

Statement regarding December 16th meeting with Ms. Momolu at the Alberta Legislature

December 17, 2019

Yesterday afternoon the Minister of Education, the Deputy Minister of Education and senior staff from our Division met with Ms. Momolu to discuss her concerns regarding her son when he was asked to remove a durag in September at Christ the King School.

We read the following apology to Ms. Momolu at the meeting:

We trust that Ms. Momolu understands and appreciates that it has never been our desire that this matter escalate to the point we are at today. We would also like Ms. Momolu to know that when she first raised concerns, the Division undertook a full investigation of this matter which included speaking to the staff members directly involved. We always took the statements she made in public seriously, and her perspective was always an opportunity to reflect upon what had occurred. Based upon our conversations with staff, we can assure Ms. Momolu that it was never their intention to racially profile her son nor to imply that he was a gang member because he was wearing a durag. Furthermore, based upon our knowledge of the staff members directly involved, we have never seen any indication of any kind over their many years of service that would indicate that they are anything but inclusive and welcoming to all students. When we previously apologized publicly for using the word 'gang', we had hoped to convey to Ms. Momolu and her son that there was no intent to connect her son's race or his choice to wear a durag with his membership in a gang; the intention was only to inform Ms. Momolu and her son of a community reality which may have put her son at risk. We are sorry that throughout this matter, she interpreted our intentions differently and that our conduct was racially motivated; that is simply not who we are. We sincerely wish that we can move forward from this matter, and that she and her son's journey with the Edmonton Catholic Schools' family will continue at the new Catholic school her son is attending.

In addition, we partially lifted the ban at Christ the King School and gave her the following information:

The Division understands that Ms. Momolu has publicly stated that she has family attending the school and the property ban would pose an impediment to attending to her extended family's needs. As a result, the Division is allowing Ms. Momolu to attend events normally open to students' extended families such as Christmas concerts, awards events, etc. Should Ms. Momolu wish to come inside the school to pick up or drop off her niece at school, she may do so subject to the normal rules the school has in place for parents in this regard. However, the Division would like to note that Ms. Momolu has always been welcome to drop off or pick up her niece prior to this, she simply has not been allowed to enter school property.

As well, we gave Ms. Momolu the following information on the dress code review that began in the fall for schools throughout the Division:

We are happy to inform Ms. Momolu that this fall, the Board's "Student Voice" committee began a review of school dress codes. The "Student Voice" committee is a committee of the Board and its membership and role is set out in Board Policy 20. The Committee has been meeting since the beginning of this school year and will be coming forward with their recommendations in terms of how to address student dress codes within the Division. We would ask that Ms. Momolu respect, as does the Board, that this review will include the voice of our students, and as a result, it may or may not align with our personal thoughts or objectives. At the conclusion of the work done by the Student Voice Committee, we will advise Ms. Momolu of their recommendations, and regardless of the outcome, she can be assured that a review was conducted by those most affected – our students.

In addition to these efforts, the Minister confirmed that additional efforts will be pursued on a provincial level to explore cultural awareness competencies within the scope of the Ministry's legislative mandate to provide a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging to all students and staff. The Ministry will be connecting with the appropriate educational stakeholder groups to explore effective way to implement these efforts in the coming months.

Finally, we agreed to continue to work towards a resolution of Ms. Momolu's remaining concerns through a third-party mediator at a further meeting which will occur in the near future.

The Board will not be making additional comments at this afternoon's public Board meeting.