

In the spirit of [TRC Call to Action #57](#) I have included hyperlinks throughout this letter (in blue):

Dear School Board of Trustees,

“We must achieve equity for First Nations children across all areas in a leap not in a shuffle”. - Dr. Cindy Blackstock, Executive Director, First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada

Ki?su?k kyukit, hu sukilqukni kin wam. Hu qaqlik Michele Buckman. Hun 'ini Ktunaxa. Hun 'ini Syilx. Hu qakiqaxi Burnaby. Hun haqnakni?ni ki?ins ?a-qasuk aklasmaknik-nintik amak?is hu yakawisknala. I have greeted you and introduced myself in Ktunaxa, a unique language isolate spoken by my mother’s ancestors in the Kootenay region of British Columbia. I would like to acknowledge the traditional territories of the Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), Tsleil-Waututh, and xʷməθkʷəy̓ əm (Musqueam) Nations on whose unceded territories I live, work and raise my children as an uninvited guest and express my gratitude for the opportunity to do so.

I registered my children in the kindergarten class at xpeý eight years ago and I am proud to inform you that they will be part of the first class of alumni to graduate from a wholly Indigenous Focus School experience this 20/21 school year. The District’s decision to listen to the Indigenous community and establish an Indigenous Focus School is a success, to be clear. Because of that demonstration of leadership I have maintained an Indigenous educational focus in my children’s lives since they first began their two years at the Eagle’s Nest Aboriginal Head Start Preschool Program here in Vancouver. Although we still have a way to go in meeting the minimum necessary threshold as set out in the [United Nations’s Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#) (UNDRIP), this district *is* making incremental progress. However, as Cindy Blackstock [highlighted](#) in 2016, **“the problem with incremental equality is that children do not have incremental childhoods ...- equality never comes up one drop at time”** - we still have much more work to do.

Over the last eight years, parents at xpeý have repeated and detailed specific ideas that could be implemented on the ground because we understand that operationalizing “reconciliation” is challenging work. We recognized that we are all products of the same colonial society and structures and that we are unlearning and learning together. The reality is that **parents are fatigued by engagement and consultation processes that do not seem to amount to meaningful and real changes for the Indigenous Focus School evidenced in annual operating budgets and long term facilities planning.** We have learned that we can’t achieve fundamental and transformative changes with the same old resources, frameworks, rules and structures in place, no matter how well intentioned. The reality is that children at xpeý still attend a seismically unsafe school with no plan to address that; the school has not extended beyond grade 7 and there is no Indigenous principal.

Parents at xpeý want meaningful commitment to the Indigenous Focus School, reflected in the district annual budget; inclusion for a new building in the long range facilities plan; culturally informed quality before and after school care; a robust Indigenous language program developed in collaboration with Indigenous parents, including xpeý parents and xpeý PAC and local Nations; a [culturally safe](#) Indigenous recruitment, hiring, retention, advancement and leadership development strategy; high demand for seats at our school by Indigenous and non-Indigenous families alike; and impressive high school completion rates and post-secondary acceptance rates for xpeý Indigenous Focus School alumni.

Indigenous parents at xpeý have worked tirelessly to raise issues and flag opportunities for action for several incarnations of the Vancouver School Board, and the Vancouver School District. We have shared our vision for a culturally safe Indigenous Focus School extending to grade 12 and led by an Indigenous Principal with Indigenous Educators and Indigenous Support Staff. We have asked for a robust Indigenous language program where children, families and staff can learn alongside one another. We have asked for help to address the systemic barriers that persist and block school growth and school enrolment. We have asked for support to grow xpeý Indigenous Focus School and realize our **community vision for a Centre for Excellence in Indigenous Public Education** with a community wrap around model of support that also ensures:

- A school that is sustainable, innovative and prepares children and youth for a future of technology.
- A school where Indigenous children have equitable and fair opportunities to realize their full human potential and capabilities to become full participating members of society in a way that is meaningful for each child.
- A school that recognizes each and every single child as gifted and with unique gifts and talents to offer the world regardless of cognitive abilities testing results or special designations.
- A Centre for Excellence in Indigenous Public Education that rivals the demand for high school mini school programs in the district and which boasts similar metrics of success.

- A school district that abides by the spirit of inclusion rather than a tiered education system that holds back the most valuable and proven resources for the advantaged few, especially in times of scarcity.

The **Vancouver School District has the highest numbers of Indigenous high school incompleteness rates in British Columbia**. This metric tells us that **the status quo is not working**, at least not for Indigenous learners. Each year, the school district administers its high school [mini school application](#) process for grade 7 students. This application process advantages the already advantaged, or inversely, disadvantages already disadvantaged learners (and not just Indigenous children). Low Indigenous parent awareness of the mini school application process isn't surprising given the competitive and elite nature of the process; the overwhelming demand for seats that are in limited supply; and racial stereotypes and assumptions. Why aren't more Indigenous students being identified for gifted designations in the district? Is that designation process intersectionality-based, culturally safe and trauma informed?

