



Kermode Friendship Society

Registered with Revenue Canada as a "charitable organization"

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Minister of Education
Government of British Columbia
PO Box 9045 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2

via email : EDUC.Minister@gov.bc.ca

Attention Honourable Fleming:

Re: Coast Mountains Board of Education School District 82 Superintendent Katherine McIntosh administrative changes- how is this in the best interest of students?

On April 25th in a media release,¹ Superintendent Katherine McIntosh announced leadership staffing appointments that impacted the students of three Terrace schools-Suwilaawks Community School, Skeena Middle School and Cassie Hall Elementary School for the 2019 fall term.

- The Vice Principal at Cassie Hall Elementary School becomes the Principal, Suwilaawks Community School
- The current Principal, Suwilaawks Community School has "chosen" to return to the classroom
- The Principal at Majagaleehs Gali Aks Elementary School, Hazelton becomes the Principal at Skeena Middle School
- The current Principal at Skeena Middle School has "chosen" to return to the classroom

We question if these administrators, in our School District, really have "chosen" to return to the classroom and if this is serving the best interest of the large indigenous student population in our community. This has created a major backlash by stakeholders in the community including students, parents, Indigenous community members. We are a longstanding (incorporated 1976) urban Indigenous organization and we have been delivering "cradle to grave" services to approximately five thousand Indigenous residents of Terrace and surrounding communities. The overall student enrollment for the School District for the year of 2013/14² was 4, 963 of which about 43% (2,149) are Indigenous. According to the School District the Indigenous student population are as follows at these three schools: Suwilaawks Community School is 82% (183/221) overall, Skeena Middle School 36% (212/585) and

¹ <http://cmsd.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/CMUSD82-News-Release-2019-2020-Leadership-Staffing-News-April-25-2019.pdf>

² This is the most recent information available time of penning this letter

Cassie Hall 73% (145/197).³ While we work in all schools we have more programing in the Suwilaawks Community School.

We are deeply concerned Superintendent McIntosh made this decision without bothering to consider our views. Despite the number of political agreements between First Nations, Canada and BC, which affirm the importance of ensuring the rights of Indigenous people are protected in matters impacting them⁴ such as education and keeping good relations. For example, in May 2018, the Government of British Columbia released the *Draft Principles that Guide the Province of British Columbia's Relationship with Indigenous Peoples*, which:

"...are intended as bold statements to guide this new relationship and end the denial of Indigenous rights that have led to disempowerment and assimilationist policies and practices. The principles will assure the Province conducts itself in a way that reflects a clear shift in an often-troubled relationship with Indigenous peoples to a modern government-to-government relationship that is strong, sophisticated and valued. These principles create the space needed to exercise our respective jurisdictions for the benefit of all British Columbians. We will recognize 5 successes when we know Indigenous peoples believe themselves to be self-determining, self-governing, self-sufficient and can practise their Indigenous cultural traditions and customs as an important and respected part of B.C. society."⁵

We understand that it is the superintendent's prerogative to make decisions to adjust administrative assignments based on their own knowledge and assessment of the needs of the district. However, in this case, there seems to be no rationale for such widespread change leading to negative impacts of students and families. In asking for clarification some parents have been told that, for privacy reasons, the rationale for decisions will not be shared. I realize we are not a government, but we have a right to speak our truth and we are not assured that these staffing changes have been made are in in the best interest of our children. I wish to point out that Kermode Friendship Society is one of five Indigenous signatories⁶ to the Coast Mountains' Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement (AEA). Through developing this local agreement, we, in good faith, thought we had a voice and that our Indigenous families would finally have a vehicle to communicate our concerns. We are dismayed Superintendent McIntosh has decided to make a change with critical administrative leads of our schools and did not consider how we felt about the change - this is troubling. Again, how are these changes in the best interests of the children?

The open letter from the Board of Education of CMSD 82, dated March 12, 2019, states:

"First Nations people have the right to make educational decisions that affect their students, with their educational institution, consistent with their unique needs, experiences, beliefs and values.....the Board of Education commits to working in

³ Coast Mountains Board of Education School District 82, Aboriginal Education Annual Report, 2013-2014 pg. 6.

⁴ United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People Article 15: 1 and 2.

⁵ <http://www.fnesc.ca/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/AGREEMENT-BCTEA-2018-FINAL-Signed-with-Schedules-WEB-VERSION-2018-08-1.pdf>

⁶ The indigenous signatories are: Gitxsan Nation, Haisla Nation, Kitselas Nation, Kitsumkalum Nation and Kermode Friendship Society

partnership with First Nations to affirm their voice in decision making in accordance to the implementation of the BC Tripartite Education agreement: supporting First Nation's success. The importance of our partnerships is greatly valued and the ongoing collaborative work to elevate success levels for Indigenous learners in our schools".

This needs to be challenged. These current decisions were not done collaboratively or in partnership with the most important stakeholders...the students and parents who will be most affected by the decisions.

We recently had a large community meeting and there was unanimous support for these administrators to remain in their positions. The Indigenous community was very satisfied with the work the administrators are doing. Were other options considered? It seems it is not the best management decision to have three highly qualified experienced administrators back in the classroom. At our gathering there were many emotional, heart felt comments by the parents regarding the work of the three administrators. I wish to share some of their comments:

"I have to fight to get my child to come home[from Suwilaawks], he loves being there".

"My children cried when I told them their Principal would be leaving".

"She [the principal] has an understanding that everybody is unique".

"I feel like I belong to this school".

In a small remote community such as Terrace, when we find great people who go above and beyond in their efforts to work with families and children, they should be valued, respected and acknowledged and we should do everything we can to keep them in their role where everyone benefits. Families, parents, students and teachers are mourning and grieving over this - indeed we are in a state of shock. No one supports this, no one understands it. Where is the transparency? There is a ripple effect beyond the students of the impacted schools to the community at large. This decision tears at the very fabric of our community – all parents and students of these schools as well as the community at large are affected by this decision.

In conclusion, Minister Fleming we want action.

- (1) Put this decision on hold.
- (2) Have Superintendent McIntosh, jointly with the Terrace Indigenous community, develop a solution that we know truly meets the best interests of students and families.
- (3) Change the process to one of transparency and collaboration with stakeholders.

All my relations



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C.c. Scott MacDonald, Deputy Minister of Education

Doug Donaldson, MLA District of Stikene

MLA Ellis Ross, Electoral District of Skeena

Superintendent, Katherine McIntosh, Coast Mountains Board of Education School District 82

Board of Trustees, Coast Mountains Board of Education School District 82

Kermode Friendship Society Board

Chief Crystal Smith, Haisla Nation, co-signer of EA

Chief, Gordon Sebastian, Gitksan Hereditary Chiefs ,co-signer of EA

Chief Don Roberts, Kitsumkalum Nation, co-signer of EA

Chief Joe Bevan , Kiselas Nation, co-signer of EA

President Eva Clayton, Nisga'a Nation

Chief Chad Day, Tahltan Council

Leslie Varley, Executive Director, BC Aboriginal Association of Friendship Centers

Jenn Dolan, Président, NW BC Métis Association

CUPE Local 20152

Coast Mountain Teachers Federation

Coast Mountain Administrators ' Association

CBC Investigates

CFNR

Terrace Standard

CFTK TV