

May 20, 2021

Attention of the Nanaimo-Ladysmith Schools Board of Directors,

My name is Melissa Peoples and I am the PEACE program Coordinator at Haven Society. I am writing this letter to demonstrate my opposition to the proposed removal of two Community Schools Coordinator positions as it is near impossible to effectively service the entire district with just three people. I firmly believe they are vital in order to bridge community services with student support.

Since 2008, my agency has offered violence prevention education through the Violence is Preventable (VIP) program to K-12 classes across the district. This has been through group format as well as presentations to both staff and students.

Being a community partner, the most challenging aspect of offering this program to schools is liaising and scheduling through various school staff. It has also been frustrating to make connections with certain staff in a school to then have that staff member move the following school year and have to start from scratch with new staff. In addition, due to their heavy workload, it is often difficult to have direct communication with school staff (mostly CYCFSW's) and there have been times when presentations have fallen through because of this.

These challenges were eradicated once Bernadette French (CSC responsible for the mental health portfolio) became my sole contact person. She has made scheduling and communication with schools much more streamlined. Because of her direct and efficient communication as well as networking, the VIP program has been offered in schools that were not as receptive to having it before. Any time I have concerns or questions, I am able to contact her and she offers resolution and provides the information I need. She has always gone above and beyond in order to ensure that students are supported.

Students face enough challenges in today's world and school cannot provide full spectrum support. Mental health issues are at an all-time high, one in four Nanaimo children live in poverty and there is a housing crisis to name a few things that many students are experiencing. From a trauma perspective, it is no wonder there are so many more students in every classroom with disruptive behaviors or limited capacity to learn- they are in survival mode!

However, the district can make the strategic and compassionate decision to maintain Community Schools Coordinator positions so that students have access to the additional support they need. It takes a village (or community) to raise a child. Please continue to make the community supports accessible to our children.

Respectfully,

Melissa Peoples

PEACE and VIP Coordinator at Haven Society

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