



INDIGENOUS EDUCATION COUNCIL (IEC) MEETING

Tuesday, June 2, 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 (<i>by Teams</i>) - Christopher Alexander - Sara Tronson (<i>by Teams</i>)	Kelowna Metis Association (2) - Cheryl Dodman - Richard Gauthier
Elder Representative (1) - Elder Wilfred Barnes (WFN) (<i>by Teams</i>)	Lake Country Native Association (1) - Ann Bell
Okanagan Indian Band (2) - <i>no representative present</i>	Indigenous Parent & Family Education Council (2) - Deanna Necan (<i>by Teams</i>) - Candace Jack (WFN)
Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society (2) - Christina Verhagen - Maureen Ziprick (alternate)	
Quorum: 8 members	
Central Okanagan Public Schools: Trustee Representatives	
Trustee Lisa Guderyan Trustee Chantelle Desrosiers (alternate) <i>by Teams</i>	
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 Secretariat: Lise Bradshaw	
Guests	
Rhonda Ovelson – District Principal, Feeding Futures Sherri Roche – District Principal, Safety & Wellbeing	

Welcome

Chair Jordan 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 June 2, 2026, Agenda:

Agenda amended by switching 'Standing Items' with 'New Business'.

**MOVED by Richard Gauthier and SECONDED by Cheryl Dodman
THAT: The Agenda for June 2, 2026 be adopted as amended.
CARRIED**

Review and Approval of Minutes: Indigenous Education Council Meeting Minutes – April 14, 2026.

**MOVED by Ann Bell and SECONDED by Cheryl Dodman
THAT: The Minutes for the April 14, 2026 meeting be adopted as presented.
CARRIED**

PRESENTATION

Feeding Futures Program

Rhonda Ovelson, District Principal – Feeding Futures provided a presentation to the Indigenous Education Council on the District's Feeding Futures program. The presentation emphasized a student-centred approach grounded in equity, cultural responsiveness, and belonging, ensuring all students have dignified and fair access to nutritious food.

School food programs support more than nutrition – contributing to student well-being, learning, and community connection. Programs are delivered through a three-tier model:

- Universal supports available to all students
- Targeted programs for students experiencing food insecurity
- District-level culturally responsive supports, including Indigenous-focused initiatives

Key program highlights include:

- Universal breakfast program serving approximately 2,000 students daily, supported through strong community partnerships.
- Lunch programs, including pay-what-you-can models and delivery of over 1,400 meals daily, with attention to dietary and cultural needs.
- Family support initiatives, including approximately 600 weekly grocery backpacks for families experiencing significant food insecurity.

Funding totals approximately \$3.75M, sourced primarily from provincial, national, and community grants.

The presentation concluded with a focus on continuous improvement, partnership with Indigenous communities, and measuring success by whether students feel nourished, welcomed, connected, and able to learn.

Rhonda Ovelson answered queries from IEC members regarding funding sources and grants, the rising costs of food, and different strategies to cut down on food waste. IEC members discussed using school gardens to contribute to the program and the importance of knowing where the food is sourced.

NEW BUSINESS:

Okanagan Song and Syilx Welcome – Protocol

Maureen Ziprick suggested the need for clear written protocols for District events, including the order of the Okanagan Song, O Canada, the land acknowledgement, the Syilx welcome, and introductions of dignitaries and staff.

Jesse Bruce noted that all schools have been given this protocol, but said a standard Administrative Procedure on the topic may be helpful. Christie Russell advised that a recording of the Okanagan Song is available on YouTube for schools that are unable to invite someone to perform the song in person.

Richard Gauthier asked why this issue had not already been addressed through policy or an Administrative Procedure as part of reconciliation efforts. Trustee Lisa Guderyan noted that the District already has a Policy regarding protocols at events, but said it may need to be updated to provide this specific guidance. Trustee Chantelle Desrosiers added that, although broader policy work has been done this past year, this matter would be better addressed through an Administrative Procedure to help ensure staff and students follow and honour this protocol appropriately, and said they would bring this matter forward to the Board for further discussion.

Chair Coble would like the Board of Education and staff to work with representatives from the IEC to bring event protocol into alignment with the host nation as this is an important step to reconciliation.

MOVED by Cheryl Dodman and SECONDED by Christina Verhagen

THAT: The Indigenous Education Council work with Trustees and staff to bring event protocol into alignment with the host nation as part of the implementation of reconciliation under the guidance of the host community and IEC representatives.