In contrast, each year these high school mini school programs realize impressive high school completion rates and university acceptance rates. I am sure that we can all agree that the link between post-secondary education and higher lifetime earnings has been long established. **Indigenous children and youth have the right to escape poverty cycles that are perpetuated by structural violence, and to graduate with freedoms and options to pursue any future they desire** and not turn away from post-secondary programs and specialized training and technical institutes because they fail to meet entrance requirements; or lack the elite mini school experience that universities reward. This right has long been denied to Indigenous learners in the district and province. **At the age of 12 and 13 years old, Indigenous children in grade 7 are being streamlined into a future with poor socioeconomic outcomes while the presence of a high school education model that works (e.g. mini schools) is dangling out of reach!**

The harsh truth is that each year, whether intentional or not, district #39 has successfully designed a tiered education model that replicates and perpetuates a class system rooted in social inequality and founded on the political and economic marginalization of Indigenous children. This is demonstrative of [systemic racism](#) and [structural violence](#) present in the Vancouver school district. Structural violence and systemic racism are often embedded in seemingly benign administrative and operational practices and procedures such as mini school applications processes, cognitive abilities testing, standardized testing, and even the criteria and analysis used in long term facilities planning e.g. [LRFP 2019](#), [Ernst and Young 2015 Final Report](#). We understand that the Ministry of Education has historically applied pressure to the Vancouver School Board to undertake fiscally conservative measures and balance budgets. I would like to ask all of you to stop and remember that Canada's fiduciary obligation to Indigenous people has also been used as a reason to enact violent and racist policies and to resist change. Now the Ministry has provided new [Long-Range Facilities Guidelines](#) to direct school districts to act in compliance with [TRC](#) and UNDRIP and is taking steps to implement the provincial [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act](#) which this Board may also expect to play a role in implementing.

In complement to these new guidelines, **District #39 would benefit from an externally published Reconciliation Strategy and Action Plan**, with a clear benchmark and indicators for measuring progress and accountability on advancing reconciliation in Vancouver and particularly around the Indigenous Focus School. This should be **accompanied with a schedule for periodic review** of the strategy to determine whether objectives are being met and whether adjustments are needed.

We understand that public education in B.C. has been chronically underfunded for years now and that all learners, families and districts have been affected by this. We also know that Dr. Cindy Blackstock, Professor at McGill University and a human's right advocate for First Nations children (e.g. [Jordan's Principle](#)), has already brought awareness to the fact that Canada is one of the richest countries in the world, has universal health and education systems, and ranked 16th in the world on the 2020 [United Nations Human Development Index](#) and yet, First Nations children consistently do poorly on almost every socio-economic and health indicator. Dr. Blackstock has also [noted that](#) while the effects of colonialism explain some of the outcome gaps, the federal government's "**chronic underfunding of public services for First Nations children and families on reserves rubs salt into the colonial wound**". And yet, **moving off reserve to attend District #39 where public education is better funded and resourced in comparison and enrolling our children in the hope of improved futures does not necessarily improve outcomes either!**

"The destiny of a people is intricately bound to the way its children are educated. Education is the transmission of cultural dna from one generation to the next. It shapes the language and pathways of thinking, the contours of character and values, the social skills and creative potential of the individual. It determines the productive skills of a people". - RCAP V.3, S.5, (p. 404)

I want to remind this Committee and the Board about the [Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples](#) (RCAP) that was established in the wake of the [Oka crisis](#) in 1991. The mandate of the commission was to study the evolution of the relationship between Indigenous peoples, the Government of Canada and Canadian society as a whole. After extensive research and consultation, the Commission issued a five-volume, 4,000-page [report](#) with 440 recommendations and an entire chapter on Canada's [Indian Residential School System](#) in November 1996. **The report discusses why**

Indigenous people are entitled to equitable social, educational and health outcomes. The report argues that **in the absence of a fundamentally different approach and new policies, the social and economic conditions of Indigenous people would remain more or less the same.** The RCAP final report provides comprehensive statistical documentation of the poor health and socioeconomic status of Indigenous people in Canada and links those inequities to colonialism and the ongoing political and economic marginalization of Indigenous people in Canada.

The Commission raised awareness of the [Indian residential school system](#) and the devastating impacts of colonization on the health and wellbeing of Indigenous people in Canada. While few of the recommendations have been implemented **in the last 25 years, gaps in education and health outcomes for Indigenous people remain.** Most notably, **RCAP has provided a benchmark for measuring Canada's progress** and commitment on addressing the inequities faced by Indigenous people.

