



March 26, 2020

Ref: 217918

Lisa Lapointe, Chief Coroner  
BC Coroners Service  
Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General  
**Email: Lisa.Lapointe@gov.bc.ca**

Dear Ms. Lapointe:

Thank you for your letter of January 27, 2020, regarding the Verdict at Inquest into the death of Elliot Cleveland Eurchuk and the recommendations made by the jury. I appreciate your comprehensive review and recommendations to identified key areas of focus to prevent a future similar student death.

The Ministry of Education considers student safety and well-being vital to supporting learning and ensuring student success. The tragic loss of a student serves as an important reminder to the Ministry to reflect on the policies and practices that protect youth and to identify opportunities to strengthen our approaches to student safety and well-being. The following describes work that has already begun and which we will continue to move forward.

In reply to recommendation numbers 1, 2, and 3 from the inquest directed to the Ministry of Education, the Ministry responses follow:

**Recommendation 1:**

*Develop processes for early detection of mental health and substance use disorders within the schools.*

- *The Jury heard evidence from multiple mental health professionals that early detection of mental health and substance use disorders was the best way to prevent prolonged drug use and dependence in youth.*

In June 2019, the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions (MMHA) released their system-wide mental health and substance use strategy, *A Pathway to Hope*, in response to the fragmented system of mental health and substance use care, including for children and youth. Through the *Pathway to Hope*, the Province is implementing evidence-based and culturally safe programs and supports that focus on prevention and promotion activities for children and youth, including establishing Integrated Child and Youth (ICY) Teams and developing a mental health in schools' strategy.

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ICY Teams are community-based multidisciplinary teams which will deliver wrap-around mental health and substance use services and supports for children and youth, so families and caregivers do not have to navigate the system on their own. ICY Teams will work closely with schools and primary care to help with early identification of children and youth who may need support and assist them to access the right services, including specialized and higher intensity services when needed. The Ministry of Education is working closely with MMHA, Ministries of Children and Family Development and Health, and Indigenous partners to implement ICY Teams in five school districts over three years. Maple Ridge and Comox are the first two districts to be selected.

The Ministry of Education is building the mental health in schools' strategy with education partners, focusing on enhancing mental health literacy in school communities and increasing awareness, knowledge and skills which can support early identification of mental health and substance use challenges. In addition to the actions highlighted in *A Pathway to Hope*, the Ministry of Education is providing school districts with \$2 million in capacity-building grants to support the development and delivery of district-led mental health action plans with a focus on socio-emotional learning, mental health literacy and trauma-informed practice.

The Ministry of Education has also redesigned the Physical and Health Education (PHE) curriculum to bring together components of physical and health education in recognition of the importance of balancing all components of well-being for maintaining a healthy and safe way of life. PHE learning from Kindergarten to Grade 10 is mandatory for all students and focuses on the development of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs related to health literacy and encompasses important health and safety topics, including mental well-being and substance use. The redesigned PHE curriculum includes strategies to protect self and others from harm; physical/social/emotional aspects of psychoactive substance use and potentially addictive behaviours; signs and symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression, and how this learning can support early detection by peers. The curriculum also acknowledges that physical activity and other healthy choices can help reduce the rates of harmful substance use by youth and contribute to their cognitive development.

The Ministry is also creating online Safe and Caring School Communities training (available fall 2020) to assist school staff in being able to identify worrisome behaviours and help students receive the supports required. In addition, the online *erase* Report It tool also allows students to anonymously report safety concerns including those related to mental health and substance use.

