

## The Story of the Land Acknowledgment in Mission Public School District

***\*\*Please Note: Qwó:ltl'el is Kwantlen First Nation\*\****

Mission Public School District has been practicing the Indigenous Land Acknowledgement for several years.

In the beginning the statement was brief, *“Mission Public School District is located on the traditional and shared lands of Kwantlen, Leq’á:mel, Matsqui and Sq’ewlets First Nations.”*

In 2019, it was modified as follows, *‘Mission Public School District is located on the traditional, ancestral, unceded and shared lands of Kwantlen, Leq’á:mel Matsqui and Sq’ewlets First Nations.’* This was done to reflect the following:

- ***Traditional***, because these are the traditional lands upon which Indigenous ancestors walked and the lands upon which we walk today.
- ***Ancestral***, because these are the lands that were passed down from generation to generation, along with the stories told on and of the land.
- ***Unceded***, because these lands were taken, by no agreement.
- ***Shared***, because Indigenous peoples of these lands shared this land with non-human beings and shared by trade, the resources of the land with other Indigenous groups.

In 2021, it was modified once again to reflect the historic agreement signed between the Province of BC, Leq’á:mel, Matsqui and Sumas First Nations and the City of Mission to commemorate the returning traditional lands to the First Nations and establish new public parklands and recreation areas. *‘The agreement is unique in that it brings together First Nations, the Province and the local government. Under the agreement, the Province will transfer approximately 60 hectares of Crown land to the LMS Society, which represents the three First Nations. The lands will be subdivided to create a park parcel of approximately 50 hectares, which will be leased to Mission to manage for public use as a community park and recreational area, and two development parcels, to be developed by the First Nations to support much-needed housing in the area and increase economic and social opportunities.* (from BC Government News: Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation).

To ensure Indigenous protocol and respectful engagement with local Indigenous Nations and communities, this work was brought to the Siwal Si’wes Indigenous Education Advisory Council for review.

During a conversation at the Siwal Si’wes Indigenous Education Advisory Council, it was decided that the order of the Nations should be changed to reflect directions, moving from east to west, and so it was modified as follows: *‘We humbly work and learn on the Traditional, Ancestral, Unceded, and Shared lands of the Stó:lō people, of Sq’ewlets, Leq’á:mel, Sema:th, Matheqwi and Qwó:ltl’el First Nations, peoples of this land since time immemorial.’*

To standardize the Land Acknowledgement, we continued to discuss this with local Nations and at the Siwal Si'wes Indigenous Education Advisory Council over the course of the 2022/2023 school year. The wish was to create a standardized version that would honour the First Peoples of these lands and share SD75's commitment to Indigenous families and students in Mission Public School District.

The order of the Nations was discussed, and it was agreed that the order should reflect those Nations in closest proximity to Mission proper and then name those from east to west. The order was changed to: Leq'á:mel, Semá:th, Máthxwi, Sq'éwlets and Qwó:ltl'el. Also discussed was replacing the word unceded with unsurrendered. This was done so because members felt the word unsurrendered more clearly represented the forced removal of Indigenous peoples from their traditional lands.

After much discussion, consensus was achieved by the Siwal Si'wes Indigenous Education Advisory Council and members of the five local Nations.

The land acknowledgment evolved to its current form:

***Il stl'i kw'els spipetstexw kw'eset ite xwelmexwelh stexwlaq temexws ye Stó:lō mestiyexw.***

***Mission Public School District is located on the Traditional, Ancestral, Unsurrendered, and Shared territories of Stó:lō people, of Leq'á:mel, Semá:th, Máthxwi, Sq'éwlets and Qwó:ltl'el First Nations, stewards of this land since time immemorial.***

***Halq'eméylem is the language of this land and of Stó:lō ancestors. The place from where Halq'eméylem (Upriver dialect) originates is Leq'á:mel. The language comes from the land, and it has been this way since time immemorial.***

***We, as members of the Mission Public School District community, embrace our commitments to strengthening partnerships and relationships with all First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities.***

We commissioned Katzie Artist slámex, Rain Pierre, to create wooden plaques engraved with this land acknowledgement, one for each school and for each department throughout SD75. We are grateful for the support of the Members of SD75 Board of Education in this endeavour.

***The evolution of this work represents honouring and respecting the First Peoples of S'ólh Téméxw, the shared asserted territory of Stó:lō People.***

**We would like to extend our gratitude to member of the local Nations and to members of the Siwal Si'wes Indigenous Education Council who led the way in this work.**