



INDIGENOUS EDUCATION COUNCIL (IEC) MEETING

Tuesday, February 10, 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 *(by Teams)*
- Nicole Werstuik
- Sara Tronson
- Denise Clough *(by Teams)*

Elder Representative (1)

- Elder Wilfred Barnes (WFN) *(by Teams) (joined at 1:57 pm)*

Okanagan Indian Band (2)

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

Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society (2)

- Christina Verhagen *(left meeting at 4:20 pm)*
- Maureen Ziprick (Alternate)

Kelowna Metis Association (2)

- Cheryl Dodman
- Richard Gauthier *(left meeting at 3:37 pm)*

Lake Country Native Association (1)

- Ann Bell
- Shannon Isnardy, *Guest/Observer*

Indigenous Parent & Family Education Council (2)

- Deanna Necan
- Candace Jack (WFN)

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
- Superintendent of Schools: Jon Rever
- Assistant Superintendent: Raquel Steen
- Secretariat: Lise Bradshaw

Regrets:

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

Guests:

- Kate Cumming, Assistant Secretary-Treasurer

Welcome

Co-Chair Sara Tronson called the meeting to order at 1:35 pm.

Opening Prayer

Chair Jordan Coble led the Council in an opening prayer.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION / DECISION

Adoption of the February 10, 2026, Agenda:

MOVED by Ann Bell and SECONDED by Nicole Werstuik
THAT: The Agenda for February 10, 2026 be adopted as presented.
CARRIED

Review and Approval of Minutes: Indigenous Education Council Meeting Minutes – January 13, 2026.

MOVED by Carol Dodman and SECONDED by Deanna Necan
THAT: The Minutes for the January 13, 2026 meeting be adopted as presented.
CARRIED

NEW BUSINESS

The Ambassadors of Compassion Student Leadership 12 Week Rise & Lift

Nicole Werstuik shared that they are partnering with the Ambassadors of Compassion program and several other organizations to launch a youth empowerment program in the Okanagan, involving middle and high school students. The 12-week Lift program focuses on youth compassion, community engagement, and leadership skills. They have selected six grade 9 and 10 students to be trained as facilitators. The kickoff is February 25th, with opening remarks by Jordan Coble. Following the kickoff, students will continue the program for 11 additional weeks. Trained youth will later facilitate sessions for their peers, aiming to foster leadership across organizations.

Strategic Plan Engagement Session

Jon Rever, Superintendent of Schools, led the IEC through a structured engagement session to gather input for the District's Strategic Plan refresh. Participants were organized into groups and guided through an interview matrix protocol, where each person both interviewed and was interviewed on four key questions:

1. When you think about the world students are entering today, what do you believe students need most from their experiences in our schools to be successful?
2. When you think about the future, what ideas do you have that would improve student learning for all students?
3. What would help families feel more meaningfully involved in supporting student learning?
4. What is one change that would make schools healthier and more supportive places for students, staff, and families?

Online participants used a digital platform to contribute their responses.

The group identified several recurring themes: the need for life skills, critical thinking, financial literacy, mental and physical health, nutrition, and community engagement for students; balancing technology with hands-on and land-based learning; improving positive communication and inclusivity for families; and fostering a supportive, village-like school environment that addresses mental health and well-being.

The data from the IEC's strategic plan engagement session will be considered by the Board of Education as they refresh the Strategic Plan for 2026-2031.

PRESENTATION

2026/2027 Draft Indigenous Education Program Preliminary Budget

Kate Cumming, Assistant Secretary-Treasurer presented a financial update to January 31, 2026 for the Indigenous Education Program. The District is on track overall with spending and a \$25,000 surplus is expected to be carried forward to next year.

The preliminary budget for 2026/2027 was presented with a projected enrollment of 3,060 Indigenous students, a slight decrease of 30 students from the 2025/2026 year. The budget is based on current per-FTE funding rates,

with adjustments to be made after the Ministry of Education and Child Care announces final funding in March. Following that announcement, another proposed budget will be brought to the April IEC meeting.

In order to ensure a balanced budget and fully spend the surplus, key changes to the proposed 2026/2027 budget include:

Cultural and Language Expenses:

- reallocating the Cultural Program Coordinator to come from Core Operating fund,
- reducing contract expenses for Elders in Residence,
- increasing cultural presentations and supplies expenses,
- adding a budget line for Contract Services – Language Instruction,
- removing Early Learning resources budget and reallocating to Language Resources

General Staffing Expenses:

- proposing to reclassify the two District Vice-Principal to District Principals, leaving the salaries allocated from Targeted funding at the District Vice-Principal level and supplementing from Core Operating Funding
- increasing Land Based teachers to 2.0 FTE, reallocating 1.0 FTE from Core Operating funding
- reducing Secondary Indigenous Success teachers from 6.7 to 5.8 FTE,
- removing Early Learning Teacher consultant budget,
- reducing clerical support by 0.4 FTE,
- reducing Indigenous Advocates from 50.6 FTE to 49.0 FTE,
- Removing Junior Advocate position budget,
- reducing after school program support to \$5000.

