

February 2, 2022

Attn: Dr. Rhonda Nixon
Superintendent of Schools

Dear Dr. Nixon,

I am writing to you today as the President of BC Métis Federation after a concerned parent reached out to me.

In your recent letter dated January 25th, you stated, “The Kamloops-Thompson School District sends its deepest sympathies and support to Williams Lake First Nation, as well as all local First Nations impacted by this news. The District is committed to working with the Aboriginal Education Council and all local First Nations to support students, staff, and families.” You went on to provide supports for First Nations including mental health resources. Whether you realize it or not, you neglected to acknowledge the Métis families in your district and provide adequate support for Métis students and their families. To exclude a specific inclusive reference to the term “Métis” from your letter and assume the use of First Nations only in your Indigenous programming continues to ignore our Métis identity and frankly is hurtful and alienating.

Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to invite you to engage in a dialogue with BC Métis Federation and learn more about the various Indigenous peoples that live in your district. In British Columbia, for the better part of 150 years there has been a concerted effort by governments to use settler society law to deny the very existence of Métis. National, provincial, and local governments used the force of law and racialized policies to diminish Métis existence, ignore our rights, dispossess us from our land, limit our access to resources, restrict our mobility, and separate us from our kinship networks. We are not homogenous and if you are unfamiliar with BC Métis Federation, we are a provincial Métis representative organization that advocates on behalf of thousands of Métis members that live in British Columbia. We provide a variety of services that may be beneficial to your Indigenous Liaisons, such as our Michif Language Curriculum, which aims to revitalize our Métis language, and is available for grades K-6. BC Métis Federation has local Métis community members in your school district and there are hundreds of Métis families that are affected by the ongoing recoveries taking place at Residential Schools in this province, and across the country.

As you may be aware, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada found that Métis students did attend almost every residential school at some point. Based on the evidence of the students who attended residential schools, it is clear that Métis people’s experiences in the residential school system paralleled that of First Nations and Inuit students. Regardless of the exact number of children in attendance, Métis people share in the Indigenous collective trauma resulting from government policies of forced assimilation through residential schools. Looking at the impact of residential schools, it is difficult to determine the actual number of Métis in residential schools in British Columbia. Métis people and communities in BC can’t access this data, use it, or benefit from it. IRS data project states that 9.1% of Métis people in Canada who self identified as Métis had attended residential schools. There is little research on the role of churches in residential schools impacting Métis, although initial research shows that significant numbers of people in residential and industrial schools were mixed ancestry. If church officials couldn’t fill the school with treaty Indians, they would fill the school with non status and ‘half-breeds’. Churches got paid on a quota per student.

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From our past. For our future.

We do know that once in the schools, Métis children experienced physical sexual, cultural, and spiritual abuse, were forced to forget their languages. They were viewed negatively if they expressed affinity to First Nations kinship and relatives. They were called half-breeds. Despite how children perceived themselves, the nuns and priests taught the children that Métis and First Nations were differently located from one another socially, creating distinctions. This shattered communities and kinship networks with First Nations. To survive, many of our children and families identified as French, Ukrainian, or British and denied their Métis identity.

The roots of this division and racialization linger today in real lives and has created a very uneven playing field for Métis peoples in British Columbia. I have attached an informational flyer that we would like to send out with students from your district, to encourage Métis families to get in touch with us, and receive the various supports provided by our organization and our partners. I would also like to extend an invitation for us to have a meeting with some of our project team members to determine how we can best support you, and your staff to ensure that Métis students and families are recognized and cared for appropriately.

I look forward to your response,

Keith Henry
President, BC Métis Federation

Encl. MACO Informational Flyer; Michif Language Curriculum Announcement

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