



September 27, 2021

*This correspondence relates to Indian Residential Schools. We recognize that this content can trigger traumatic memories and difficult feelings. For Indigenous peoples, a 24-hour National Indian Residential School Crisis Line is available by calling **1.866.925.4419**.*

Greetings Parents, Guardians, and Care Givers,

September may be a time of excitement for many families, fresh school supplies, a new teacher, and reunions with friends. Students return to the classrooms, and families settle into the rhythms of school.

For Indigenous families in our District, September is also a time of grief and sadness. For many Tla'amin parents and grandparents, September recalls a time of forced separation from family—when children as young as 4 years old were taken to residential schools in Sechelt, Kamloops, Mission and beyond, some never to return home.

Orange Shirt Day (September 30), established in 2013 by Residential School Survivor Phyllis (Jack) Webstad, Northern Secwepemc, invites Canadians to wear orange shirts to commemorate the Indigenous children taken from their homes and placed in residential schools. The colour orange is significant because it was the colour of Webstad's shirt on her first day of residential school — this shirt was taken away from her when she arrived at the school.

Earlier this year, the discovery of children's remains at the Kamloops Indian Residential School sent shockwaves through the country. As community leaders, we recognize that schools play a critical role in supporting children and families to reckon with these truths; after all, the school system erased Indigenous histories for decades.

This September 30th is the first annual National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Many of you may be wondering what the appropriate way to mark this day is; some parents may feel unsure about the subject of reconciliation, as so many of us were denied the opportunity to learn about this history when we were students ourselves.

On this National Truth and Reconciliation Day, we encourage parents and families to observe this day meaningfully. We offer the following suggestions:

- Participate in the ceremony held by *heheš'in: The Way Forward* commencing with a walk leaving the Townsite at 3:30 pm arriving at Willingdon Beach at approximately 4:15 p.m. Thursday afternoon, Orange Shirt Day, and other community events.
- Take time for self-education and family discussions about this history, its meaning today, and your commitments to positive relationships and reconciliation. Visit the Public Library for resources suited to all age groups and, visit <https://nctr.ca/education/trw/> for more information about the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

- Support and contribute to Indigenous businesses and communities or donate to Indigenous organizations.

On this inaugural Day of Truth and Reconciliation, we invite you to walk this path to reconciliation with us. We strongly believe that *together* as families, schools, neighbours, and friends, we have an opportunity to build a more just future for all our children. *When we know better, we do better.*

Sincerely,



Ms. Dale Lawson
Chairperson
Board of Education, SD47



John Hackett
Hegus
Tla'amin Nation

JH_DL/ac