



**INDIGENOUS EDUCATION COUNCIL (IEC) MEETING**

**Tuesday, January 13, 2026 – 1:30 pm to 4:30 pm**

**Room 370 – Learning Centre**

(1040 Hollywood Road South, Kelowna, BC)

**MINUTES**

**Voting Council Members**

**Westbank First Nation (4)**

- Jordan Coble
- Nicole Werstuik
- Sara Tronson
- Denise Clough (*by Teams*)

**Kelowna Metis Association (2)**

- Cheryl Dodman
- Richard Gauthier

**Elder Representative (1)**

- Elder Wilfred Barnes (WFN) (*by Teams*)

**Lake Country Native Association (1)**

- Ann Bell

**Okanagan Indian Band (2)**

- None
- Absent: Allan Louis*
- Absent: Peggy Joe*

**Indigenous Parent & Family Education Council (2)**

- Deanna Necan
- Candace Jack (WFN)

**Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society (2)**

- Bill McKenna
- Ethel Lariviere (Alternate)

**Central Okanagan Public Schools: Trustee Representatives**

- Trustee Julia Fraser
- Trustee Lisa Guderyan

**Central Okanagan Public Schools: Staff**

- Director of Instruction - Indigenous Education, Diversity, and Student Wellbeing: Jesse Bruce
- District Vice-Principal of Indigenous Education: Christie Russell
- District Vice-Principal of Indigenous Education: Kevin Kaiser
- Superintendent of Schools: Jon Rever
- Assistant Superintendent: Raquel Steen
- Secretariat: Lise Bradshaw

**Guests:**

- Black Mountain Elementary School:  
Michelle Relova, Principal
- Keely Flannigan, Teacher-Librarian and Shannon Wynne, Indigenous Advocate
- Students: Kaydence Peters, Aleeyah Ranchoux, Brooklyn Sinclair, Everley Barrie,  
Mia Ranchoux and Duncan Popoff

Delta Carmichael, Secretary-Treasurer/CFO

## **Welcome**

Chair Coble called the meeting to order at 1:34 pm.

## **Opening Prayer**

Elder Barnes led the Council in an opening prayer.

## **ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION / DECISION**

### **Adoption of the January 13, 2026, Agenda:**

**MOVED by Nicole Werstuik and SECONDED by Cheryl Dodman  
THAT: The Agenda for January 13, 2026 be adopted as presented.  
CARRIED**

### **Review and Approval of Minutes: Indigenous Education Council Meeting Minutes – November 28, 2025**

Ann Bell noted a correction to two names listed in the minutes:

- The Lake Country Native Association Alternate Council Member is Shannon Isnardy.
- The new President of the Lake Country Native Association is Marie James.

**MOVED by Ann Bell and SECONDED by Richard Gauthier  
THAT: The Minutes for the November 28, 2025 meeting be adopted as amended.  
CARRIED**

## **PRESENTATION**

The Indigenous Education Council introduced themselves and welcomed the group from Black Mountain Elementary School.

### **Black Mountain Elementary School: Indigenous Focused School Priority**

Michelle Relova - Principal, Keely Flannigan - Teacher-Librarian and Shannon Wynne - Indigenous Advocate, along with students from Black Mountain Elementary School presented to the IEC on the way Black Mountain Elementary is moving beyond traditional practices toward a new priority focused on equity, inclusion, and authentic learning. They highlighted core values such as celebrating language, knowledge, history, and cultures, while fostering respect, rights, and community responsibility to the land and each other. The school staff, students and the parent community show a strong commitment to Indigenous education, centering learning on caring for the land and listening to syilx Okanagan voices.

Students answered queries from the Indigenous Education Council regarding their learning journey.

## **STANDING ITEMS**

Chair Coble expressed heartfelt condolences to District staff on the recent tragic loss of a student and reaffirmed the commitment of the Westbank First Nation and IEC to support the community in any way needed.

### **District Updates**

Jon Rever, Superintendent of Schools, thanked Chair Coble for the thoughtful words of support, acknowledging the year had begun under deeply tragic circumstances.

## **District updates:**

- The Board of Education has begun a refresh of the Strategic Plan. From Peachland to Lake Country, there are six public engagement sessions being offered at the various secondary schools. If there is interest from the IEC to engage in their own session, they can coordinate with Jesse Bruce.
- The Districts' budget development process has begun, and input from the public and IEC is welcomed.
- The Superintendent of Schools has made a written commitment to improve numeracy and literacy for all students, but the priority is the persistent performance difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners. The District will continue the work to understand the root cause of this issue.
- 'School Learning Priorities' – are now a part of our School Community Plans for student learning. The word 'community' is important as it means that we recognize the input and feedback from community for the development of priorities for students. The District is decolonizing and shifting to learning priorities which signals a new approach.
- The Superintendent expressed enthusiasm about the recent enhancement to the Equity in Action Agreement, highlighting the inclusion of a stronger connection to family and its significant influence on a child's success.
- The Board of Education will be hosting two public information sessions this spring for Westside families regarding the opening of George Pringle Secondary School in September of 2027. Chair Coble asked if there was a possibility of having a session for WFN parents at the WFN Youth Centre as well.