We are all treaty people and we are all responsible for advancing progress on RCAP. It is important to know that the year 2026 will mark the 30th anniversary for the release of the [RCAP Final Report \(1996\)](#). What I want to know is:

- What is this Board's RCAP 2026 plan for advancing progress on the benchmark established by RCAP (e.g. raising high school completion/university acceptance rates for all Indigenous learners in the district broadly and specifically those graduating from the Indigenous Focus School)?
- What VSB legacy does this Board want the Vancouver Urban Indigenous Community to remember in 2026?
- If change starts with each of us, what is *your* personal legacy going to be when people look back at your term in office?

Now, as we have heard our Prime Minister say countless times in the last year, bold action is required to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, save lives, support people and businesses throughout the remainder of this crisis and build back better. We simply can not deny that in the last year **this pandemic has shone a spotlight on inequality in Canada.** In her Fall 2020 report, [From Risk to Resilience: An Equity Approach to COVID-19](#), Dr. Theresa Tam, Canada's Chief Public Health Officer, has clearly documented that **the pandemic has had devastating impacts on lives and livelihoods and exposed fundamental gaps in our society – COVID is simply not impacting Canadians equally.** While the pandemic affects us all, the health impacts have been worse for society's citizens who are most marginalized and vulnerable. As Dr. Tam has highlighted, there is a need to improve the health, social and economic conditions for these populations to achieve health equity and to protect us all from the threat of COVID-19 *and future pandemics*. **Dr. Tam has made it very clear that actions requiring a "whole of society approach" are needed to support society's most vulnerable and marginalized people and address social inequities.**

The Vancouver School District and the Board of Trustees are well positioned to contribute to a whole of society approach that uplifts society's most vulnerable and marginalized children and youth so they might stand a better chance at weathering the pandemics of tomorrow.

In closing, I have chosen to provide a written submission in light of recent changes to VSB committee meeting rules that limit delegations to five minutes favouring "function" and "efficiency" over equity, full participation, democracy, social justice and a robust and meaningful public engagement process. The liberty to take extra time to research and detail in writing the expansive nature of societal inequality and calls for action & justice that contextualize the vision and need for an Indigenous Focus School in order to ensure that this Committee and the Board has a full understanding of what is at hand - is a privilege and skill that is not evenly distributed in Canadian society and is difficult to do verbally in 15 minutes, let alone in writing. I can only imagine the additional challenges faced if English is not an individual's first language.

While I can appreciate the complicated and time intensive nature of robust and meaningful public engagement, and the discomfort that arises when constituents show up in person to look you in the eye and speak truth to power, it is a necessary responsibility that comes with holding an elected office. Frankly, it is disappointing to see that in a school district with a publicly elected and politicized Board of Trustees, that we would allow for limits on, and barriers to democracy in a society and a structure that is rife with inequality. The new changes in committee procedures amount to simply another layer of structural inequality and systemic racism **in an already problematic and culturally unsafe board-committee structure that has failed to recognize and rectify the many barriers to parent engagement that persist and are rooted in societal inequality and structural racism.**

I understand that sometimes we make mistakes that are uncomfortable to acknowledge and that we often don't recognize power unless we have felt it's full force and effect. However, I strongly encourage the Board to revisit this decision to change committee rules through a compassionate [trauma-informed](#) lens of [gender-based analysis](#), [intersectionality-based policy analysis](#), and [principles of anti-oppression](#).

Respectfully,

Michele Buckman

[Please include this written submission in the meeting minutes for committee consideration and Board voting].

“We are all vulnerable to the slow and insidious practice of dehumanizing others and we are all responsible for recognizing and stopping it”. - Dr. Theresa Tam, Canada’s Chief Public Health Officer

“Systemic racism is when the system itself is based upon and founded upon racist beliefs and philosophies and thinking and has put in place policies and practices that literally force even the non-racists to act in a racist way”. - Senator Murray Sinclair, Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission

“We cannot go back to the old normal of inequality, injustice and heedless dominion over the Earth. Instead we must step towards a safer, more sustainable and equitable path.... Now is the time to transform humankind’s relationship with the natural world — and with each other.” - UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres

TRC Call to Action #57: *We call upon the federal, provincial, territorial, and municipal governments to provide education to public servants on the history of Aboriginal peoples, including the history and legacy of residential schools, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Treaties and Aboriginal Rights, Indigenous law, and Aboriginal-Crown relations. This will require skills based training in intercultural competency, conflict resolution, human rights, and anti-racism.*

budget 2021-2022

From: SANDRA BOUTILIER
Sent: Thursday, March 4, 2021 9:44 AM
To: budget 2021-2022
Subject: written submission for budget 2021-22
Attachments: FOSL 2021-22.docx

Hello

Please find attached my written submission for the VSB budget process 2021-22 on behalf of FOSL (Friends of the School Library).

Please let me know if you need any other info from me.

