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Sent: 18 June 2025 13:32

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Subject: Drag performer- award presentation disrespected

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Good afternoon,

Attached is a letter to express my concerns over the display of micro-aggressions from board trustee Amy Geistlinger last week. I have cc'd the media - If you do intend to reply, please include all parties.

Sincerely,

Samantha Nagel

June 18, 2025

Esteemed members of SD23 Board of directors,

I am writing to express my disappointment with the micro-aggression display by Amy Geistlinger at the award presentation to Tyson Cook, on June 11th. This really did more than dampen the spirits of the awardee, it signified a stance by a representative of your Board and organization, and I believe there needs to be a follow up statement made, and corrective actions taken.

Tyson's award represents the commitment to diversity, acceptance and inclusion in schools within SD23's district. Their commitment to education and public speaking has undoubtedly brought positive impact to the students and teachers of the schools and organizations where Tyson / Freida Whales has worked, and set the stage for further acceptance to those who may not otherwise have the exposure to Drag (and the wider LGBTQIA2S+ community) in a supportive setting. The actions taken by trustee Amy Geistlinger, in remaining seated during commemorative photo, to "respect(sic) her own personal convictions" were inappropriate in this setting, as she represents both the school district and the wider population of Lake Country, not simply her own beliefs or opinions.

To further her action, Amy Geistlinger's follow up comment "It was his drag queen persona, Frieda Whales, that was being recognized, not Tyson Cook as a CEA. Why would we celebrate work unrelated to board and school district business?" – perhaps as a board you should take the time to explain to this trustee why Tyson's work is absolutely related to board and school district business. Let me help here- drag has long served as a space for self-expression and a vital form of social commentary. Yet, like Tyson, drag continues to face scrutiny and is often a primary target of anti-2SLGBTQI misinformation and disinformation. Misleading narratives misrepresent drag, creating stigma around an art form that celebrates individuality and challenges rigid gender norms. This form of performance art is meant to challenge binary gender conventions and societal norms, but it also creates space for wider exploration of expression and performance. To have drag performers welcomed into schools helps to bring themes of inclusion and belonging while encouraging self-confidence and inclusion. In a fun and accessible way, it helps further a message of acceptance and peace. These messages are not simply for the LGBTQIA22+ audience, but for everyone.

Ideally, the harms of Amy Geistlinger's actions (refusing photo) should have been disarmed immediately, despite the implied uncomfortable awkwardness of the conversation. This can be done by a request to clarify their statement or action. Use a probing question, such as "How do you mean that?" This gives people a chance to check themselves as they unpack what happened, and also acknowledges your organization's separation from the microaggression committed. As trustee, Amy controls what this incident will mean for her life and work, but what you will take from the interaction and what you will allow it to represent the school district is up to the board. To

encourage candid discussions on discrimination in the workplace, this cannot be ignored. Cultural change takes time and intention. I encourage you to issue a public statement to denounce the actions of Amy at the award presentation, as well as some educational reform assignments to Ms. Geistlinger, to further her understanding of the harms of her actions, as well as the importance of diversity and acceptance in schools, and how drag fits the commitments you've made the time to state – that equity is everyone's responsibility, and that equity is about nurturing the spirit. If Ms. Geistlinger should wish to express her perspectives on this subject, she should know what is appropriate for this setting, and as her intention was to be indignant, she should simply have excused herself from the presentation entirely, to maintain the integrity of your board and district policies.

I look forward to your response.

Sam Nagel

Okanagan resident, Mother, and Drag enthusiast