

January 26, 2020
Vancouver School Board - School District #39
1580 W. Broadway
Vancouver, BC V6J 5K8

FAO: Superintendent Hoffman and Vancouver Board of Education Trustees

QMUNITY, BC's Queer, Trans, and Two-Spirit Resource Centre Society, is writing in support of the petition calling for the Vancouver School Board (VSB), superintendent, and trustees to address longstanding and systemic issues of anti-Black racism in Vancouver public schools. In particular, QMUNITY supports the call to eliminate the role of Vancouver Police Department (VPD) officers in schools through the School Liaison Officer program.

The LGBTQ2SAI+ community has a long and troubled history with policing going back decades, including raids on LGBTQ2SAI+ establishments and community spaces; criminalizing consensual sexual acts between adults; policing gender and gender expression; and harbouring and protecting individuals who express transphobic and misogynistic attitudes. To this day policing communities fail to adequately serve and protect LGBTQ2SAI+ individuals and communities, repeatedly doing 'stop and frisks' and street checks of trans women and failing to enforce hate crime legislation for example.

In recent history, there have been repeated efforts by advocates and educators to deliver "diversity training" to police forces across the country. This training, often no more than a couple of hours and delivered to officers en masse, has proven to be ineffective in addressing and shifting the problematic and prevalent behaviours, attitudes and structures that continue to marginalize and harm BIPOC communities.

In our own work, we strive to centre and uplift the experiences and voices of QTIBIPOC (Queer, Trans and Intersex, Black, Indigenous and People of Colour). The intersections of these identities often and typically result in intersectional and compounding experiences of oppression and violence, reinforced by institutions including the education system and police. In the VSB's on-going review of the School Liaison Officer program, it is imperative that the voices and experiences of those most harmed and impacted by the program are centred and considered in future decision-making processes.

For nearly 20 years, QMUNITY has developed and administered a school program called **Pridespeaks**. Pridespeaks recruits a dozen LGBTQ2SAI+ youth every year and provides them with life-enhancing, skills-based training, including public speaking, leadership building and group facilitation. LGBTQ2SAI+ youth deliver over 150 workshops and presentations per year, in schools across Metro Vancouver. The workshops focus on justice and equity, addressing conflict and bullying in classrooms and school hallways, and celebrating the contributions LGBTQ2SAI+ youth make to a vibrant school culture.

In our Youth Program, which includes short-term counselling, social drop-ins and strategies for building resiliency within youth, LGBTQ2SAI+ youth consistently share personal stories of times that they, or their friends, have been treated in a racist, homophobic, transphobic or ableist way

by police officers. We know programs like Pridespeaks, and many other youth programs across the city, engage with and support youth considered 'at-risk,' providing them with skills-building training, increased confidence, and connections to community members and mentors to increase their resiliency and capacity to be effective leaders in their schools, communities and families.

The calls to defund the police that have gained mainstream attention in the last 12 months must compel all of us, and most especially those in positions of exceptional power and privilege, to think differently, creatively and imaginatively of a future that is more just and equitable for all. The School Liaison Officer program costs approximately \$75,000/school/year to administer, while invaluable and high-impact programs like QMUNITY's Youth and Pridespeaks programs are drastically and chronically underfunded. Let us all imagine a world in which these powerful, collaborative and empowering programs and supports are adequately supported to enhance their reach and their impact for youth, and their communities.

Join us, and the many other individuals and organizations across Vancouver, who are committed to aspirational, imaginative, creative and radical thinking about how to do things differently, with justice, equity and community at the heart of our work.

For media requests and on-going engagement

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