
Re: Governance Concerns – June 11 Motion Lacked Transparency and Due Process

From Julia Fraser <Julia.Fraser@sd23.bc.ca>

Date Mon 2025-07-21 12:31 PM

To Ryan Armstrong

Cc All Trustees <All-Trustees@sd23.bc.ca>; Delta Carmichael <Delta.Carmichael@sd23.bc.ca>; Jon Rever <Jon.Rever@sd23.bc.ca>; Mona Essler <Mona.Essler@sd23.bc.ca>; Lise Bradshaw <Lise.Bradshaw@sd23.bc.ca>

Dear Mr. Armstrong,

Thank you for your thoughtful follow-up. I acknowledge and respect your concerns, and I appreciate the opportunity to respond further.

As Board Chair, I take seriously the public's expectations of transparency, accountability, and principled governance. I will address the points you've raised.

1. In Camera Deliberations and Public Trust

You are absolutely right that public trust is foundational to good governance. In Camera sessions are used judiciously and only within the limits permitted under the School Act. While I cannot disclose the contents of those meetings, I can assure you that the Board does not make public-facing decisions lightly, nor without due process. When a motion is brought forward into a public meeting, it becomes subject to full Board scrutiny, and the vote—taken publicly—is recorded in the official minutes. This process allows for Board members to speak to the motion, to amend it, or to vote against it, in full view of the public.

With respect to the June 11 motion, the Board determined that holding a Special In Camera meeting was both appropriate and necessary. The next scheduled Public Board Meeting was three weeks away, and we believed it was important to respond promptly to MLA Tara Armstrong's public comments, given the immediate and visible impact they were having on our students, staff, and families. That impact could not be ignored. Timeliness is essential when issuing a Public Board Statement—particularly in response to remarks made by an elected official within our school district. In such cases, a delayed response risks compounding harm or creating further misunderstanding, especially when the well-being of our school communities is involved.

When the Board decided to respond to MLA Armstrong's public statements—which had a very real and negative impact on our Indigenous communities, especially our First Nations Rights Holders, Westbank First Nation—it was decided that we must act swiftly to repair any damage to the relationship between the Board of Education and our Indigenous communities that her words may have caused. MLA Armstrong's comments were already in the public realm, and their meaning was clear. No further clarification was required. The intent of our Public Board Statement was simply to offer emphatic and

unambiguous support to our Indigenous students, staff, families, First Nations Rights Holders, and Indigenous Education Partners.

I recognize that to those outside the system, the lack of visible debate may appear opaque. We must continue to reflect on how we can better communicate not only our decisions, but the integrity of the process behind them.

2. Value-Based Statements and Governance Responsibility

You've raised an important distinction. When the Board issues a statement grounded in our District values—such as equity, inclusion, and reconciliation—it is a governance action, though distinct from policy-making or operational decisions. These Public Board Statements are rooted in the values articulated in our Strategic Plan—values that all trustees have helped shape, deliberated on, and unanimously endorsed. They serve as the foundation for our collective decision-making and reflect our shared commitment to fostering a safe, inclusive, and respectful environment for all learners. That said, we recognize that such statements carry weight and can have wide-reaching impact. We must remain attentive to how we engage the community in these moments. Boards across the province are continuing to evolve in how they respond to complex and politically sensitive issues, and we are no exception.

3. The Role of the Chair and the Integrity of Process

Your comments on optics are taken seriously. As Chair, I do not author motions independently, nor do I control their passage. However, I am responsible for facilitating Board discussions and ensuring the Board acts within its collective authority. The motion on June 11 was crafted and brought forward by trustees, voted on in public session, and passed by majority vote. The accompanying media release was developed to clarify the Board's position for the broader community, following standard practice.

Although it is within my mandate as Board Chair to issue public statements that reflect the values of the Board—as outlined in the Strategic Plan adopted by the Board of Education—I have chosen a collaborative and consultative leadership style. I believe the Board speaks most effectively when we do so collectively, and in alignment with our shared values and commitments.

Nonetheless, your concern about the perception of sequence—from confidential discussion, to public motion, to external communication—is a reminder of how critical it is that our processes not only meet legislative standards but uphold public confidence. We are reviewing how we might improve clarity and consistency going forward. Perhaps the next time the Board considers making a public statement, we will decide—as a Board—to create a motion, discuss it, and vote on it during a public meeting, allowing the public to witness firsthand how the motion is crafted, debated, and supported (or not) by individual trustees. That would be a demonstration of transparency. It is a suggestion that we will consider collectively as a Board in the future.

4. Consultation with the MLA

Consultation with MLA Armstrong was not required, as the Board was responding to public comments already made and widely circulated in the public. The Board's only intention by the Board's Public

Statement was to affirm our ongoing commitment to truth and reconciliation, and to support our Indigenous students, staff, families, and partners.

We look forward to engaging in constructive dialogue with MLA Armstrong at our upcoming annual Joint Board Meeting with MLAs, where we can discuss issues that impact students, staff, and families across the Central Okanagan. That forum will offer an appropriate opportunity to share perspectives and strengthen our mutual understanding.

In Closing

I agree wholeheartedly that trust must be earned. While our processes align with legal and policy requirements, we are always learning from public feedback. Your engagement is part of that learning. I assure you that the Board will continue to reflect on these concerns as we work to balance transparency, accountability, and our duty to represent the values of our diverse community.

Sincerely,
Julia Fraser
Chair, Board of Education
Central Okanagan Public Schools

Warmest Regards,

Julia Fraser

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Central Okanagan Board of Education

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I respectfully acknowledge that I live, work & play on the ancestral, traditional and unceded territory of the Okanagan People.