

September 28, 2022

## Reflections on Truth and Reconciliation

As the Board Chair for the Sooke School District, I have the pleasure of experiencing first-hand the magic that education can hold: the development, the empowerment, and the wonder. In saying that, I recognize that we are not so far removed from an ugly history where education played a pivotal role in purposefully removing Indigenous culture and language from over 150,000 children in this country. In recent years more was exposed about the horrors committed at residential schools. The pain and dread that many Indigenous families and communities lived through for decades without investigation or acknowledgment became public – that their child was never coming home.

The trauma that education created in this country still exists and we know that survivors and their families continue to live with the atrocities of abuse in all forms. When I reflect on Honorable Murray Sinclair's message that education got us into this mess, but that education is also the key to reconciliation, I understand the role that schools, and educators must play to create a path forward. We must also remember that not only were residential schools a source of damage and trauma during this time, but non-Indigenous schools were teaching discrimination and setting the course for the systemic racism that still exists in education today. These traumas took place over several generations and we cannot expect that this work will be easy nor swift. It will be the work of many over the course of generations to walk the path towards reconciliation.

I am proud to say that this work has already begun in our school district. The Sooke School District Board of Education has made it a priority to ensure Indigenous student success as well as bring awareness and understanding of Indigenous histories, cultures and ways of being in our schools and sites. Yesterday, our Board committed to the five-year renewal of our Na'tsa'maht Education Agreement with Pacheedaht First Nation, Sc'ianew First Nation, T'Sou-ke First Nation and Metis Nation of Greater Victoria. Together, we will foster Indigenous student success through the lens of equity and increase knowledge and appreciation of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit histories and contemporary practices for all.

We cannot change the past. Apologies do not erase the hurt nor do they heal trauma. What we can do is put in the work of dismantling the systemic racism that exists within education and focus on ways that we can promote inclusivity and equity in our school communities. When I visit our schools, I am hopeful that the work we are committed to actioning is making a difference. Our Indigenous students see their culture reflected in our curriculum and in our commitment to following the "One Mind" and "One Spirit" objectives of our Na'tsa'maht Agreement at our schools. Our Non-Indigenous students benefit from learning about Indigenous cultures and ways of being - they feel a sense of belonging through connection and our commitment to inclusivity and diversity.

This work will not be completed in my lifetime. My hope is that through education and dedication, we are laying the foundation for the next generation to continue the necessary work of reconciliation.

Sincerely,



Ravi Parmar  
Chairperson, Sooke School District Board of Education

Submitted on behalf of Trustees: Bob Beckett, Wendy Hobbs, Bob Phillips, Dianna Seaton, Margot Swinburnson, Allison Watson