

# JOINT STATEMENT ON THE KAMLOOPS RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL BURIAL SITE

This statement has been issued jointly by the Surrey School District, Surrey Teachers' Association, CUPE 728, Surrey Principals & Vice Principals Association, Surrey Board of Education, Semiahmoo First Nation, Katzie First Nation, Métis Nation BC, Kwantlen First Nation, Kekinow Native Housing Society, and the Fraser Region Aboriginal Friendship Centre.



On May 28<sup>th</sup>, Tk'emlúps te Secwé pemc First Nation in Kamloops, B.C. announced the discovery of the remains of 215 children buried at the site of what was once a residential school. In response to this heartbreaking announcement, the Surrey Aboriginal Education Council called a special meeting to discuss our district's response, and what steps we should take in support.

As we listened to the stories and experiences of those on the Council, the trauma of residential schools and their impact came forth in many ways. It was stated that every Indigenous person has had their lives touched in some way by residential schools, and the enormity of this grief will not pass quickly.

As we listened to the individual experiences of our Council members, there was a shared belief that this may only be the start of further discoveries at sites across Canada. This thought, along with the discovery of the findings in Kamloops, serves as a difficult reminder for survivors of residential schools and their families, of the hurt and intergenerational trauma they have endured. Members shared that for many Indigenous People, this has brought forward painful memories, and has forced them to relive the residential experience all over again.

The Council also shared gratitude to the Tk'emlúps te Secwépmc people for initiating the search and uncovering the truth. A truth that has been spoken about throughout the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but without such irrefutable physical evidence that now stands before us.

We collectively represent our schools as places of learning. We stand together and are committed to continuing to tell the story of the traumatic history of residential schools and their deliberate attempt to eradicate the rich heritage, culture and languages of Indigenous Peoples.

This week, our community and our schools will be showing their support in many ways.

Since June 1st, flags have been flying at half mast and we are encouraging schools to have staff and students wear Orange Shirts, for 215 hours, or 9 days.

We know that each person and each school will find their own unique way to show support and we also want all staff to know that there are resources available to support those who continue to grieve. We are also looking toward September 30<sup>th</sup>, which is the official date of Orange Shirt Day in our schools. We will continue to educate our children and our community about the importance of how residential schools created inter-generational trauma that deeply affects Indigenous Peoples today. We are committed to truth and reconciliation and the sad truth of this recent discovery only empowers us to ensure we reconcile our future with the truth of our past.

And we are grateful to members of our Council, and the Elders, Leaders and families from the Katzie, Kwantlen, Semiahmoo and other Coast Salish Peoples, as well as our Indigenous staff, students and their families who continuously share their voice and their stories with our staff and students and provide their counsel in relation to our programs and services.

*We are committed to continuing to work together to reveal and correct miseducation around the shameful legacy of residential schools and the ongoing need for Truth and Reconciliation.*



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*As a Chief of Semiahmoo First Nation and partner with Surrey Schools, I extend our deepest condolences to the community of Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc and all the families and communities across Canada that are impacted by the discovery at Kamloops Indian Residential School. My grandfather attended Kamloops Indian Residential School, so this impacts me not only as an Indigenous leader but as a grandchild. This discovery is a harsh reality of the much undiscussed history of Canada and First Nations people and we must work towards meaningful reconciliation not only on a national scale but here in Surrey. I am committed to working with Surrey Schools to build an educational strategy that empowers our land based and urban Indigenous peoples.*

**–Chief Harley Chappel,**  
Semiahmoo First Nation

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*The entire Métis Nation BC Board of Directors stands with the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc through these difficult and challenging times. Residential schools and their history remain an open wound in Indigenous communities across this country. While painful, uncovering the truth remains vital for reconciliation.*

**–Lissa Dawn Smith,**  
Métis Nation BC, Acting President

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*Like everyone in our community of Kamloops, I was shocked and abhorred to see that the remains of 215 children were found at the site of a former residential school.*