Thanks and have a great day

Sandra Boutilier (VSB parent, member of FOSL)

Feb 28, 2021

To: Vancouver School Board Trustees

Thank you for the opportunity to submit a written statement regarding the 2021/22 VSB budget.

As a member of the organization Friends of the School Library, I would like to suggest school libraries as a budget priority for the upcoming school year.

The school library and its teacher-librarian are at the heart of a school's academic success, and play a critical role in teaching information literacy to this generation of students. The school library is where students seek information, discover the books that changes their lives, and is where life-long readers are made. I'd like to mention just a few reasons why investing in school libraries is an effective way to spend budget dollars.

Information literacy

Teacher librarians are experts in helping students develop the skills to navigate the world wide web with all the misinformation and dangers therein. And what an essential skill information literacy is for modern students who have unprecedented access to information in this digital age, but who often lack the skills to wade through an onslaught of search results to identify authoritative, appropriate, and trustworthy sources. Research skills are vital to academic success and these skills will serve a student throughout their lifetime. Students can be overwhelmed about where to even start a project, whether with a print, database or general web resource. The library, staffed with a professional teacher librarian is the best place for students to seek guidance. Information literacy is a key component of one of the BC Ministry of Education's core competencies: critical thinking. Teacher librarians are uniquely positioned to help foster critical thinking and teach the skills that allow students to successfully search for, evaluate and ethically use information resources.

Curriculum Support

The library is one of the most equitable places to spend education dollars because the school library is used by virtually every student and teacher in a school. And with the curriculum's new emphasis on personalized learning, the library becomes even more crucial. Teacher librarians collaborate daily with classroom teachers on lesson planning and are the go-to experts on finding and evaluating resources needed to implement the curriculum. By teaching research skills and keeping their library up to date, teacher librarians make the personalized learning outlined in the curriculum possible. Here access to quality time in the library (ie. library "flex" time) is crucial.

Another area where the library supports new priorities in the curriculum is in the area of Indigenous Perspectives and Knowledge. As an example, at the school my children attend, the teacher-librarian did an overhaul of the Indigenous collection and, with the help of our PAC,

was able to purchase up to date non-fiction titles in this area, as well as a beautiful collection of authentic and well-curated picture books. Classroom teachers are eager for genuine, up to date materials in this area of the collection in particular.

Literacy/creating lifelong readers

The school library obviously plays a key role in supporting literacy at a school for students in the earliest grades as they make their way through phonics books and readers. But as students mature, the library continues to support their reading needs and teacher librarians are gratified when a student makes a connection with a book in a meaningful way. Introducing a student to a book where they can read about someone who looks or feels like they do or is facing a similar crisis is one of the ways that teacher librarians inspire their students daily. A professionally staffed library here is key. An unstaffed or understaffed library does little to create a “reading culture” in a school.

Why invest now?

VSB school libraries supply students with the resources required for both their informational and recreational reading needs, and are therefore imperative to a student’s intellectual development. But not all VSB libraries are created equal. Inequities exist both in terms of students access to library time and to the quality of collections. Firstly, the access to quality time in the school library varies greatly across schools. Here we need to differentiate between library prep time and library flex time. Last year FOSL asked what, if any, formula is used to calculate the amount of library flex time in schools. It seems only fair that this quality “flex” time be standardized across the VSB. As a reminder, flex time is where teacher librarians and classroom teachers can work collaboratively to implement the curriculum and guide students through in-depth research projects and learn those crucial information literacy skills. This type of library education is key to the stated goals of BC’s curriculum. Secondly, we note that the library materials budgets have not kept pace with the increasing costs of quality books. Teacher librarians wanting to keep their libraries well stocked with current, quality books must supplement budgets with book fairs, fundraisers or rely on the financial assistance of PACs. It’s not difficult to see how inequities quickly develop between schools in different parts of the district. A third inequity concerns access to electronic and audio books. The VSB has increased the range of titles available, but improving the depth of this part of the collection is of particular importance to those students who are learning from home during the pandemic.

In conclusion, we thank the board for considering school libraries as a VSB funding priority. School libraries are an ideal place to increase funding because the libraries are used universally by all staff and students, directly support the implementation of curriculum and are linked to the Ministry identified core competency of critical thinking. By increasing library materials budgets and standardizing access to library flex time, it is hoped that inequities that have developed between schools in the district could be improved.

I am a member of Friends of the School Library, but the above comments are my own personal observations.

For more on research showing how school libraries impact learning outcomes see:

<https://researcharchive.canadianschoollibraries.ca/more-research/>

<https://kappanonline.org/lance-kachel-school-librarians-matter-years-research/>

<https://www.bctf.ca/IssuesInEducation.aspx?id=13266>

<https://www.lrs.org/data-tools/school-libraries/impact-studies/>

Thank you

Sandra Boutilier