

MINUTES

**OPEN MEETING OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION OF THE
NICOLA-SIMILKAMEEN SCHOOL DISTRICT (NO.58)**

**MERRITT SCHOOL BOARD OFFICE, BOARD ROOM
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 2025, 6:00PM**

Success for ALL Learners Today and Tomorrow

Present:	Chairperson	G. Swan
	Vice-Chair	L. Ward
	Trustees	J. Jepsen (Absent) J. Kent-Laidlaw E. Hoisington J. Chenoweth D. Rainer
	Student Trustees	H. Clarke J. Davis (Absent)
	Superintendent	C. Lawrance
	Assistant Superintendent	J. Kempston
	Interim Secretary Treasurer	H. Cull
	Assistant Secretary Treasurer	L. Rusnjak
	Executive Assistant	K. Buckland
	Manager of IT	E. Park

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE TRADITIONAL TERRITORIES AND METIS COMMUNITY

AGENDA

25/028 It was moved by Vice-Chair Ward and seconded By Trustee Chenoweth
THAT the agenda be approved as presented.

MOTION CARRIED

MINUTES

25/029 It was moved by Trustee Rainer and seconded by Trustee Kent-Laidlaw
THAT the minutes of the Open Meeting held January 15, 2025, be adopted as presented.

MOTION CARRIED

Business Arising from the Minutes

None.

Report of the Closed Meeting held January 15, 2025.

Report of the Closed Trustee Meeting held January 21, 2025.

PRESENTATION TO THE BOARD

Foster Parent Recruitment (Interior Community Services)

Renata Bonthoux provided a presentation via zoom, emphasizing the importance of foster parents in helping children grow into confident adults. She highlighted the need for caregivers who can support children and youth with complex needs, diverse abilities, and those who identify as 2SLGBTQIA+. Renata also addressed myths about fostering, emphasizing that while it is not necessarily easy, it is certainly rewarding. She hopes that the School District could promote fostering through newsletters and social media. Renata Bonthoux explained to the Trustees that scanning the barcode on the poster will direct them to a page where they can request more information. This page will then connect them to the appropriate agency.

The Board agreed to coordinate the distribution of information about fostering through newsletters, website and the Facebook page.

Proposed District Calendar (Princeton District Teachers' Union -Trina Moulin)

Princeton District Teachers Union representative Trina Moulin spoke to the Trustees, advocating for the inclusion of professional development days in the regular school year while maintaining a two-week Spring Break. Ms. Moulin discussed the history of the union, the impact of a two-week Spring Break on instructional time, and the benefits of professional development days for building professional learning communities and supporting recruitment and retention. She also addressed concerns about the cost of attending professional development events and the impact on parents with childcare needs.

Vice-Chair Ward asked Ms. Moulin for clarification on whether new hires attending the Summer Institute would be paid for their time.

Superintendent Lawrance responded on the behalf of Trina Moulin, explaining that the Summer Institute in August is voluntary, and teachers can choose whether to attend or not. Pro-D Days are incorporated into the existing calendar during the second week of Spring Break. Therefore, if teachers do not attend Summer Institute, they must attend those three days during Spring Break. These days are for those teachers who started later in the school year to catch up.

Trustee Kent-Laidlaw raised concerns about the potential impact on parents for childcare if the Board approves three additional Pro-D Days within the school calendar year. She also expressed interest in researching what percentage of teachers utilize the three days during Spring Break for additional learning.

Trustee Chenoweth expressed interest in understanding whether collegiality is lost if teachers choose to do their professional development at their school instead of attending the Summer Institute. He would like to learn more from all the schools to see if they lose the sense of togetherness.

2025-2026 District Calendar:

25/030 It was moved by Trustee Rainer and seconded by Trustee Kent-Laidlaw

THAT the 2025-2026 School District Calendar be approved to send to the Ministry of Education.

MOTION CARRIED

25/031 It was moved by Trustee Rainer and seconded by Trustee Kent-Laidlaw

THAT the Chairperson Gordan Swan form an ad hoc committee to review the District Calendar with all parties, rightsholders, parents, teachers, and support staff for the 2026-2027 District Calendar year.

MOTION CARRIED

Chairperson Swan stated that he will organize a committee involving Trustees and senior staff to develop a timeline to have this information ready for discussion before November/December 2025, in order to make a decision in February 2026 for the 2026-2027 school year.

EDUCATION

Indigenous Education Report:

Superintendent Lawrance introduced the newly appointed District Principal of Indigenous Education Angela McIvor, highlighting her local connections and experience in the District.

Angela McIvor spoke about the Winter Celebration that she attended on January 29, 2025. She praised the outstanding work of the previous Director of Indigenous Education and all of the Indigenous Student Advocates (ISA) within the District. The celebration featured a powwow with dances and singing.

Early Learning and Child Care Report:

Superintendent Lawrance discussed the report by District Vice-Principal of Early Learning and Child Care, Daniella Bennie, highlighting that they participated in a literacy week in the Community of Merritt. The grand finale to end off the week was a free concert for children and families at the Civic Center in Merritt. Superintendent Lawrance wanted to also highlight that Daniella is organizing writing workshops throughout the District.

