

Name: Raigilie Mackey

Brief summary of issue or topic of discussion:

I would like to speak about continuing to make efforts to help Indigenous students succeed academically throughout the Elementary Program Review changes. As a member of the Ottawa Inuit community, I hope to see connections being made with our community to make sure our students' are succeeding while attending an OCDSB school.

Dear Trustees,

My name is Raigilie Mackey, and I work at Tungasuvvingat Inuit as an Inuit Cultural Education Support Worker. I work directly with Inuit students in the OCDSB and the Ottawa Catholic School Board. My goal in my role is to help Inuit youth stay connected to their culture while they live in a southern, urban city and help them succeed in their academic setting. My priority is providing a safe and comfortable space for storytelling, going out on the land, and taking time to learn from our elders.

In the spring of 2024, the OCDSB identity-based data survey continued to show unfortunate results for Indigenous students. 3.7% of the 47,000 student responses identified themselves as Indigenous. Within this small population and compared to all other students, they have the lowest attendance rates, are suspended at a higher rate, have the lowest mental health support awareness, and report very low levels of feeling safe and included at school. When the board has the support of the Indigenous Education Team, community partners, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, similar results have still been presented to us year after year.

The Board has many tools and resources at its disposal including the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action and cultural tools offered by Indigenous organizations here in Ottawa. You need to make it a strong priority to use these tools to improve the well-being and outcomes of Indigenous students.

The lack of meaningful Indigenous consultation and voice during the initial stages of the Elementary Program Review led to the Board not using those cultural tools and

Resources.

While reading the Review, I was surprised to learn that part of the plan is to completely eliminate the Alternative Program. Eliminating this program will cause us to miss out on a really great opportunity to improve education for Indigenous children in Ottawa. When looking at their seven tenets, I can see how they are closely aligned with our Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit principles. One example is the tree families at Churchill Alternative, where students from different grades are brought together to work together. This aligns well with Ikajutigiinik, a value taught to Inuit to teach us to work together for a common purpose. Another example is Wonder Wednesdays, the days at Lady Evelyn Alternative where kindergarteners are brought outside to closely look at nearby nature, learning about the history and importance of each plant, aligning well with Avatittinnik Kamatsiarniq, the teaching of having respect and care for the land, animals and the environment.

What Alternative Schools are doing to teach their students about Indigenous cultures is very, very encouraging to see. By closing this program, Inuit students will also be affected. I hope that the Board can consider keeping open Alternative Schools, and their school culture where inclusivity is the pinnacle of the school design and delivery, and where the school community consists of engaged families.

I want to give you some examples on how we can follow in the footsteps of the Elementary Alternate Program to incorporate teaching more about First Nations', Metis, and Inuit cultures. My list includes; students learning about traditional clothing items in an art class, learning the history of lacrosse in a physical education class, or an elder could come in to teach traditional recipes in a cooking or health class. Activities like these could be organized and promoted with the help offered by Indigenous families and community partners.

I believe that prior to and during the presentation of the Elementary Program Review, the well-being of Indigenous students has not been prioritized, and by pushing this plan forward before hearing from the incredible Indigenous scholars and other voices in the Indigenous community, you are ignoring another group of vulnerable students. I am asking you to pay more attention and help Indigenous students succeed.

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Raigilie Mackey