



Northern Lights

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Working Together to Help Every Student Learn and Excel

July 4, 2024

Honourable Demetrios Nicolaides
Minister of Education
Members of Executive Council
228 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Ave
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

<sent via email: education.minister@gov.ab.ca>

Dear Minister Nicolaides,

Subject: Indigenous Spaces in Schools

The Northern Lights Public Schools Board of Trustees would like to express our appreciation for your attendance at the recent provincial School Boards' associations events and your willingness to respond to questions from their memberships.

As we work through the design phase for our replacement school for Vera M. Welsh Elementary School (VMW) in Lac la Biche, our Board has been discussing the ways to best utilize the space for the success of our students. Specifically, in alignment with Alberta Education's Outcome 2, we are exploring the possible inclusion of features intended to improve the outcomes for First Nations, Metis, and Inuit students that attend VMW. Currently, over 50% of the students enrolled at VMW self-identify as FNMI (149 out of 280).

Within our Division, we have seen great success in improving education attainment levels and success rates for FNMI students when we are able to encourage an environment where students can see their identities and experiences reflected. For example, in addition to having Student Advocacy Counsellors on site, we are also fortunate to have an Elder within some of our schools. This opportunity to connect with

students is invaluable, and all students benefit from the interactions and teachings this provides.

We believe that strengthening Indigenous education initiatives and strategies is a great step towards reconciliation, and should be a focus when considering capital needs. However, there is currently no consideration for the inclusion of dedicated spaces for these initiatives in new builds, modernizations, or existing schools. While we have the ability to reallocate space typically designated for things like the library or learning commons, we believe that the inclusion and integration of culturally significant pursuits should not come at the expense of other essential school needs, nor as an afterthought. We ask that funding be considered specifically for spaces within schools to provide things like an office for Elders, space for smudging, or to welcome other community-based supports that would enhance awareness and encourage attendance and success for FNMI students, and for all their peers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Karen R.", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Karen Packard

cc: Honourable Brian Jean, Minister of Energy and Minerals
Honourable Pete Guthrie, Minister of Infrastructure
Honourable Rick Wilson, Minister of Indigenous Relations
Marilyn Dennis, ASBA President
Dennis MacNeil, PSBAA President
ASBA Board Chairs