**Recommendation 2:**

*Develop and implement a plan to transition youth from acute care and addiction treatment facilities to schools.*

- *The jury heard evidence that schools need to be part of planning for youth when they leave acute care treatment facilities in order to address safety concerns and ensure that appropriate supports are in place for the student.*

The Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions is best positioned to respond to the transition planning from acute care to community care as a key part of their mandate. In addition, the ministries of Health and Children and Family Development are developing an *Acute to/from Community Transitions Agreement*, which provides a provincial framework for local protocol development for child and youth mental health and substance use services. The Ministry of Education has provided input on the Agreement and schools are included in the Agreement as key service providers involved in developing local/regional protocols. Further wrap-around supports and services, including transition planning, will be offered by Integrated Child and Youth Teams beginning in five school districts across the province.

While the Ministry of Education has a limited role within the Ministry mandate in transition planning for youth from acute care and addiction treatment facilities to schools, the Ministry does operate Provincial Resource Programs to support students with their education while attending mental health and treatment facilities. A recent review of the Provincial Resource Programs recommended that additional information be shared between the treatment facilities and school setting as a part of transition planning. The Ministry will support the Provincial Resource Programs to increase their ability to support transition planning between the facility and the school environment and will require the Resource Programs to provide updates on improvements as a part of their yearly reporting requirements to the Ministry. The Ministry recognizes that information sharing is a key component of good transition planning.

**Recommendation 3:**

*Provide education to students, parents or guardians, teachers and administrators on mental health and substance use disorders.*

- *The jury heard testimony that School District 61 provided student, parents, educators and administrators with timely information on facts and issues around substance use and mental health disorders through “Snapshots”. The jury further heard that the information was well received and helpful.*

Education about mental well-being and healthy decision-making is important learning for all students. Mental well-being is one of the four key focus areas of the PHE curriculum. In the early grades, students learn to identify and describe feelings and worries, and about practices that promote mental well-being. In later grades, students learn about the signs and symptoms of stress, anxiety and depression, in addition to strategies for managing problems related to mental well-being and substance use. Learning standards related to substance use are found in every grade of the PHE curriculum from Kindergarten through Grade 10, beginning with learning about different types of substances and effects of substance use and expanding to the physical, emotional, and social aspects of psychoactive substance use and potentially addictive behaviours. PHE curriculum for Grades 11 and 12 includes learning standards on analyzing health messages from a variety of sources and describing the impact of physical activities on mental well-being.

Acknowledging the connection between mental health and substance use is integral for supporting student well-being. The Ministry of Education is working to ensure schools and education partners have access to evidence-based, current resources on mental health, substance use and overdose prevention. New PHE resources were introduced in September 2019 to support teachers in delivering the redesigned curriculum and the teaching of mental health in elementary and secondary schools.

The resources were developed by BC teachers with support from the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions and other key health stakeholders and provide a starting point to teach topics such as stress, anxiety, and mental health stigma. The guides also include instructional approaches and support classroom teachers in normalizing conversations about mental health topics.

The Ministry expanded the *erase* strategy during the 2018/19 school year to include additional focus on mental health and substance use which includes new information on the *erase* website for students, educators, and families. The Ministry also held a trauma-informed practice speaker series and training needs assessment conference in March 2018 and has since developed trauma-informed practice resources for educators. These resources were made available on the *erase* website, December 2019. In addition, the Ministry has distributed teacher resources developed by the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research (CISUR) for substance use education, including opioid overdose:

- Helping Schools Program (Grades 4 to 12) - Supports teachers, school and district staff, and parents to implement a comprehensive approach to drugs that promotes student health and learning.
- iMinds (grades 4 to 12) - Drug-related health literacy resource with online modules and lessons that support the development of the Core Competencies in the redesigned PHE curriculum.

On behalf of the Ministry of Education, I thank the BC Coroners Service and the death review panel for their report. We are committed to supporting student safety and well-being and will use the jury recommendations provided to continue to refine the policies and practices that protect our youth and ensure their success as learners.

Sincerely,



Rob Fleming  
Minister

Attachment: Jury Recommendations

pc: Michael Egilson, Presiding Coroner  
John McNamee, Executive Director, Legal Services and Inquests  
Vince Stancato, Regional Director, BC Coroners Service, Island Region