CARRIED

Blanketing Ceremonies – Update

Kevin Kaiser provided an update on the blanketing ceremonies taking place at secondary schools through the end of June. While each ceremony is unique and requires significant planning, all are intended to honour and celebrate Indigenous students. Indigenous Education Council members were encouraged to attend.

Christie Russell provided an update on the development of this year's Equity in Action *for Truth and Reconciliation* Annual Report. This year's report is being re-envisioned to be more student-centred and more closely focused on key priorities. Rather than asking schools to respond generally, the District will invite school teams to share stories connected to specific priorities, beginning this year with Chief Siya (Saskatoon Berry). Other Food Chiefs, including Fly, will be featured in future years. Over time, this approach will build a five-year collection of stories showing how schools are progressing in Truth and Reconciliation work. The report will be story-based, and some students will contribute their voices directly.

Chair Coble supported the revised approach but emphasized that student stories should clearly explain why the report matters, including its connection to the ongoing legacy of residential schools and the purpose of the Equity in Action work. He encouraged the District to present the report honestly, focus on how the work is supporting students, and avoid framing it as a list of accomplishments. He said the report should tell an authentic story about why the work began, why it continues, and how it is affecting students and schools. He also encouraged staff to work with the Indigenous Parent and Family Education Council to ensure their perspectives are reflected in the report.

June 21 National Indigenous People's Day

School teams are preparing for National Indigenous Peoples Day, with cultural teams, Knowledge Keepers, and Elders already booked in schools. To support meaningful learning, the Indigenous Education Department, alongside the Learning & Innovation Team, created an interactive June calendar with daily links and activities for teachers to use. Trustee Lisa Guderyan noted that the calendar was also shared out with families.

Budget Update

Jesse Bruce provided a brief budget update to the end of April and advised that a surplus of approximately \$50,000 is projected. He noted that once headcount and budget are confirmed in the fall, there may be an opportunity to use the surplus to add supports.

Christina Verhagen suggested that, in future, the IEC would benefit from more time to review and discuss budget information. She suggested that budget materials be provided to IEC members in print and discussed at a separate meeting without guest presentations or other lengthy agenda items. Nicole Werstuik asked whether future budget updates could also include a notes column to document changes for later reference.

October 9 Implementation Day

Jesse Bruce advised that Dr. Dustin Louie is scheduled to deliver a keynote address to all District staff on the October 9, 2026 Implementation Day. The proposal is for all staff to participate in the keynote, after which the Indigenous Education and Learning & Innovation teams will work with Dr. Louie to develop reflection activities for use in schools and departments. Dr. Louie will also continue supporting the District through four COLT (Central Okanagan Leadership Team) meetings focused on decolonizing practices, with opportunities to engage partner groups and Trustees. There may also be an opportunity for him to meet with the Indigenous Education Council and other partner groups. Christie Russell and Kevin Kaiser advised that they visited the Chilliwack School District to spend a day with Dr. Louie and attend a celebration of learning, where schools shared their inquiry questions and the actions they are taking toward reconciliation.

OMRIE Fall Summit

OMRIE is planning another IEC Leadership Summit at Spirit Ridge on November 24 and 25, 2026, and IEC members will be invited to attend. The agenda will be shared once finalized. The IEC Planning Committee is seeking input on topics members would like to present on or learn more about, and a Google form will be circulated for that purpose. Representatives from 13 districts are expected to attend. Deanna Necan and Candace Jack are assisting with the planning.

STANDING ITEMS

District Updates:

- Jesse Bruce conveyed regrets on behalf of Superintendent of Schools Jon Rever, who was unable to attend due to other District and school commitments.
- Trustee Guderyan reiterated that the Board has been reviewing the Policy Manual throughout the year, including moving many policies into Administrative Procedures to streamline the framework.

Department Updates:

- The Indigenous Spring Family Event was held on May 20 at Chief Tomat Elementary school and welcomed approximately 320 students and family members for traditional activities. Students from CNB volunteered at the event. Language bingo was especially popular, and prizes included Indigenous storybooks. A highlight was the strong support from Chief Tomat Elementary staff, who all volunteered. The event also drew interest from Brad Baker at the Ministry of Education and Child Care, who requested a write-up and hopes to attend next year. Thanks were extended to Candace Jack and Deanna Necan for their help in planning the event.
- Twenty students attended the OMRIE Leadership Conference in Vernon, where they participated in cultural activities and sessions on food sovereignty and story. A highlight was the closing circle, during which students reflected on their hopes for Indigenous students in the future. The conference was described as inspiring, and the District may consider hosting next year.
- The District received a \$10,000 grant from the Children's Fund to support families experiencing significant and unexpected hardship.
- This year's Indigenous Grad Retreat was at Bertram Park. It was noted that students expressed a desire to spend more time on the land. The one-day retreat was led by Elder Randy, who helped set the tone for the day. Students were gifted a shell and medicines, along with time for reflection.
- Fifteen bursaries for Indigenous students were awarded this year across the District's schools.
- Indigenous students participated in a paddle across the lake connected to the Memorial Cup and RCMP.