Inclusive Education Report:

Superintendent Lawrance discussed the report by Director of Instruction – Inclusive Education, Misty Sheldon, which highlighted the work of the District's Student Support Teachers (SSTs). The stories in her report showcase the power of collaboration, creativity, and community engagement in supporting students and their families.

Vice-Chair Ward would like to applaud Misty Sheldon for the outstanding report that she wrote. She also appreciated that Misty used the font that WorkBC has adopted for accessibility needs as she described in a pre-emptive paragraph in her report.

Superintendent's Report:

The Superintendent circulated and spoke to her report, reflecting on the District events that have taken place over the past month.

OPERATIONS

Riverside Learning Centre Update

Superintendent Lawrance discussed the Riverside Learning Center project, which has been delayed due to a lighting package supply issue. The project is now expected to open in May or June 2025 instead of the initial timeline. The Ministry has recommended that the District put in an application for additional funds, which Interim Secretary Treasurer Harold Cull has already started working on.

Trustee Rainer requested to set up a meeting with the Y.M.C.A. management group to resolve some issues.

AUDIT AND FINANCE

2024 - 2025 Amended Budget Bylaw Process

Interim Secretary Treasurer Harold Cull discussed the 2024/2025 amended budget process, which has been delayed due to the government election and the delay in receiving budget figures from the Ministry. He will bring back the Amended Budget, incorporating the actual February enrolment counts and the latest financial forecast (February 28th), and present it to the Board of Education with the Amended Budget Bylaw for their review and consideration at their March 12th meeting. Given the deadline for March 28th and not having another scheduled Board of Education meeting until April, staff will ask the Board to pass all three readings of the Bylaw on March 12th.

2025 – 2026 Preliminary Annual Budget Process

Interim Secretary Treasurer Harold Cull and the Board discussed the preliminary budget process for 2025/2026, which will involve consultation with rights holders, partners, and the administration team. The board will consider having a special meeting in May to discuss the preliminary budget.

POLICY

First Reading

None

Second Reading

None

Third Reading

3.40 Board Authority Courses

25/032

It was moved by Vice-Chair Ward and seconded by Trustee Chenoweth

THAT the Board approved Policy 3.40, Board Authority Courses, forward for third reading as amended.

MOTION CARRIED

Policies Recommended for Repeal

Policy 300.1 - Hiring of Excluded Personnel

25/033

It was moved by Trustee Kent-Laidlaw and seconded by Trustee Hoisington

THAT the Board approved Policy 300.1, Hiring of Excluded Personnel, be repealed and moved to the Administrative Procedure Guide.

MOTION CARRIED

Policy 401.6 – Criminal Record Checks

25/034

It was moved by Trustee Kent-Laidlaw and seconded by Trustee Hoisington

THAT the Board approved Policy 401.6, Criminal Record Checks, be repealed and moved to the Administrative Procedure Guide.

MOTION CARRIED

Policy 404.2 – Bus Driver Training, Abstracts & Physical Exam

25/035

It was moved by Trustee Kent-Laidlaw and seconded by Trustee Hoisington

THAT the Board approved Policy 404.2, Bus Driver Training, Abstracts & Physical Exam, be repealed and moved to the Administrative Procedure Guide.

MOTION CARRIED

Policy 406.6 - Use of Alcohol and/or Illegal Drugs

25/036

It was moved by Trustee Kent-Laidlaw and seconded by Trustee Hoisington

THAT the Board approved Policy 406.6, Use of alcohol and/or Illegal Drugs, be repealed and moved to the Administrative Procedure Guide.

MOTION CARRIED

Policy 307.0 - Interpretation Administrative Officer's

25/037

It was moved by Trustee Kent-Laidlaw and seconded by Trustee Hoisington

THAT the Board approved Policy 307.0, Interpretation AO's, be repealed and moved to the Administrative Procedure Guide.

MOTION CARRIED

Policy 402.14 - Teacher Exchange

25/038

It was moved by Trustee Kent-Laidlaw and seconded by Trustee Hoisington

THAT the Board approved Policy 402.14, Teacher Exchanges, be repealed and moved to the Administrative Procedure Guide.

MOTION CARRIED

Policy 402.15 – Teacher Trainees

25/039 It was moved by Trustee Kent-Laidlaw and seconded by Trustee Hoisington

THAT the Board approved Policy 402.15, Teacher Trainees, be repealed and moved to the Administrative Procedure Guide.

MOTION CARRIED

Policy 406.5 – Dress

25/040 It was moved by Trustee Kent-Laidlaw and seconded by Trustee Hoisington

THAT the Board approved Policy 406.5, Dress, be repealed and moved to the Administrative Procedure Guide.

MOTION CARRIED

Policy 406.10 – Electronic Device Use

25/041 It was moved by Trustee Kent-Laidlaw and seconded by Trustee Hoisington

THAT the Board approved Policy 406.10, Electronic Device Use, be repealed and moved to the Administrative Procedure Guide.

