



**INDIGENOUS EDUCATION COUNCIL (IEC) MEETING**

**Tuesday, April 14, 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 *(by Teams)*
- Sara Tronson
- Denise Clough *(by Teams)*
- *Christopher Alexander (Guest) (by Teams)*

**Elder Representative (1)**

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

**Okanagan Indian Band (2)**

Allan Louis

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

- Christina Verhagen
- Bill McKenna
- *Maureen Ziprick (Guest) (by Teams, joined 2:56 pm)*

**Kelowna Metis Association (2)**

- Cheryl Dodman

**Lake Country Native Association (1)**

- Ann Bell
- *Shannon Isnardy (Guest)*

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

- Deanna Necan
- Candace Jack (WFN) *(by Teams)*

**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

Assistant Superintendent: Raquel Steen

Secretariat: Lise Bradshaw

*Regrets:*

*Superintendent of Schools: Jon Rever*

*District Vice-Principal of Indigenous Education: Christie Russell*

*District Vice-Principal of Indigenous Education: Kevin Kaiser*

**Guests:**

Jennifer Adamson – Principal, Chief Tomat Elementary

Kim Kosik - nsyilxcən Language Instructor

Ashley Madson, Teacher

**Welcome**

Chair Jordan Coble called the meeting to order at 1:35 pm.

**Opening Prayer**

Elder Barnes led the Council in an opening prayer.

## **PRESENTATION: Learning nsyilxcən Together**

Presenters: Jennifer Adamson – Principal, Chief Tomat Elementary  
Kim Kosik - nsyilxcən Language Instructor  
Ashley Madson, Teacher

The team, along with two students from Chief Tomat Elementary School, shared their progress on the introduction of the nsyilxcən language to Grade 4/5 students, with the goal of sparking interest so learners continue their language journey at Constable Neil Bruce Middle School.

The program is grounded in the understanding that language revitalization is an essential part of reconciliation, requiring collective effort from students, teachers, and the broader community. The importance of building respect for the ancestral language that has cared for the land and preserved its stories since time immemorial was highlighted.

Data was shared to illustrate the endangered status of the nsyilxcən language, with only 81 fluent speakers left. The connection between language, land, and ancestral stories was highlighted. Jennifer Adamson spoke to the cultural importance of the language and shared observations of nsyilxcən in action — including growing student engagement, joy in classrooms, and the language spreading into everyday school life.

Kim Kosik provides nsyilxcən language instruction every Monday, with 40-minute sessions delivered across 4 classrooms. What began as basic phrases and classroom commands has progressed to colors and numbers. Classroom teachers further the language lesson each Friday, using hands-on, land-based, interactive methods, and incorporating games and play-based activities.

The presentation closed by centering student perspectives on their learning experience.

## **ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION / DECISION**

### **Adoption of the April 14, 2026, Agenda:**

MOVED by Sara Tronson and SECONDED by Ann Bell  
THAT: The Agenda for April 14, 2026 be adopted as presented.  
CARRIED

### **Review and Approval of Minutes: Indigenous Education Council Meeting Minutes – February 10, 2026.**

MOVED by Cheryl Dodman and SECONDED by Nicole Werstuik  
THAT: The Minutes for the February 10, 2026 meeting be adopted as presented.  
CARRIED

## STANDING ITEMS

### District/Department Updates:

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Jesse Bruce provided updates on:

#### 1. Indigenous Graduation celebrations:

Doors open at 5:00pm and the program starts at 6:00pm. Formal invitations will be sent.

- CPS Thursday May 28
- GESS Wednesday June 3
- MBSS Tuesday June 9
- KSS/OKM Thursday June 11
- RSS Thursday June 18

IEC members are welcome any or all graduation blanketing ceremonies. A formal invitation will follow.

2. **Bannock, Books & Bingo:** Chief Tomat Elementary is hosting this family event on May 20. Indigenous Education staff are working with the District's Learning and Innovation team on this event and also purchasing books with Indigenous focused content. An invitation to IEC members will follow.

3. **Medicine Wheel Awards:** Interested IEC members are invited to participate in the selection committee meeting.

4. **Indigenous Grad Retreat:** IEC members are invited to the Indigenous grad retreat scheduled for May 7 at Bertram Creek Park.

5. **OMRIE Youth Wellness Summit:** A dozen grade 10/11 students are going to the Okanagan Mainline Indigenous Education Youth Wellness Summit scheduled for May 8 in Vernon. After the summit, students will then share back their learnings.

