



# SCHOOL DISTRICT 5

## S O U T H E A S T K O O T E N A Y

May 31, 2023

Hon. David Eby, Premier, Province of BC  
Parliament Buildings  
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Dear Hon. David Eby,

RE: Addition of Neuro-Diverse Training to Curriculms

At the School District 5 (SD5), Southeast Kootenay public Board Meeting of May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023, the Board carried the following motion:

*THAT the Board of Education write a letter to the provincial government advocating for the inclusion of neuro-diverse training in the curriculum for teachers, education assistants and early childhood educators.*

On March 30, 2023, the Canadian Federal Government gave assent to *Bill S-203, An Act respecting a federal framework on autism spectrum disorder*. This Bill recognizes that there is a need for autistic persons and their families to receive direct, timely and ongoing access to financial support, treatment and services.

While this Bill does not specifically address K – 12 education, which is the purview of each provincial government, it is significant in that it acknowledges the distinct needs related to persons within the autism spectrum.

More than **95 percent** of persons on the Spectrum have at least one co-occurring condition (ie: physical condition, language disorder, learning difficulty), and more than **50 percent** have at least one of those conditions –*in addition to autism*.

Simply put, some persons on the Spectrum will have conditions that respond

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best using a medical approach while others will have conditions that respond better to a neurodiverse approach. Many have both.

Medical approaches are often straightforward and easily communicated to the people who employ them. The neurodiverse approach is not.

A neurodiverse approach requires that equal attention be paid to what an individual *can do* rather than disproportionately focusing on what a person struggles with. These variations are intrinsic to an individual's identity and sense of self.

As educators, we need to rethink the language we use (ie: at risk for, deficit in, etc.), stop defaulting to the "autism label" to explain *all* actions or behaviours of an individual and recognize that persons on the Spectrum encounter a range of emotions (just like everyone else), *even if they are unable to express those emotions in a typical way.*

According to a 2019 Scientific American article, *"...in highly social and unpredictable environments some of their [neurodivergent] differences may manifest as disabilities, while in more autism-friendly environments the disabilities can be minimized, allowing other differences to blossom as talents."*

Without the proper education and understanding of those who work with persons on the Spectrum, a neurodiverse student is more easily triggered leading to frustration for the student, classroom disruptions/interrupted learning for other students and, in too many cases, violent outbursts against the professional(s) caring for that student. Neurotypical students who witness such behaviour simply learn to "deal" with it.

To the other extreme, many neurodivergent students learn to "mask" (ie: forcing eye contact, mimicking gestures, minimizing personal interests or "pushing through" intense sensory experiences) their differences, denying their own identity and sense of self, to "fit in". The long-term consequences of masking have been linked to anxiety, depression, loss of identity, exhaustion and suicidal thoughts.

Inclusion of neuro-diverse training in the curriculum for teachers, education assistants and early childhood educators would reduce the incidents of student-to-staff violence in schools and increase the opportunity for all students to thrive. As these students grow into adulthood, they will begin to positively redefine how neurodiverse citizens are included in the community, workplace and society – which is the ultimate goal of inclusion.

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Education and training *must be built into the curriculum* for teachers, education assistants and early childhood educators. For the safety of our staff, the successful learning environment of our students and the future inclusion of neurodiverse citizens in society, our Board urges you to consider the merits of our request and the tremendous advantages such a small change can reap. We look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



Doug McPhee, Board Chair

Cc\*: Hon. Selina Robinson, Minister, Post-Secondary Education & Future Skills  
Hon. Rachna Sing, Minister, Education and Child Care  
Kevin Falcon, Leader, BC United Party  
Sonia Furstenau, Leader, BC Green Party  
Tom Shypitka, MLA Kootenay East BC  
Elenor Sturko, Critic for Education, BC United Party  
Karin Kirkpatrick, Critic for Child and Family Development & Childcare, BC United Party  
Hon. Katrine Conroy, Minister of Finance  
Chris Brown, Assistant Deputy Minister, Resource Management Division  
Dr. Allyson Jule, Chair, Association of BC Deans of Education  
Violet Jessen, Chair, Early Childhood Educators of BC  
Alicia Kroeker, Chair, Education Assistants of BC Society  
Carolyn Broady, President, BCSTA  
BCSTA for distribution to member Boards of Education  
Clint Johnston, President BC Teachers' Federation  
Chris Schultz-Lorentzen, President, BCCPAC  
Shelley Balfour & Adrienne Demers, CFTA Co-Chairs  
Krista Naple, SD5 CUPE President  
Lies Salvador, DPAC Chair  
Aaron Thorn, President, SD5 Administrators' Association  
Chris Walker/Corey Bullock, CBC Radio  
Dennis Walker, 107.5 Today FM Radio  
Wylie Henerson, Rewind Radio 102.9  
Jeff Johnson, Wild B104 Radio  
Josiah Spyker/Ryley McCormack, 107.5 Today FM  
Barry Coulter/Trevor Crawley, Cranbrook Daily Townsman  
Ian Cobb, e-know Online News  
Joshua Fischlin, Fernie Free Press

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\*This correspondence is public and transparent. Please feel free to share and/or respond with comment.

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