## **Department Updates:**

Christie Russell, District Principal of Indigenous Education, provided information on:

- The Annual Primary Winter Gathering is happening January 27-30, 2026, for 250 Grade 3 Indigenous students from the District, as well as students joining from sēnsisyustən and Revelstoke school district.
- On February 9, 2026, Deanna Gestrin, an Indigenous educator, registered counsellor and SFU faculty Associate, will lead a wellness workshop for Indigenous Advocates, focusing on strategies to support their own well-being and personal growth, enabling them to better serve and uplift students.
- The Indigenous Education Department is partnering with the Learning and Innovation Team to host four Indigenous-focused Family Literacy nights. These will be occurring at Springvalley Elementary, Watson Elementary, Chief Tomat Elementary and Davidson Road Elementary.

Kevin Kaiser, District Principal of Indigenous Education provided information on:

- The Land Based Love Family Nights that were hosted the first week back after winter break at four middle schools: Constable Neil Bruce Middle School, Springvalley Middle School, École KLO Middle School and École HS Grenda Middle School.
- A session for the Indigenous Education team lead by Jace Lacert, about how one can carry inter-generational trauma. Real, common-sense strategies to recognize and get rid of stress were offered.

Nicole Werstuik commended the Indigenous Education Department team for providing these valuable sessions for the Indigenous Advocates to support their mental health and wellbeing.

Jesse Bruce, Director of Instruction - Indigenous Education, Diversity, and Student Wellbeing provided information on:

- The District's focus on caring for the professionals who care for young learners and families, with the Superintendent of Schools making employee wellness a priority.
- Christie Russell and Jace Lacert will be travelling to the Yukon to share teachings.
- The Equity in Action Agreement will be shared at the next District Central Okanagan Leadership Team ("COLT") meeting. Additionally, Dr. Dustin Louie is going to present to the group on 'relentless incrementalism' - starting with small, focused efforts to create incremental growth.

## Community Updates:

Chair Coble asked each group to provide a brief update or a “brag”:

### Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society (Ethel Lariviere)

- Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society has a new Executive Director – Christina Verhagen. Rob Bullock is no longer with KFS. A letter to the IEC will be coming.
- They are restructuring their outreach and programs looking to fill in gaps in community.
- Two staff members, Ethel Lariviere and Camryn Allard, both got accepted at the University of Victoria for the MBA program for Advancing Reconciliation, they will graduate in December of 2028.

### Westbank First Nation

- (Jordan) Thank you to CNB for hosting the Land Based Love program. He would support expanding this program to new areas of the land.
- (Nicole) WFN will be introducing drum group lessons and stick games for all ages starting in March. Three Mount Boucherie Secondary School students will be helping to facilitate.
- (Sara) A Salish language conference is coming up, and Okanagan Nation Alliance putting on captikw forum on January 20, 2026.

### Indigenous Parent and Family Education Council

- (Candace) WFN will be hosting Powwow culture nights, teaching protocols, dance moves and drumming. Open to all ages.
- (Deanna)
  - o There is a Global Voices for Local Action festival on February 6, 2026.
  - o Deanna completed her Okanagan School of Education application.
  - o Deanna has authored a poem called The 100s regarding her residential school story.
  - o The Rutland Secondary School Bingo night was a great success and she recommends Bingo as a great way to get people together.

### Kelowna Metis Association (Cheryl Dodman)

- On February 21, 2026, at Mamawapowin, Samson LaMontagne, a fluent Northern Michif speaker/teacher from Saskatoon and Elder Tom McCallum from 108 Mile House will be sharing in celebrating our Language program.
- Victor Henry (local) will provide music and Fergus Dalton (Langley) will be sharing with Jigging teachings. This evening event will be for all who attended classes via Zoom and in person.
- The Christmas luncheon celebrated with music and a traditional turkey meal.
- Cheryl Dodman received the Nation Builder Award at the October Métis Nation BC Governing Assembly. Only 12 people received this Award in the Province.

### Trustee Fraser

- Julia Fraser queried the possibility of doing an IEC bus tour to a few schools. Jesse Bruce advised that this was done last year, when there was a week of school visits and IEC members could sign up for mornings or afternoons. If the IEC wishes to do this again, it could be arranged.

### Trustee Guderyan:

- Lisa Guderyan recently finished her master's degree and has been integrating and blending some nsyilxcən language and stories with respect to Indigenous and western research methodologies. Lisa expressed her gratitude to Pamela Barnes for her help with her research.

