

Attn: Office of the Superintendent, Board of Education

April 16, 2025

I am a parent of two students at Shas Ti Kelly Road Secondary School. I'm a member of the Parent Advisory Council and District Parent Advisory Council. I am writing to you with my personal perspective as a parent of a student who has benefitted from a school trip to Greece/Italy in March 2023 led by Mark Hunter. I understand that the district has concerns about sponsoring these international travel trips. I'd like to provide some feedback for you to consider as you make these decisions.

First of all, I understand the liability and risk involved in travel and really any activity involving minors, but thankfully we have not had an incident or complaints about this program. On the contrary, these travel clubs provide positive publicity for our schools and district. I know similar programs exist in other districts around the province. I believe it's a critical time in a student's life to appreciate and remember an excursion and school groups provide an opportunity for growth among peers.

I hope you will agree with the many educational outcomes and life skills that are developed in a student before, during, and after an experience overseas. The teachers ask participants to research their destination and present their learning. They have to learn language and culture – my son still has a Duolingo streak going in Italian! They are stretched to adapt to time zones, long journeys, busy itineraries, and different currency and social norms in another country. I was amazed at the knowledge and maturity that my son displayed when he returned.

We appreciate all the work that our staff does over and above educational time at our secondary schools. Teachers sponsor clubs, sports teams, band trips, and many other initiatives at their own will. The teachers who chaperone our trips are giving up their Spring Break to be responsible for students which brings highlights, but is not a vacation, it is a commitment. They bring extra effort before, during, and after the trip as well. I fear that we may lose staff who are willing to engage at this level when there is adversity and additional mandates put on them.

I know all students are given the chance to join the group, and it is an equal opportunity. It is well advised and explained to the youth and their families. If the cost was a barrier, there are fundraising suggestions and support. I know my son was proud to work and save for a portion of the cost. It made him appreciate it more.

In conclusion, please consider amending your administrative procedures to support international travel for secondary students. Travel insurance and complementary passes are provided by the travel agency; therefore, the school district does not have a cost. I hope you will continue to approve these trips and the leave applications for the teachers to participate knowing that preparation and care is taken to ensure the safety of all. We will continue to celebrate these good news stories in SD57.

Respectfully submitted,
Christa Porter