

Dear Administrators...

I would first of all like to thank you all for the many years that you allowed us to tell students about our programs. There is no doubt that this venue enabled students to acquire information quickly so that they could make informed decisions about whether or not to attend our recreational programs each summer. The numbers of campers that came during those years bears this out quite clearly. It continued to a lesser degree during the years that the brochures were made available in the school office.

Thank you.

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I wrestle with a dual purpose for this email, and have decided that at the very least I would like to register a response to the decision of School District 59. Please note that I respect the right of a school district to make decisions and interpret MOE policies. This is not meant as argument, nor to cast blame, but rather to simply respond with my own concern about this direction as a parent, and as a member of the community. I will try to format this response into four points.

1. I am familiar with the approach taken by MOE Policy – some of which occur as “must”, some as “should”, and some as “maybe”. It is my understanding that much of what is said about community involvement is designated in the last area, and it is not spelled out in black and white that outside organizations cannot be allowed to speak to students or offer material to them. Therefore I see the recent decision of SD #59 as an interpretation of MOE Policy. We work within five school districts (one in Alberta), and SD #59 is the only one that takes this interpretation.

2. Safety of students is a primary concern for every part of the community. Here is a statement that comes out of a resource called, [“The Building Blocks of Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools”](#).

“All aspects of school life embrace and reflect diversity. The school is an inviting place for students, staff, parents and visitors. Staff members make conscious and concerted efforts to help other members of the school community feel connected.”

While I realize that I am quoting this out of its direct context, it still holds true in principle. There are two approaches that play against each other. The one says that if we make blanket rules to protect students, that we can maintain safety for all. The other says that by making the effort to make informed decisions as they come, diversity is embraced and members of the community are honored. The latter seems to be the approach taken by principle by the MOE in the quote above.

3. The MOE provides a curriculum standard which requires that students be encouraged to get involved in quality extra-curricular activities. By pulling back completely, students will have no guidance in making these choices, and many may choose to do nothing. Physical activity is one case in point. Television, Facebook and computer gaming, junk food, and quick pre-prepared dinners have stolen away the physical health of our children. So the government offers a taxable benefit for the cost of certain extra curricular activity that helps bring back some of that health. And schools offer more directed physical activity programs. Once the community options are no longer available for advertisement on school bulletins boards, then the majority of urban students will be more likely to settle on zero extra curricular activity. Physical activity is only one of the benefits provided by extra curricular involvement. Others include leadership skills, the attitude of volunteerism, being able to relate to various age groups, and a challenge to think for themselves as people. There is no doubt that these are also covered to some degree in the school, but the MOE recognizes that community involvement helps to strengthen these skills and aptitudes.

4. I take exception to a point emailed to the Chetwynd administrators within the last week. (*I do not know why you sent that email separately, Rob Dennis, as the Chetwynd schools were already included in the previous April 23 email. But I can speculate that it may have something to do with a request for clarification from one or more administrators. I did not initiate any further requests in Chetwynd this year.*) The point to which I take exception is that Camp Sagitawa was given “preferential” treatment over many years. I have sat in many morning assemblies at SD #59 schools over the years, and have either preceded or followed other organizations doing short presentations. We were not the only group presenting. I do recall one concern at the SD office as a question given to me as to what the District should do if “Mormons and other groups” tried to advertise their camps. My question at that time still stands, “Who has tried? And why should there be an issue over something that has never occurred?”

4. I certainly hope there is no religious bearing on this decision. I have never crossed that line in any school presentation, as I hold to and respect the District’s guidelines in this area to the highest degree. Even at camp, teaching is only accomplished with parents being fully informed about whom we are and what we believe. I maintain the highest level of dignity for which religious information is offered to anyone at camp. It is always taught as an option, never pushed, and never put in a way that obligates or manipulates.

I trust that this summarizes my views fairly well, and yet while I am concerned about the general direction being taken, I do respect the choice.

Thanks again for the many years of support.

Gary Pryzner, Director
Camp Sagitawa