



**NANAIMO LADYSMITH**  
**PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Letter from the Office of the  
Superintendent

November 10, 2023

**RE: Concerns re Circus Advertisements**

Dear Jenny Rutherford,

Thank you for taking the time to write to the Board of Education on September 29, 2023. Your letter was shared at a public meeting held on October 25, 2023, and I have been asked to respond and provide an update.

The school district does have a [procedure](#) and processes in place to approve fundraising or advertising initiatives. As you can imagine, we receive many requests to share information with our communities.

As a result of your letter, I had tasked our Learning Services Department and the Executive Director of Communications to examine our current practice and determine if it should be updated and communicated to our school staff. Updated instructions were developed and shared with school principals this past week and it is now very clear on what materials can or cannot be shared with families and who will approve the distribution.

I appreciate your perspective in this matter.

Sincerely,

Scott Saywell  
Superintendent/CEO

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**From:** Jenny Claire Rutherford

**Sent:** September 29, 2023 11:33 PM

**To:** Trustees

**Subject:** Concerns re: circus advertisements handed out in class

**CAUTION:** External Message

To the Board:

I am writing this letter to voice my concerns about the mass distribution of so-called "free" circus tickets through the school system. My kids happen to attend Randerson, but I have spoken with parents of children attending three other elementary schools in town and they have all had the same experience.

First, to get this out of the way: the circus is an exciting and fun event that children will for the most part very much enjoy if they're lucky enough to be able to go. This is not an "anti-circus" letter. We all love the circus. I have no problem with the circus coming to town and entertaining the local kids. If they were actually doing it for free I would be the first to praise them for their generosity and to suggest absolutely everyone take advantage and go.

But these aren't free tickets. The tickets that are being distributed by teachers to students admit one child with one *paying* adult. Two children means two paying adults. Three children means three paying adults. (Good luck, single parents!)

These aren't free tickets. They are a highly manipulative marketing scheme that has somehow gained enormous traction within the schools. For what reason, I'm at a loss to say. How this got started I don't know. Why are teachers assisting a for-profit business with advertising their event directly to school aged children - *while they are in school*? The "free" ticket absolutely factors in the cost of the mandatory adult ticket that must *also* be purchased for the child to get in "free". That's ...obvious, isn't it? We all understand that, don't we? And don't forget, once you get under that nostalgic striped tent there's so many shiny and tasty things to ask your mom or dad to buy!

In case it needs saying again: These aren't free tickets. They're nothing more than an advertisement small children are bringing home, they (and apparently, their teachers) having been thoroughly

bamboozled by the word "FREE". Kids hand this ticket to their parents with the wide-eyed expectation that they will now be able to enjoy a wonderful treat - it's FREE!

This is the equivalent to some one following through on those signs you see in shops that threaten to give unsupervised kids an espresso and a free puppy.

But we didn't leave our kids unsupervised. We sent them to class.

I could spend another four paragraphs laying out what all of us already know: families are struggling. Groceries are expensive. Housing is scarce. Paychecks aren't rising to match the cost of inflation. Parents all over the city are having to say "no" to their kids about all kinds of small pleasures and pastimes. They are having to prioritize many competing interests, and things get left out. This hurts. I know that and you know that. It's cruel to set parents and their kids up like this, without warning, without any opportunity for parents to "opt out" before hopes are raised and dashed. Kids don't understand the subtleties of this stuff. They're *kids*.

I very respectfully ask that the board review this situation in light of these concerns, and also look into whatever school policy has permitted for-profit businesses to advertise through our schools with the active participation of our teachers and without any parental consultation (that I am aware of). I would suggest that any such policy - if one exists that allows for such a thing - ought to be revisited.

Regards,

Jenny Rutherford, parent of two

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