

BOARD OF EDUCATION

April 28, 2022

Trigger warning: Sexual Assault

To all students, parents, caregivers and staff,

At this week's meeting of the Board of Education, a student representative from the SEAS Club (Safety Education Advocacy and Supports) at New Westminister Secondary School attended and spoke at one of the public portions of our meeting, within the context of providing an update about the work they've been engaged in and framing some of their goals moving forward.

To provide context, the SEAS Club (formally the Safety in Schools/SIS Club) was brought together last year as part of the coordinated efforts to respond to student-led activism that brought to light concerns about patterns of sexual harassment and assaults that were impacting students and their sense of safety. While we know these systemic experiences are not limited to one school or one district, they were and are troubling to hear.

Appropriately, these concerns were taken seriously by the Board, by District staff and by leadership and staff at the school. School administrators have continued to work with staff and students to address immediate needs (and with other stakeholders, where appropriate) and have worked to create educational opportunities to address the attitudes and patterns that can lead to harassment and assault – including but not limited to staff workshops, high profile guest speakers for students, and peer-to-peer engagement around these issues.

We heard that some students are disappointed by the pace of this work and are looking for renewed engagement from administration. That is valuable feedback for us as a Board to hear, so we can help to ensure that student safety and needs are being appropriately met.

However, comments from a limited number of the non-student participants were misleading and took the conversation in a challenging direction. Personal attacks on members of the Board and staff are inappropriate, harmful and don't help move this critical and sensitive issue forward. As a Board, we want to be clear about where we stand.

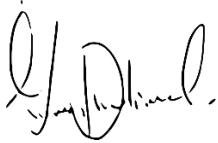
Gender-based harassment and violence is something we take exceptionally seriously, at all levels of our organization. As we have been doing, we will continue to ensure that students have safe and supportive opportunities to share their concerns and thoughts. Those

conversations are happening, not only with appropriate supports in place for the students, but also with staff who are empowered to evaluate options and take additional action, if that should be required.

Associate Superintendent Maryam Naser, who has been engaged throughout this last year, has been asked to follow up on the concern raised. She has met with the administration and staff at the school already, and will be working with them, with the students, and with any other relevant stakeholders to delve deeper into what else may need to be done.

Student safety – both physical and emotional – is paramount to our concerns as a Board. And we look forward to hearing how these deeper conversations have continued.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gurveen Dhaliwal". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "G" and "D".

Gurveen Dhaliwal, Board Chair