### Lake Country Native Association (Ann Bell)

- At the end of January there will be a family cultural gathering led by Shannon Isnardy.
- In February drum circles will be starting with Elder Randy Swanson.
- The Christmas party was a big success.

## **Indigenous "Kids in Care" in the School District, Tutors, and Wrap-Around Services of Support**

Chair Coble requested that at an upcoming IEC meeting, that the names of the community partners that support the Indigenous Advocates and Wellness Workers who work with the Indigenous and non-Indigenous students be brought forward, so that they can be recognized for their good work. The IEC would welcome some good news stories around the table about the community partners supporting our youth.

IEC members shared that the Metis Community Services in Rutland does a lot of work, as well as the Child and Youth Advocacy Centre.

Jon Rever advised that District staff have just had a meeting with the City of Kelowna regarding supporting youth and there is opportunity for more conversation regarding this topic.

## **Indigenous Student Attendance**

Jesse Bruce advised that Indigenous Education Department staff have met with many school Principals over last few weeks regarding actions that the School Based Team can take when students are absent over multiple days. While each school handles absenteeism differently, they each shared how they were connecting with families. Indigenous Advocates also play a strong role in monitoring student attendance on a daily basis including walking school buses, home visits and check-ins.

Jon Rever advised that a review of the graduation program (grades 10-12) is underway with Assistant Superintendent Lynda Reeve. They recently met with 40 students from the District Student Council, who are planning to conduct student-led empathy interviews in all secondary schools. Their goal is to capture the perspectives of students who are facing challenges or struggling with attendance and better understand the root causes.

The District is also conducting a review of the adult graduation program. There appears to be an over-subscription of Indigenous students in this program which they are trying to understand.

Sara Tronson asked that information on the District's adult graduation program numbers be brought forward to the next IEC meeting, with data going back to pre-pandemic years. She also asked whether a report exists that compares student attendance with academic performance, and whether any correlation can be identified.

IEC members discussed the over-subscription for the Adult Grad program for Indigenous learners. The Superintendent noted that FNEESC has expressed concerns about the provincial data and the District is actively investigating. IEC members shared the wish that all students receive a high-quality education, leading to graduation and a Dogwood Diploma, rather than going down the alternative path of just 'getting over the finish line' when there are no other extenuating circumstances.

## **nsyilxcən Language Instruction**

Christie Russell shared the progress of the nsyilxcən Language Instruction happening at Chief Tomat Elementary school. The practical hope is that students will leave grade 5 knowing how to introduce themselves in nsyilxcən, know the nsyilxcən names for 10 animals and 10 numbers, be able to recognize local territory and know what a land acknowledgement is and also understand that one word may have multiple meanings. This nsyilxcən language teaching will be a reportable subject on student learning summaries (similar to French) for the grade 5s. IEC members are welcome to observe the language instruction teaching during the three blocks on Mondays at Chief Tomat Elementary.

Kevin Kaiser advised that Tyler Ernst is finishing up at Mount Boucherie Secondary School. He will begin teaching all Grade 6 classes at Constable Neil Bruce Middle School, land-based love classes for Grade 7 students and Indigenous leadership classes for grade 8 students. Tyler will also be teaching at Ecole Kelowna Secondary School at the end of the semester.

Christie Russell expressed thanks to Elder Barnes for his support and guidance in this program.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

## **Learning Centre Artwork**

Delta Carmichael, Secretary-Treasurer/CFO shared the plan for artwork for the newly renovated Hollywood Road Learning Centre.

The District has purchased 15-20 pieces from local artists that feature the Central Okanagan. Additionally, there will be some student art pieces from the Indigenous Art program (facilitated by teacher Jim Elwood). Finally, the District is hoping to have a historical black and white photo gallery wall of some of the various school sites. A sample of some of the old photographs was shown. IEC members are invited to share feedback, concerns or questions regarding the photo gallery project. Chair Coble suggested that a land acknowledgement be included within the historical photo gallery wall, as well as ensuring there is a photo of the old George Pringle Elementary school included.

## **SD23 Schools of Choice – Suggested Circle Practice**

Nicole Werstiuk shared a recent incident at Constable Neil Bruce Middle School where repeated physical altercations occurred among two WFN students. One of the parents requested a meeting with the other family but did not want to do so alone. A talking circle was suggested which resulted in a very successful outcome for both the students and the parents.

IEC members discussed the value of bringing students and parents together in a talking circle, and the positive outcomes and cultural growth the process provides. The group reflected on whether this practice could be used more broadly for all students as an alternative to suspensions or other disciplinary measures, while acknowledging that there are times when a pause is necessary for schools to be able to effectively address the situation.