MOTION CARRIED

Policy 406. 11 – Communicable Disease

25/042 It was moved by Trustee Kent-Laidlaw and seconded by Trustee Hoisington

THAT the Board approved Policy 406.11, Communicable Disease, be repealed and moved to the Administrative Procedure Guide.

MOTION CARRIED

Policy 406.1 – Non-Sexist Environment

25/043 It was moved by Trustee Kent-Laidlaw and seconded by Trustee Hoisington

THAT the Board approved Policy 406.1, Non-Sexist Environment, be repealed and moved to the Administrative Procedure Guide.

MOTION CARRIED

Trustee Reports:

Student Trustee Reports

Assistant Superintendent Kempston asked Student Trustees to reflect on the following: What is the biggest health and wellness challenges facing students in our School District from their perspective?

The Student Trustees highlighted the challenges students face, particularly regarding sleep and substance misuse. They noted that substance misuse is prevalent throughout MSS, including grade 8 students. Drinking is also a significant concern, as it is observed across all grades.

The Board acknowledged the need for safe and supportive environments for students and discussed the importance of peer-to-peer support and mentorship.

The conversation ended with a discussion on the need for all staff members to be equipped to support students without judgment.

Vice-Chair Ward addressed Assistant Superintendent Kempston with a question, asked what do we do when we hear substance abuse and drinking in young students? Are that certain protocols will be triggered, and steps will be taken moving forward?

Assistant Superintendent Kempston replied that she understands students need a safe place to be. Both Hayden and Jacob challenge the District to consider that students are doing the best they can. They asked what can be done to provide kids with alternatives when they find themselves in difficult and dangerous situations. As a result, senior administrators need to return to the high schools and ensure that students have access to safe adults, safe places, no shame, no blame, no judgment, and excellent education and strategies.

P.A.C. Reports

Trustee Rainer reported on John Allison Elementary. He highlighted that John Allison PAC has gone to the town of Princeton for a grant of \$10,000 to get trees for the property.

Trustee Chenoweth reported on SCIDES and Collettsville Elementary. Collettsville's PAC raised some questions for the Principal regarding communication, given the recent staffing changes. Trustee Chenoweth was impressed that the Principal was able to respect confidentiality while addressing the concerns. SCIDES is planning a sexual health seminar for students and parents. Trustee Chenoweth also mentioned that SCIDES will be spending some money on book orders and planning Spirit Week fundraisers.

Chair Swan reported on Merritt Bench that they are looking for sensory applications for their floor. Chair Swan advised the PAC that they need to meet with Operations Manager Darrell Finnigan to make sure to purchase equipment that will last. He mentioned that Bench School will be hosting a Garage Sale in April. Chair Swan also reported on Merritt Secondary School that there will be a Grad vs Teacher Hockey game on Wednesday February 19th.

Trustee Kent-Laidlaw reported on Princeton Secondary School, highlighting all of the extracurricular activities. The planning for the PSS Spain/Portugal trip is well underway, and fundraising has now started. There will be a dinner in the next couple of months as a fundraiser. Tickets will be on sale for anyone who would like to come out and explore of Spain and Portugal. The event will include a presentation on the destinations and activities planned for the trip, as well as a raffle.

Trustee Ward reported on Vermilion Forks Elementary. She highlighted that the PAC committee for that school does an amazing job fundraising.

Trustee Hoisington reported on Nicola Canford, highlighting that they had a successful volleyball season, and that the ski trip went to Harper Mountain was a success.

Trustee Jepsen was not present to report on Diamond Vale Elementary and Merritt Central Elementary.

Other Reports:

BCSTA Motions

a. Fully Funded Exempt Compensation

The Board is asking for total cost of compensation to exempt staff based on actual labor cost for the Exempt Salary Increase Report submitted to BCPSEA including increases that have already been committed to in previous budgets. Furthermore, future exempt staff salary increases should be fully funded in alignment with outcomes of the bargaining session.

This motion was voted on February 4, 2025, and put through as an emergency motion but Trustee Kent-Laidlaw got a call from BCPSEA that they will not consider this motion as emergency, but they will push it forward to the AGM.

b. Technology Security

The BCSTA requests the Minister of Finance to provide additional new funding to School Districts to cover the increasing incremental costs associated with information technology security.

25/044 It was moved by Vice-Chair Ward and seconded by Trustee Rainer

THAT the Board will bring this motion to the BCSTA AGM meeting.

MOTION CARRIED

c. Feeding Futures

The BCSTA requests the Ministry of Education and Child Care continue to provide funding to support the feeding future School food program and treat as an ongoing program past its current three-year mandate. The current funding agreement expires in June 2025.

25/045 It was moved by Trustee Rainer and seconded by Trustee Chenoweth

THAT the Board will bring this motion to the BCSTA AGM meeting.

MOTION CARRIED

CORRESPONDENCE:

None.

PUBLIC QUESTION PERIOD


None.

ADJOURNMENT

25/046 Motion to adjourn was made by Vice-Chair Ward and seconded by Trustee Kent-Laidlaw. The Open Board meeting adjourned at 8:20pm



Chairperson



Interim Secretary Treasurer