Community Updates:

Elder Barnes:

- Starting in September, there will be a course offered at the Okanagan Heritage Museum. This course is geared for UBCO nursing students but is also open to others who wish to participate.

Westbank First Nation

- Nicole Werstuik reminded everyone of the stick games and drumming lessons being offered, which is an all-ages program. The WFN graduation is on June 30th. There are Youth summer camps starting on July 7, through to August 27. Each week is \$25 and a different theme.
- Sarah Tronson advised there is a Unity Run June 4-7, and the National Aboriginal Day celebration on June 20.
- Chair Coble advised that Chris Alexander is stepping into Denise Clough's role on the IEC, a council resolution was passed on Monday.
- Chris Alexander shared his attendance at the Capstone events and UBCO Parent and Youth Conference.

Indigenous Education Parent & Family Education Council

- Deanna Necan shared that they are looking forward to working on Terms of Reference for the Parent & Family Council.

Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society:

- Christina Verhagen advised that one of their Elders, Arnold August, had passed recently, and there will be a celebration of life on June 8 for all who knew him.
- Youth programming continues.
- KFS is co-planning the June 21 Turtle Island Festival alongside the Kelowna Metis Association.
- Some supportive housing units have recently become available.

Lake Country Native Association:

- Ann Bell shared details of the family cultural gathering at Beaver Lake.

Kelowna Metis Association:

- Richard Gauthier announced that he was going to be running in the local 2026 municipal election for the position of School Trustee.
- Cheryl Dodman advised that further to her announcement at the last meeting regarding the President of Metis Nation BC being dismissed, a by-election is being planned to fill the role. This may result in some shuffling of positions within the Association.
- Cheryl Dodman provided some details on various recent events such as language teaching, ribbon skirt-making, sweat lodges and a staff retreat.

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

This standing agenda item is an opportunity to raise concerns or advise of a new organization or partnership. After a question from Maureen Ziprick, Christie Russell advised that District staff are not provided with the names of children in care.

Indigenous Student Attendance

Kevin Kaiser advised that the District has recently begun gathering student voice on attendance to better understand barriers and support engagement, and noted that this work is still in its early stages and will take time.

It was asked whether home schooling data could also be analyzed and why attendance concerns are not being tracked earlier in the school year. Maureen Ziprick and Ann Bell noted that more Indigenous advocates are needed and requested that advocate-to-student ratios be provided at an upcoming meeting. Concern was expressed that current Advocates are overstretched and that the District should consider hiring more Indigenous staff to strengthen student connection.

Chair Coble noted that additional Advocates would be valuable, but that in some cases, the role might need to be considered in separate categories rather than as one broad function that includes cultural, academic, and other supports.

Christie Russell advised that the student to Advocate ratio is generally about 60:1, but noted that the level of support needed can vary significantly from one school zone to another. She also noted that the Advocate role differs depending on the availability of inclusion or success teachers, food programs, tutoring supports, and other services. At the elementary level, Advocates are often more focused on social-emotional support, food support, and family connection.

Maureen Ziprick suggested that, if the District's priority is academic support, staff may want to reconsider some special events such as the Grade 3 Powwow may so that resources can be redirected accordingly.

nsyilxcən Language Instruction

Christie Russell advised that Kim Kosec will conclude this year's language lessons at Chief Tomat Elementary School next Monday. Feedback will be collected, and it is encouraging to see the language reflected in student learning summaries. Kim has committed to continuing the program next year, and summer learning resources will also be available. The program has been a great success.

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

Proposed schedule for 2026/2027: A separate meeting for budget discussion will be included.

- Tuesday ~~September 22~~ (*rescheduled to September 15*)
- Tuesday, November 3
- Tuesday, January 12
- Tuesday, February 9
- Tuesday, April 13
- Tuesday, June 1

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 4:46 pm.