



Where is Festivus For the Rest of Us at SD23?

From Sujaree Smith [REDACTED]
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To Board of Education <Boardof.Education@sd23.bc.ca>

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Dear Board of Education of SD23,

When is being different not condoned within SD23?

The article, "[Lake Country school trustee refuses to pose with award-winning drag queen](#)," from Kelowna Capital News was brought to my attention last week; and I could not stop thinking about it. Therefore, I am writing this email to support Trustee Amy Geistlinger in her choice to be different based upon her own personal conviction in hope to ensure that our schools will be a safe place for all of us to be different.

I'm a former international student of SD23, who moved to Kelowna before the Central Okanagan International Student Program started in 2005. It was within the walls of Rutland Senior Secondary that I learned that Canada is a mosaic of Multiculturalism and that Canadian Charters of Rights and Freedom allowed my family to have [the freedom of conscience and religion](#) to celebrate something that is uniquely from our own culture and belief. I grew up in a Buddhist home, where my relatives did not celebrate Christmas. However, I felt comfortable being different at school even though I did not know any Christmas carols until grade 12 when I joined the school's choir. My friends and teachers made me feel safe regardless of what I celebrated or not.

Upon seeing this article, I am concerned if the current school environment will allow my child, niece, and nephew to feel comfortable being different simply because we do not celebrate the same things as the rest of the crowd.

In this article, I see Trustee Amy Geistlinger being condemned and shamed for choosing to not celebrate something that does not align with her belief or her scope of work. Freida Whales was being celebrated for the Honour in the Arts, which is outside of the school district business. It appears to me that Trustee Geistlinger exercised her choice in a respectful manner and yet this article makes it sounds like if you're not celebrating with us then you're against us. In my opinion, not posting a photo with someone does not mean that one is against someone.

I'm calling upon the board and its members to use this as an opportunity to reflect upon this situation and ensure that our schools are a safe place for all of us to be different, not just the majority or the popular

crowd.

Respectfully,
Sujaree