoria.

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An important part of her work will be to ensure improved engagement with parents on the issue of safety and establishing strong governance practices at the board level. Her appointment is expected to continue until next scheduled elections in fall 2026

My top priority remains the safety of students and staff in School District 61 and I am committed to ensuring that the district has an effective safety plan in place. This work will be continued by the official trustee and supported by the re-appointment of special advisor Dr. Kevin Godden. While this plan is being created, safety supports are still in place in schools.

Please know that we have not made this decision lightly. I have heard from many educators, parents, and community partners in the past several months and I appreciate you sharing your perspectives and priorities. Thank you for your commitment to ensuring that our children and youth have safe, caring and inclusive learning environments. I am committed to ensuring that through the Official Trustee, parents and caregivers will continue to be informed.

I am confident that the supports put in place today will help get the district on the right path. Students and staff in Victoria deserve our attention to re-building a foundation of trust and community collaboration in the Greater Victoria School District.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Lisa Beare".

Lisa Beare
Minister

cc: Deb Whitten, Superintendent, School District No. 61 (Greater Victoria)
Sherri Dee Bell, Official Trustee