

Monday, Sept. 27, 2021

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To our Families and Community Partners,

It has been six years since the Truth and Reconciliation Commission completed its work of giving voice to the Indigenous Peoples who have been affected by Indian Residential Schools. It took the Commission seven years to travel across the country and hear from 6,500 witnesses. Their testimony became one of six reports released by Truth and Reconciliation Commission that highlight the suffering of Indigenous Peoples at the hands of their oppressors.

The Commission, led by the Honourable Murray Sinclair, put the genocide that was perpetrated against Indigenous Peoples in Canada in the spotlight. The findings and resulting exhibit were a catalyst for change. The commission also released [94 Calls to Action](#) that act as way finders; concrete steps to move forward in acknowledging the truth of Canada's history with Indigenous Peoples and beginning the very difficult and uncomfortable work of reconciliation.

The Calls to Action list 94 changes that need to be made to dismantle the systemic racism that continues to affect Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Near North District School Board (NNDSB) recognizes it has a role to play in truth and reconciliation. It is imperative that the board climbs the mountain as requested by the Commission.

The path to truth and reconciliation will be slow and painful, but the steps must be taken.

The Board of Trustees has proactively acknowledged this, and endeavours to be part of the change. In addition to opening meetings with a land acknowledgement, Board meetings now open with a prayer from an Elder. The Indigenous Trustee, elected by members of the First Nations to represent them on the Board, is actively consulted and her input valued in decision-making on issues that affect Indigenous students.

The board is fortunate to have guidance from Indigenous Education Lead Tracy Hendrick, whose work involves not only supporting Indigenous students and their families, but also helping all NNDSB staff and educators understand how colonization continues to affect members of Indigenous communities, and to guide staff in developing their understanding of Indigenous worldviews to best support all students. NNDSB is thankful for the learning provided by teachers of Indigenous ways and Anishinaabemowin (language), FNMI grad coaches who provide support in the choice of pathways for students and Indigenous Child

Development Counsellors concerned with student well-being. We recognize this is just the beginning of the climb.

As an institution, NNDSB is taking steps in response to the Calls to Action, including:

- working to eliminate educational gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children (have staff positions to support Indigenous families in education)
- an Indigenous Trustee position elected by members of the area First Nations to sit on the NNDSB Board of Trustees
- offering Indigenous language classes to all interested students at 12 schools
- providing resources and building capacity to support all staff and students in understanding Indigenous history, culture, perspectives, and ways of knowing
- encouraging and supporting non-Indigenous staff who want to take a First Nation, Metis and Inuit Additional Qualification course
- partnering with Anishinabek Education System (AES) to place two full-time cultural advisors/knowledge keepers in schools on a regular basis
- successful AES pilot project applicant to be one of five boards in the province to provide cultural competency training to administrators

From the Truth and Reconciliation Commission grew [Orange Shirt Day](#). Phyllis Webstad told the Commission of having her new orange shirt taken from her as a six-year-old child on the first day of residential school. Held on Sept. 30, Orange Shirt Day provides an opportunity for discussion about residential schools and lets survivors and their families know they still matter.

The federal government has legislated Sept. 30, 2021 as the first National Truth and Reconciliation Day. NNDSB wants the day to be acknowledged in a way that is most appropriate and meaningful to members of the eight First Nations that are NNDSB community partners, and other Indigenous Peoples in our schools. Schools have been given the flexibility to provide community-relevant programming.

The legacy of residential schools weighs heavy in the hearts of survivors and their families, who have been subjected to 200 years of colonization and systemic discrimination. NNDSB will continue to climb the mountain and strive to do better.



Jay Aspin
Chair of the Board



Craig Myles
Director of Education