### Community Updates:

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#### Indigenous Parent & Family Education Council

- Deanna Necan shared they are working with Chief Tomat Elementary School on the upcoming Bannock Books and Bingo event which will set the bar for events to be hosted at other schools.

#### Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society

- Christina Verhagen shared that they now have 8 staff to help the unhoused and make community connections for Elders and youth, and are looking for some partnerships to find space to offer programs. They will be participating in the Turtle Island festival on June 21.

#### Trustee Guderyan/Trustee Fraser

- Trustees attended the BCSTA AGM where a motion advocating for Indigenous music and art was submitted. At the recent Education and Student Services Committee meeting, the Committee reviewed and analyzed all the data gathered at the public engagement sessions.

#### Westbank First Nation

- WFN members shared various upcoming events, including intake for the National Indigenous Artist Training Program, the WFN AGM, NDC Career Fair and Expo, Youth Council, Drum lessons, Ambassadors of Compassion group, Soaring Indigenous Youth Conference and cultural safety training at the Kelowna Museum.

#### Lake Country Native Association:

- Shannon Isnardy and Ann Bell highlighted various past and upcoming events, including the Learning on the Land at Beaver Lake, storytelling by Elder Randy Swanson, and the ONA family group session regarding water and the cultural relevance.
- Ann Bell queried the Terms of Reference for the Indigenous Parent and Family Education Council as she has received some questions on when meetings occur, etc.

2:56 pm: Maureen Ziprick joined the meeting via Teams.

OKIB

- Allan Louis shared that School District 22's Indigenous Grad is scheduled for May 26 and June 3. School District 22 data in the HAWD Report indicates an improvement of 14% for Indigenous graduation.
- OKIB is hosting Indigenous parent sessions to help educate parents on how to support students with school and homework; artist Sheldon Lewis is starting a mural in one of the elementary schools that does not have Indigenous art; OKIB is applying for grant for a dual credit pathway for teachers to teach nsyilxcən.

Kelowna Metis Association:

- Cheryl Dodman shared information on various past and upcoming events, including a trip to Enderby for a sweat lodge, local fiddle player offering lessons, monthly potlucks, and participation in the Turtle Island event.
- It was also shared that the President of Metis Nation has been dismissed, and there will be an election for a new president.

Chair Coble expressed gratitude for the information about community events and relationship-building among IEC members, but noted that this often takes considerable time during meetings and allows for less time to discuss other items on the agenda. It is recommended that this be taken into account when IEC members share Community Updates at upcoming meetings.

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

Chair Coble advised that this standing agenda item was an opportunity for IEC members to raise any issues that may have come to their attention.

### **Indigenous Student Attendance**

Chair Coble commended OKIB's initiatives aimed at assisting parents in supporting their children's education and homework.

Jesse Bruce shared data regarding Indigenous Student Attendance. Since COVID-19, attendance rates have declined among both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. It was noted that chronic absenteeism among Indigenous learners has improved by 5.2%, indicating progress. However, as students grow older, there is a higher rate of absenteeism, especially at the middle and secondary school levels. Although numbers have improved slightly, chronic absences remain a concern.

To investigate these issues further, an inquiry was initiated, including requests for individual student names from secondary schools where absenteeism exceeded 20%. A consultant was tasked with analyzing individual attendance records from kindergarten to the present, looking for trends across schools and among students. As anticipated, absenteeism tends to worsen as students progress into middle and secondary school, highlighting the importance of transitional support.

The next phase involves engaging directly with students. Kevin Kaiser and Christie Russell have reached out to schools to conduct Empathy Interviews, asking the following three questions:

- What factors prevent you from attending school?
- What barriers exist, such as transportation or safety concerns?
- How can community partners support efforts to reconnect with students not currently attending school?

Further updates will be provided as this work continues. Indigenous Advocates, who are well acquainted with the students, have been able to effectively identify cases of chronic unexcused absences, excluding those absent for extracurricular activities like hockey.

### **nsyilxcən Language Instruction**

The 'How Are We Doing' (HAWD) report includes data regarding language, specifically inquiring about the host language and its accessibility. For the past three years, no formal language was reported; however, this is expected to change next year with the introduction of the course at MBSS.

