



# Media Release

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## Grand Erie Prioritizing Equity; Embracing Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action

**Brantford Ont.** – As Grand Erie District School Board continues to carry out the work of its Multi-Year Plan, board activities for the 2018-19 school year will focus on Equity – a key pillar of that plan – and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action.

“Grand Erie is fiercely committed to the ideals of equity and inclusion,” said Brenda Blancher, Director of Education. “This means a genuine and whole-hearted focus on listening and learning about our local history, particularly when it comes to residential schools. It means creating new relationships built on mutual respect, acknowledgement and recognition. And, it means continuing to support our Indigenous students, whether on reserve or off, by removing barriers and doing everything we can to ensure their success.”

Over the past year, in response to calls 62 and 63 of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s report, Grand Erie’s Indigenous Education team worked with community partners, including the Woodland Cultural Centre, Six Nations of the Grand River, and Mississaugas of the New Credit, to develop a resource for educators on the history of residential schools.

“Within Grand Erie’s boundaries, only minutes from our main administration office, is a building full of truths to be heard, stories to be told, and voices to be honoured,” said Sabrina Sawyer, Indigenous Education Lead in reference to the Mohawk Institute Indian Residential School. “This large and looming building is a constant reminder of all the work that still needs to be done for all students within our board to ensure these secrets of the past do not remain hidden.”

Grounded in local context, the new residential school resource will be shared with Grand Erie educators this fall to facilitate meaningful discussion and learning. In developing the resource, the team focused on creating a tool to engage all students in critical thinking. More than information sharing, it will allow students to examine what led to this point in history as well as spark intentional discussion and planning on where to go next.

“Reconciliation is both an individual journey as well as a collective journey,” said Karen Sandy, Grand Erie Trustee representing the interests of Indigenous students. “The hope with this new resource is to engage all students in learning the history present within our local communities, develop better intercultural understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, and to help build a positive future together.”

There are more than 1,750 Indigenous students attending Grand Erie schools, including over 500 who are from Six Nations of the Grand River or Mississaugas of the New Credit.

Grand Erie's Indigenous student population is expected to grow as the Board continues to develop supports for Indigenous students. Some of these supports include: A Native Advisor for Six Nations, three Native Education Counsellors, a Native Community Liaison Officer, an Indigenous Education Lead, a Student Support and Engagement Teacher, an Elementary Instructional Coach, a Child and Youth Worker and nine Educational Assistants. Grand Erie has a Native Advisory Committee which focuses on Six Nations students. Its mandate is to help students graduate or move on to the next phase of their life. Grand Erie also supports Indigenous language-learning, offering Cayuga and Mohawk language programs at select secondary schools. Grand Erie has an active Indigenous Education Advisory Committee (IEAC) whose mandate is to promote, enhance and improve Indigenous education for all students.

In addition to the supports provided by Trustee Sandy, who has been with the Board since 2014, Grand Erie now has an Indigenous Student Trustee. Allan St. Pierre, a student at Tollgate Technological Skills Centre, is the first student in Grand Erie history elected to the role. He was chosen by his peers this past spring for the 2018-19 term.

Each year, Grand Erie honours a number of Indigenous-focused events including Orange Shirt Day, Treaties Week, and National Indigenous Peoples Day. There are also leadership opportunities for Indigenous students such as Indigenous Mentorship Day and Indigenous clubs at most secondary schools.

"The goal of Grand Erie's Multi-Year Plan is *Success for Every Student*," said Denise Martins, Superintendent of Education who was newly appointed to the Indigenous Education portfolio. "That means developing tools and resources for all students and staff to learn about Indigenous history and to appreciate and celebrate culture and tradition."

Grand Erie's focus on Indigenous Education is not a short-term initiative. It is a sincere, long-term commitment to creating relationships built on mutual respect, openness and understanding.

Grand Erie's Multi-Year Plan includes Equity as one of six indicators to guide the work of realizing *Success for Every Student*, and promotes practices that help students, families, and staff feel safe, welcomed, and included.

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**Contact:**

Kimberly Newhouse  
Manager of Communications and Community Relations  
Grand Erie District School Board  
349 Erie Avenue, Brantford, Ontario, N3T 5V3  
Office: 519-756-6301 ext. 281147 | Cell: 519-732-8540  
**GrandErie.ca**