General Program Expenses

- removing budget for clinical supervisor for wellness workers,
- reducing grad retreat budget from two to one,
- Reducing professional development budgets for staff and administration,
- reducing telephone budget,
- reducing Youth Wellness Worker expenses.

Expenses to be Recovered from District

- Adding Administrative supports – wage increase for two District Vice-Principals moved to District Principals,
- Reallocate Land Based teacher to Targeted Funding budget),
- Reallocate Cultural Program Coordinator to Targeted Funding budget.

Kate Cumming shared that funding from the Feeding Futures Fund, Jordan’s Principle Fund, SSHRC Grant and Metis Early Learning Resource Fund is uncertain at this time.

Ann Bell queried the budget for the Indigenous Education Council Capacity Funding and the lack of a budget allocation for the Indigenous Parent and Family Education Council. Additionally, she emphasized that cultural opportunities should be made a priority for Indigenous learners.

3:37 pm Richard Gauthier left the meeting.

Christina Verhagen shared her experience as an Indigenous Advocate, the increasing caseloads and complexity of needs for Advocates, especially post-COVID, and the impact on their ability to provide cultural and foundational support.

The IEC discussed the reduction in the proposed budget for Early Learning and Success teachers. Jesse Bruce advised that the Early Learning teacher was removed due to budget considerations and the reduction of Secondary Success teachers is not a true reduction, as those positions were funded by the temporary spending of the surplus agreed to in the fall. Staffing for Indigenous Advocates is based on student FTE, so if there are more students than projected in September, 2026, another Advocate could be added.

Jordan Coble emphasized that students’ basic needs should come first. He noted that when he attended high school, there used to be only Advocates, but now there are Wellness Workers, Learning Support staff, and Indigenous Advocates. Jordan queried if the District could look at the ratio of Indigenous students to Indigenous Advocates. Additionally, more emphasis could be placed on outreach and wellness roles to those with more formal training, while acknowledging the cultural value that Advocates bring, such as providing food and a safe space, not necessarily also leading cultural activities.

After a question from Mo Ziprick, the IEC discussed professional development opportunities for Indigenous Advocates. Nicole Werstuik thanked District staff for the progress made in giving Advocates opportunities for wellness and professional development. Additionally, she suggested bringing in a team of senior Advocates to share ideas.

The IEC made a motion:

MOVED by Jordan Coble and SECONDED by Ann Bell

THAT: The preliminary budget for 2026/2027 be supported, with the notes given by Ann Bell on proposing a budget for the Indigenous Parent and Family Education Council.

CARRIED

STANDING ITEMS

District Updates:

Jon Rever, Superintendent of Schools shared that the District is anticipating a decrease of 200 students district-wide, marking the first decline in population in ten years. Current indicators from the City of Kelowna, as well as recent provincial reports, suggest that British Columbia's overall population is also decreasing. Since funding is allocated on a per pupil basis, this presents difficult decisions moving forward. The District is required to make similar choices as those being considered by the IEC. More detailed information regarding the budget will be available next week; however, it appears there will be no increase in per pupil funding. Despite these challenges, the District remains unified in prioritizing the needs of our students.

Department Updates:

Jesse Bruce, Director of Instruction - Indigenous Education, Diversity, and Student Wellbeing recapped two recent successful events including the Primary Winter Gathering for Indigenous grade 3 students, and a Pro-D session with Deanna Gestrin regarding 'Culturally Informed Practices for Wellness'.

Community Updates:

Westbank First Nation:

- Nicole Werstuik advised that during Spring Break, the Youth Centre would be open daily from 2-7pm and other fun events are planned for the break.

Indigenous Parent & Family Education Council

- Deanna Necan shared that she and Candace Jack are still in a transitional period learning exactly what agency they have in connecting with students and parents pursuant to the refreshed [Equity in Action Agreement](#). Jesse Bruce advised that Christie Russell, District Vice-Principal, Indigenous Education, will provide support.

Trustee Fraser

- Trustee Fraser attended the Global Rhythms for Location Action event with Trustee Guderyan and thanked IEC rep Deanna Necan for eloquently sharing her residential school story.

Lake Country Native Association:

- Ann Bell shared details of their fun family event last month "Winter Survival in the Okanagan" where families built structures such as kekulis. They have started the youth drum circle and Elder Randy donated a rock cutter so the kids are enjoying this exploration. On February 27th, there will be an excursion to High Rim Trail up to Beaver Lake, led by Shannon Isnardy. As there is no snow, they will again be looking at winter survival skills.
- Together with Elder Mo Ziprick, Ann stated that the Elders are very happy with Christina Verhagen in her new role as Executive Director of Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society, and member of the IEC.

Metis Association:

- Cheryl Dodman shared that work is underway at the Black Mountain property, and efforts are being made to establish a cultural protocol for all activities there. Some medicine men have visited to provide teachings.

Due to time, the rest of the Agenda items have been tabled to the next meeting in April.

- **Indigenous "Kids in Care" in the School District, Tutors, and Wrap-Around Services of Support**
- **Indigenous Student Attendance**
- **nsyilxcən Language Instruction**
- **IEC Appointments – letter received** (Christina Verhagen – Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society)

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

April 14th 2026 and June 2nd, 2026.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

- Language Teaching

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 4:35 pm