

September 20, 2019

Dear Parents and Guardians,

We live in an era of global climate change. The signs are all around us. While there are large-scale initiatives around the globe, such as a move to electric cars and alternative forms of energy, it is clear that our efforts are insufficient. It now must be our children who will be the ones to address the issues, to formulate resolutions, and to find the will and dedication to address the complex problems facing our planet. Such will and dedication requires a call to action.

Inspired by Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg, rallies are being arranged around North America and these rallies, dubbed Global Climate Strike, are timed to coincide with the United Nations Climate Action Summit in New York in the coming week. Many advocates and groups are communicating under the hashtag #FridaysForFuture and are asking for people specifically to participate in rallies on September 27th, when Greta is intending to participate in the rally in Montreal. There are other events planned across Canada.

Climate change and environmental issues are deeply embedded in the BC curriculum. The teachers who collaborated in writing the curriculum did so with full awareness of the challenges ahead. Educators care deeply about these issues and it is very common – from student leadership initiatives, science fair presentations, community gardens, the numerous recycling efforts and many other initiatives – to see how schools embrace the issues related to our planet and the environment every day.

Our Board of Education has always placed a priority on environmental sustainability. Whether it's through sponsoring programs like Surrey's Salmon Habitat Restoration Program or through offering a choice program at our EKOLogy environmental school, our Board believes in the need to care for our planet and in the power of education to shape our future. Our Board also believes strongly that student voice and engagement is valued and again, whether it's in the classroom, at the school or district level, that voice needs to be heard. In schools and classrooms across the district next week, I am certain that climate change will be a topic of many lessons and activities and this is all part of engaging our youth in such an important issue that impacts us all.

Many jurisdictions across Canada are making statements about the rallies and potential student participation. In these statements, districts are reaffirming the priority of student safety. In Surrey, if parents make a choice to excuse their children from school on Friday, September 27th, the district will follow our normal routines of marking students as "excused" for the day. We are also asking our schools to ensure that if any students are excused by their parents for that day, they will be provided the opportunity to make up any missed work or tests without penalty. First and foremost, students would want to speak with their teachers about missing school.

....2

LEADERSHIP IN LEARNING

Page 2
September 20, 2019

We encourage you to discuss this topic and this global movement with your children. Climate change is real and is a critical issue for our future. This letter is to ensure that parents are informed and to know that we want to place the responsibility for a decision to participate or not in these rallies where it belongs, which is in the hands of our parents with their children. Student advocacy and engagement in civic and global issues is a key to our future. Our vision for learning includes students caring for self, others and society and if we are to accomplish this, it must be done together.

Sincerely,



Jordan Tinney
Superintendent of Schools/CEO

Copy: Board of Education

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