The Superintendent noted that schools currently have restorative justice programs in place but agreed that suspensions rarely change behaviour. The District aims to equip students with the tools to resolve conflict before situations escalate. Given that existing discipline policies tend to be colonial and outdated, the Superintendent advised that he does have it on his radar to discuss with the Board of Education to consider formally incorporating culturally appropriate approaches into Policy.

*4:06 pm The Superintendent and Secretary-Treasurer left the meeting.*

## **School Completion Certificate Partner Workflow Table, Gr 10-12**

Jesse Bruce shared information from FNEC indicating a provincial concern that some Indigenous learners were being streamed into the Evergreen pathway, which is intended for students with an intellectual disability or Ministry designation. The District team conducted a review and want to reassure the IEC that they did not find any instances of an Indigenous learner being directed into this pathway without the appropriate Ministry designation.

## **Blanket Exercise**

Jesse Bruce advised that there are now staff members in the District who are trained to train others to deliver the Blanket Exercise. This is significant as historically; the District has had to pay for the training. There are often days such as Implementation Day, where staff are requested to facilitate the Blanket Exercise at multiple locations.

This matter is being brought forward in advance of the IEC budget meeting in February, as there is a significant annual fee in the amount of \$5000. Another consideration is that when staff facilitate on non-instructional day such as Implementation Day, they are not being pulled from supporting students. However, when the Blanket Exercise is facilitated on a school day, a number of staff would have to be released from their assignments and from students. Jesse Bruce would welcome any questions before the budget meeting in February.

Elder Barnes shared concerns regarding the Blanket Exercise and believes there are better local offerings available and stated that this KAIROS Blanket Exercise comes from the church which does not align with reconciliation.

Chair Coble queried why this cost would come out of the IEC budget as the Blanketing Exercise is not specific to Indigenous students, and additionally it would be taking Indigenous Advocates away from students.

Christie Russell clarified that KAIROS is not owned by a church organization. The Blanket Exercise was originally written by an Anglican church and while it is not from community, it has been reviewed by an Indigenous professor.

IEC members discussed blanket exercises and the resulting engagement and education but agreed with Elder Barnes that local resources are needed.

Chair Coble reiterated that this should not come from the IEC budget, as Indigenous people are not responsible for the reconciliation efforts of others. However, if Indigenous people want to be included, guidance, shared resources and perspective should be offered.

### **Equity in Action Agreement for Truth and Reconciliation**

Jesse Bruce presented a new draft of the refreshed Equity in Action Agreement which will be shared at next week's Central Okanagan Leadership Team meeting. There are two changes to note:

- The timeline has been replaced with a narrative of the journey of the Equity in Action for Truth and Reconciliation in our District, written by Terry Beaudry, retired Deputy Superintendent and long-time member of the IEC.
- Fly has been added alongside the Four Food Chiefs. Fly teaches us that even the smallest beings carry great responsibility and purpose, and that all voices matter. There is a commitment to learner agency, by ensuring learners are provided with meaningful opportunities to share their voice in their learning and assessments.

The next step is the plan is to invite a Reconciliation Representative from each school to meet regularly and bring information and teachings back to their schools to share at staff meetings.

Any suggestions for edits to the document are welcome.

### **The Ambassadors of Compassion Student Leadership 12 week Rise & Lift Programs**

Due to time, this agenda item will be deferred to the February 10, 2026, IEC meeting.

### **Election of Vice-Chair**

Chair Coble advised that nominations were open for Vice-Chair.

Nicole Werstuik thanked the IEC for the opportunity of being Co-Chair for the past 6 years and nominated WFN Councillor Sara Tronson as Vice-Chair.

The nomination was seconded by Ann Bell.

As there were no further nominations, Sara Tronson accepted the nomination and was acclaimed as Vice-Chair.

### **INFORMATION ITEMS**

#### **IEC Appointments – letter received**

- (a) Ann Bell and Shannon Isnardy (alternate) Lake Country Native Association
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## **REVIEW ACTION ITEMS**

*Action Item:* Reach out to the language speakers in the territory to ensure the translation of the acknowledgement poster into the nsyilxcən language is done correctly.

Christie Russell advised that this could be removed from the Agenda as the nsyilxcən acknowledgement poster is now complete.

## **FUTURE IEC MEETINGS** (Tuesdays 1:30 to 4:00 pm - School Board Office)

**February 10<sup>th</sup>, April 14<sup>th</sup>, June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2026.**

## **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

- Impact of the new personal student digital device restrictions at school (*from June 3, 2025 IEC Meeting*)
- Language Teaching
- Deferred item: The Ambassadors of Compassion Student Leadership 12 week Rise & Lift Programs

Chair Coble requested that we limit the number of Agenda items for the next meeting (other than the standing items) so that there is enough time to focus on the Budget discussion.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 4:38 pm.