*It saddens and pains me to know these children were taken from their home and never returned. The anguish their families must have felt. The pain of this news is real and hits home, as my mother, who is a proud Métis woman, was forced into these schools.*

*She, like many other Indigenous children, could have met the same fate.*

*This institution was sanctioned by our government and the Catholic Church. How many more of our children lay in unmarked graves? We still have so much healing to do in this country.*

**–Dean Gladue**  
Métis Nation BC, Director for Region 3 (Thompson–Okanagan)

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I am beyond words for the discovery unearthed in Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc, and the Kamloops Residential School. It is truly a time of mourning and I feel the collective heart ache. I pray for the families, survivors and all of First Nation people and communities. The darkness of Canadian history is no shock to our people, or surprise to us, we live it, we endure it, we survive it. The genocidal history will continue to unfold, and our prayers will get stronger, and our voices louder. This is only one school out of 139 in Canada. The Creator has a way of turning over the pathway we need to walk when the time is right, I trust the walk. It's time to mourn, sing our songs, pray in our way, use our sacred medicines, use our love to pick each other up, use our compassion to hold each other up. We stand in solidarity and share the heart ache, and grief with the survivors and all those we have lost.

**–Chief Grace George,**  
Katzie First Nation

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We the Fraser Region Aboriginal Friendship Centre Association (FRAFCA) extend love and support to the Elders, families and communities impacted by the Canadian Residential School System. The Tk'emlups community confirmed findings of 215 children buried on the site of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School. This brings forward the trauma experienced by residential school survivors, families and communities from the insufferable actions of the Canadian government.

—Fraser Region Aboriginal Friendship Centre Association



### *May all that's hidden be revealed.*

As we reel from the heart breaking discovery of 215 children in a mass grave at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School on Tk'emlups te Secwépemc First Nation in Kamloops, B.C., we recommit our efforts to supporting our Indigenous neighbours, working to provide safe and secure communities as we face these atrocities together and heal from the trauma of the Indian Residential School System. We urge you to look out for your elders, as they battle painful memories as they resurface.

**KUU-US Crisis Line Society:** First Nations and Aboriginal specific 24/7 crisis line based in Port Alberni and serving the entire province.

- TOLL-FREE: 1-800-588-8717
- YOUTH LINE: 250-723-2040
- ADULT LINE: 250-723-4050

**Native Youth Crisis Hotline:** 1-877-209-1266. Answered by staff 24/7. Available throughout Canada and US.

**Youth in BC:** visit [www.youthinbc.com](http://www.youthinbc.com) for youth resources or chat with a counsellor online. You can also call 1-866-661-3311 (toll-free in BC).

*We honour the lives of all those lost, to addictions, mental health and to death.*

—Kekinow Native Housing Society



*On behalf of Kwantlen First Nation, we are so very saddened and wish to express our deepest condolences to the community of Tk'emlups te Secwepemc at this time. In hearing of this news, we have been actively engaged in sacred, spiritual work to honour all of the dear little ones who never made it back home. All of our families have been so deeply impacted, we know first hand the impacts are multi-generational and run very deep. Most of our Elders from Kwantlen attended residential schools throughout B.C.—in Mission (St. Mary's), Kuper Island, Vancouver Island, North Vancouver (St. Paul's) and Lytton (St. George's) and some of our Kwantlen families we know also attended the Kamloops Indian Residential School. Many others attended residential day schools. We also know of Kwantlen students who attended and never returned home. The legacy of these schools to our families is devastating, and if anything, people learning and understanding more about this legacy so that it can never be repeated is important and necessary. We are doing what we can now to heal and support our families in their journeys through and forward from this legacy. The strength and resilience of our people, our Elders and ancestors is truly an inspiration from which to continue to heal. Our thoughts, love and prayers are with everyone affected.*

—Chief Marilyn Gabriel,  
Kwantlen First Nation

