

Taking Action in Support of Truth and Reconciliation

To: Presidents and All Members

From: Domenic Bellissimo, Associate General Secretary – Professional Services

For Action

On Thursday, May 27, 2021 around 10:00 p.m., various news agencies began reporting on the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation's discovery of the remains of 215 children buried at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School.

OSSTF/FEESO is deeply saddened by this horrific discovery, a discovery that as the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) accurately points out, serves as a reminder that Canada cannot bury its residential schools' sins. Moreover, this new development further demonstrates the magnitude of intergenerational trauma caused by colonialism and acts of violence against Indigenous peoples.

OSSTF/FEESO has supported various actions and organizations since the release of the Final Report of Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2015. Our focus has been on improving the learning of the truth of the residential school system, and the many other acts of oppression against Indigenous peoples.

It is important that we come together, as we have always done in education, to support the students we serve in coming to terms with the ever-unfolding history of the residential school system, and to address the devastating impacts of the endless tragedies on families, communities and this country.

Given the pain and trauma associated with residential schools, all members are encouraged to seek out support from their employer to ensure they have taken the necessary pedagogical considerations for teaching about residential schools into account prior to engaging in learning with your class/students. Resources, like this [one](#) from the First Nations, Métis, Inuit Education Association of Ontario offer some important reminders and suggestions.

Possible actions for local leaders and members:

1. Learn more about the Ontario Residential Schools and find out if there is a local Survivor Society that may be seeking support and/or donations.
<http://www.trc.ca/about-us/residential-school.html>

2. Leaders and members looking for ways to act are encouraged to increase their awareness of the First Nations, Metis, and Inuit communities around them. To do so, leaders and members should contact their local school board/employer Indigenous Lead or other similar staff member. If this is not possible, members can also connect with the nearest [Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centre](#) for possible suggestions and information.

3. Consider being part of the Heart Garden movement to honour and memorialize the children lost to the residential school system, while expressing a very visible, public call to action for change in this country: to value and honour the lives of Indigenous children, their families and communities.

This is a BCTF initiative that involves some challenging conversations with students. It is typically done in person but could be adapted to a virtual setting but should only be done by staff who are knowledgeable and experienced with the subject of reconciliation and residential schools and are encouraged to consult their employer/supervisor prior to attempting this activity.

You can find the information about the Heart Gardens and what they are on pages 3-5 of this BCTF resources-

https://bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/AboriginalEducation/Have_A_Heart_booklet.pdf

Additionally on pages 9,10,11,13 and 15 you will find examples including patterns and templates for the hearts and messages.

For further information or for questions of clarification please contact Dan Earle dan.earle@osstf.ca in the Communications Political Action department.

DE/mo cope 343