



Board of Education

School District No. 61 (Greater Victoria)
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Ministry of Education and Child Care
Office of the Minister
PO Box 9045 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2

Email: ECC.Minister@gov.bc.ca

ATTENTION: Honourable Lisa Beare, Minister of Education and Child Care

Dear Minister Beare,

The Board of Education of School District No. 61 writes in response to a letter which we understand from media reports to have been sent to you by the police chiefs / superintendents of the four police services in the District, expressing that they have “lost confidence” in the Board, and indicating that they view their relationship with the Board as irredeemably damaged.

We must express in the strongest terms how entirely inappropriate it is for the leaders of municipal police departments or local RCMP detachments to declare their unwillingness to work with a democratically-elected body, simply because the police disagree with a policy decision squarely within the scope of that body’s statutorily-assigned responsibilities.

Setting aside the issue of whether taking such strong organizational positions on policy matters ought to be questions for the respective police boards, and not the individual chiefs, the letter – predictably and strategically leaked to the media – is simply the latest salvo in a clearly coordinated campaign aimed at bringing about the Board’s removal. The possibility that the letter may have been solicited by the Ministry of Education and Child Care is equally concerning, as are reports that the Ministry has selectively been inviting the views of groups and stakeholders within the District who oppose the Board’s decision regarding the SPLO program, while ignoring the views of the many groups who support the Board. The recent shift in public messaging from being about “safety” concerns, to alleging failures in governance or

damaged relationships, appears designed to create the false impression that the Board is failing in its duties.

To be very clear: this disagreement is not about student safety. No credible evidence has been presented that would suggest students are less safe than they were when the Victoria Police Department decided to end funding for the SPLO program, or that the return of that program would make them safer. Many times, the Board has asked for some evidentiary support as to the need for police in schools. We have yet to receive it. We share the concerns of the Human Rights Commissioner, civil liberties organizations, and many parents and teachers about the risks of granting unfettered access to police, just as we would with any external group wishing to have a presence in our schools.

Rather, this dispute is about power. The police response simply demands that their preferred version of the safety plan, containing no District oversight of the SPLO program, no accountability, and no terms of reference, be approved – and implies that the Board should be removed if they refuse to capitulate. Manifestly, that usurps the role of the Board. It is the antithesis of “collaboration” and “relationship.” It is profoundly undemocratic.

What is it, exactly, that is so unacceptable about the Board’s plan in the eyes of the police? In all of the public criticism of the Board, no one has been able to point out what specific aspects of the Further Revised Safety Plan drafted and submitted to the Minister for consideration by the Board are inadequate. That, we must conclude, is because the Board’s revised Safety Plan essentially allows for the key aspects of the police-approved safety plan – while preserving the Board’s ultimate oversight role.

The carte blanche, anything-goes approach to police in schools which the SD61 police services appear to desire is wholly at odds with the approach taken elsewhere in the province. The Memorandum of Understanding between the Vancouver Police Department and the Vancouver School Board – available at https://media.vsb.bc.ca/media/Default/medialib/mou_slo_and_appendix.0b7a5a66724.pdf - features a much more robust oversight role for the Board, along with a short notice termination provision and a meaningful review mechanism. This is what actual collaboration looks like. While the specifics of Vancouver’s SPLO program would not necessarily be appropriate for Victoria, the comparison is illustrative insofar as that program acknowledges the important statutory role of School Boards in approving and overseeing the educational programs that are delivered in British Columbia school districts.

We reiterate that many school districts in the province have no stand-alone safety plan, and many do not have SPLO programs.

Why are the police so resistant to any oversight or scrutiny? The Board is ready and willing to have a meaningful conversation about any substantive concerns with its preferred version of

the safety plan. SD61 has always had police in its schools, even now, and intends to continue to do so. But if the desire by the police is – as it appears to be – simply to avoid accountability, that is not something the Board can willingly accept.

The Board would never purport to make demands about how a police board or police chiefs exercise their authority under the *Police Act*. For the police to do so in an area within the Board’s jurisdiction, under the *School Act*, is not “relational” or “collaborative” – it is a power-grab. The fact that this is even controversial, or that the Minister appears to be considering the nuclear option of terminating the Board in response to such ultimatums from external groups, should be concerning to all.

Yours truly,



Nicole Duncan
Chair, Board of Education
School District No. 61 (Greater Victoria)

cc: Board of Education, School District No. 61
Deb Whitten, Superintendent, School District No. 61
Katrina Stride, Secretary-Treasurer, School District No. 61