

May 2, 2024

Chair Aaron Stone
CVRD Board of Directors
175 Ingram Street, 3rd Floor
Duncan, BC V9L 1N8



Sent to: chairperson@cverd.bc.ca

Dear Chair Stone and CVRD board members,

We are writing to you on behalf of the students, parents and teachers of Q'shintul Mill Bay Nature School (QMBNS), seeking your support in our opposition of the recent decision by School District 79 to end the K-7 nature/land-based learning program of choice and transition to a catchment school for kindergarten to grade 2.

This decision dismantles a program on the cutting edge of educational research that embodies the world-renowned BC curriculum. Our school was also featured in a documentary called [10,000 Gifts](#), which portrays its distinctive role in local reconciliation.

QMBNS is a school of choice, rather than a catchment school, in the Cowichan Valley School District (SD79), which means it is available to any child that lives within the area that SD79 serves. QMBNS is a truly special choice school that has been co-created with the late Quw'utsun Elder and his wife Sulsameeth/Deb George, Quw'utsun knowledge holders, staff, students and families.

The school is modelled and organized after a Hul'qumi'num village to create a safe, flexible and culturally responsive environment. This environment has been transformative for many students and has provided a profoundly inclusive way to fulfill the BC curriculum. There are QMBNS families with children that were not able to attend a more traditional school environment.

The decision-making process and associated actions necessitate a thorough review, as they do not align with the Board's established procedures and have resulted in substantial concerns amongst the community. The decision was made entirely in a closed in-camera session, without any public notice or consultation. The information provided to stakeholders regarding the reasons for closing our school has been minimal, provided in informal "Q&A" sessions, and seemingly based solely on enrollment projections.

We have requested a more comprehensive analysis and communication of the decision-making factors, which are essential to ensure a process of transparency and accountability. At the time of writing, neither the Board nor District staff have made available in writing any materials or information that support the decision made.

The rationale provided has been about space pressures in surrounding schools. We completely understand the Ministry of Education's mandate to maximize the use of school infrastructure to

provide education opportunities to all children within the SD79 area and feel that there is a solution that can preserve this program of choice and accommodate the growing population.

Our late Elder, a residential school survivor, described QMBNS as the school he would have liked to attend, and a place of healing for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to practice reconciliation in action. Given the importance of the role he and his wife, Sulsameethl, held in our community and the unique cultural perspective they offered, it is concerning that the family was not consulted during this process. This oversight requires immediate attention, apology and correction.

Our highly valued staff at QMBNS have been served a board-initiated transfer slip, and priority has been given to teachers from George Bonner Elementary for next year. Our teachers have received oral teachings from the late Elder and are knowledge holders of the Indigenous co-created learning model now in place. If these teachers are displaced, we lose the precious teachings of the late Elder and his legacy of reconciliation in education.

We need future-focused vision and leadership from elected officials right now (as outlined in the school district's own strategic plan, which by the way our school is featured prominently in!). The unique children across the Cowichan Valley Regional District need options within their education. The decision to dismantle QMBNS's current program of choice not only affects the immediate families and staff who rely on the school, but also diminishes the broader educational diversity and richness within the Cowichan Valley.

Our late Elder gave the school the name Q'shintul, which means "walking together" in Hul'q'umi'num. We ask you to Q'shintul with us at this time when we need you. This school is an ongoing act of decolonization, centering our xe xe smuneem, our sacred children, but this unilateral decision to shut us down is colonial in all the worst ways. This school was developed through relationships with respected Indigenous knowledge holders. Closing us down devalues the ongoing work of truth and reconciliation that we have been doing through these relationships. Our children have been learning Indigenous ways of knowing and being, but this closure teaches them that bureaucracy rules.

We are asking for your support in advocating to the Minister of Education and Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation on our behalf to preserve this unique program of choice for the Cowichan Valley.

Huy tseep q'u siem for considering our request. We hope we can count on you to advocate for our community.

Sincerely,

Jaime Blacklock
Eagle Clan PAC Co-Chair
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