



April 24, 2018

Dear parents/guardians, students and school community,

As you may be aware, there has been significant community dialogue about the totem pole that stands in the front foyer of Tecumseh Public School. Recently, Lambton Kent District School Board (LKDSB) Senior Administration decided to remove the totem pole. The totem pole will be removed during the summer renovations in preparation for the consolidation of students from the John N. Given English Language Program at Tecumseh Public School.

The totem pole was created by four Tecumseh Secondary School students as an extra-curricular activity and has been located in the school for approximately 45 years. Based on LKDSB records and the reports by the students who created it, this was not commissioned by the school, nor the former Kent County Board of Education.

Although the totem pole has a longstanding history in the building, LKDSB Senior Administration, in consultation with representatives from local and northwest coast Indigenous communities and the LKDSB Indigenous Lead, have determined the totem pole is a symbol of cultural appropriation.

Totem poles are of cultural significance to Indigenous communities on Canada's West Coast. They are traditionally used to tell the stories of Indigenous families and important historical events. Additionally, totem poles do not represent Tecumseh, a Shawnee from what is now known as Ohio, as noted by local Indigenous community members.

In our role as educators, we see this as an opportunity for education and understanding of Indigenous histories and traditions and to further the educational goals of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action. We feel it is important to engage in ongoing, critical conversations about the symbols and artifacts that decorate our schools. As educators, we need to be leaders for our students and our learning environments must be a reflection of our mission, vision and belief statements.

The LKDSB recognizes it has been wrong in the past. We have displayed a piece of artwork that does not reflect our commitment to creating a safe, caring and inclusive learning environment for all. Moving forward, we commit to doing better - we all play a role in supporting our Indigenous community partners and continuing the ongoing work towards reconciliation.

We look forward to the consolidation of John N. Given Public School and Tecumseh Public School in September 2018 and we are pleased the school community has decided to continue to honour Tecumseh its name. We continue to work with our Indigenous partners to ensure that the redesigned front foyer incorporates an appropriate and accurate celebration of Tecumseh's legacy and the 'Timberwolves' mascot.

We appreciate your support as we move forward to ensure all LKDSB schools are safe, respectful and inclusive learning environments for all students. [Click here to read the LKDSB media release.](#)

Sincerely,

Jim Costello
Director of Education
Lambton Kent District School Board