It should be noted that significant learning occurs outside what is reported to the Ministry. Jasmine Peone has contributed valuable instruction, and today's presentation highlighted opportunities for grade 4 and 5 learners. This exposure means that when students transition to CNB alongside students from s̓nsisyust̓n, they may not be at the same level but will have prior experience. At CNB, all grade 6 learners are enrolled in nsyilxc̓n language classes, and Tyler Ernst continues to collaborate with middle and secondary schools. Plans are underway for expanding language offerings to additional elementary schools within the District next year. UBCO is graduating students proficient in nsyilxc̓n.

Maureen Ziprick raised the question of why nsyilxc̓n is not yet available in all elementary schools. Chair Coble clarified that this was addressed earlier in the meeting during the Chief Tomat Elementary presentation, and affirmed it is part of the current plan. It was noted that efforts are still in preliminary stages, with the goal of developing a formal curriculum. Sara Tronson shared that the Penticton Band School has established a robust curriculum, and suggested a senior District team member be sent to next year's Band School conference.

Maureen Ziprick also proposed forming a nsyilxc̓n working group to initiate discussions. Chair Coble expressed interest in creating dedicated spaces for language learning, including portable and outdoor options.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **'How Are We Doing' (HAWD) Aboriginal Report – 2024/2025**

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Chair Coble opened the discussion with a concern regarding fluctuations in Indigenous student data. The IEC discussed challenges related to self-identification and changes over time. It was noted that variations may result from differences in how families understand or apply Indigenous identity, eligibility rules for funding, cultural disconnection due to intergenerational trauma, or decisions by families to opt out of supports. Clarification was provided regarding data anomalies identified through audit preparation, including distinctions between students who are Indigenous but not eligible for provincial funding and those who are eligible but choose not to access academic or cultural supports. Updates have been made to enrolment processes to improve clarity on this issue.

Members raised concerns about the potential misuse of self-identification and the impact this may have on Indigenous communities, while also cautioning against exclusion and recognizing the complex history that has limited many individuals' access to cultural knowledge and identity. The importance of balancing accountability with compassion and inclusivity was emphasized.

Trends in declining enrolment were discussed, with confirmation that decreases align with overall district enrolment patterns. Questions were raised about comparative data with other districts and the need to strengthen academic foundations for Indigenous learners.

Discussion focused on changes in Indigenous program staffing, particularly a shift away from academic support roles to well-being supports. While Indigenous Advocates were acknowledged as critical, there was concern that reduced academic support may be contributing to outcomes. IEC members highlighted the need for a strategy that addresses academic achievement, cultural connection, and mental health, noting that students may be strong in one area but not another.

Funding pressures were identified, including reduced availability and longer waitlists for external supports, shortages in specialized services, and increased demand for mental health and assessment supports. While systems are being stretched, efforts continue to prioritize timely access where possible.

Members also discussed alternative programs and noted demographic trends within those programs, emphasizing the importance of maintaining safe, inclusive, and empowering environments. Suggestions were shared for peer tutoring models, including involving older students in tutoring in return for volunteer hours.

Jesse Bruce shared that the District will continue to explore next steps in closing academic achievement gaps. The IEC may want to form a working group or subcommittee to focus on academics. On a positive note, the following data was shared:

- 83% of Grade 4 Indigenous students report feeling safe at school. This is up 9% from last year and up 13% from two years ago.
- 81% of Grade 4 Indigenous students report having two or more adults at school who care about them. This is up 12% from last year.

- 83% of Grade 12 Indigenous students report having two or more adults at school who care about them. This is up 23% from last year, and more than reported in the last four years.

In these, and other areas, data tells a story of improved relationships, feelings of safety and belonging, positive connection to caring adults, and access to academic support and help with schoolwork.

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### **OMRIE IEC Retreat – Fall 2026**

Jesse Bruce advised that OMRIE is requesting two volunteers from each IEC to meet 2-3 times prior to next fall to organize next year's IEC OMRIE Retreat.

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### **Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Children**

Resources for Red Dress Day will be shared via email to all IEC members.

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### **Dr. Dustin Louie Partnership**

Jesse Bruce shared that Dr. Dustin Louie has committed to being the keynote speaker for the District's Implementation Day this fall, for the 2026/2027 school year. He will also join four Central Okanagan Leadership Team (COLT) meetings, and will be working with a number of schools on reconciliation.

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### **INFORMATION ITEMS**

IEC Appointments

- (a) Christina Verhagen, Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society

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

**June 2nd, 2026.**

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### **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS**

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### **ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting adjourned at 4:35 pm