

"What We Heard" Report

Seabird Island Membership Meeting on Proposed
Education Law 2025

July 30, 2025



Seabird Island Band

1. Executive Summary

On July 30, 2025, Seabird Island held a membership meeting to discuss proposed updates to the Education Law. This event was part of the Nation's democratic process and reflected Chief and Council's ongoing commitment to open, respectful communication with membership.

Meeting Participation and Attendance

Approximately 40-50 community members attended the meeting, including Elders, parents, former students, staff, leadership, and interested community members. Some members joined for the meal and left early, while others remained for the full discussion.

Community members participated in multiple ways: spoken contributions during the meeting, written feedback submitted at the session, and follow-up emails.

Scope of This Report

This report focuses exclusively on feedback related to the proposed Education Law 2025 amendments and governance structure changes.

The broader operational concerns were recorded and will be addressed through ongoing community engagement opportunities and appropriate administrative channels separate from the law-making process.

Key Observations about Participation

Notable attendance patterns shaped the discussion: Many of the members who spoke did not have children currently enrolled in the Early Childhood Education program or Lalme'lwesawtexw. Parents of current students were largely absent from the meeting, and many parents who were present shared most of their comments in writing rather than speaking aloud. This dynamic highlighted important questions about representation and the various engagement opportunities required to hear all necessary voices to guide education governance decisions.

Areas of Agreement and Tension

Despite diverse viewpoints, common themes emerged: deep care for children's education, commitment to democratic decision-making, and desire for meaningful improvements to governance structures.

Key tensions centered on who should have decision-making authority in education matters, some parents shared openly their operational concerns, with feeling overshadowed by members without school-aged children, reflecting broader questions about representation in governance.

Missing Perspectives

Important voices were missing from the discussion, particularly member parents with children currently enrolled in Early Childhood Education and Lalme'lwesawtexw, as well as families from neighboring Nations whose children attend the school. Their absence was felt throughout the meeting, as many concerns were shared second-hand rather than from direct experience.

Democratic Process in Action

The meeting demonstrated the democratic process working as intended: providing space for honest feedback, respectful disagreement, and meaningful dialogue about governance changes.

Every effort has been made to accurately capture community input through anonymous AI transcription, detailed meeting notes, and the inclusion of all written submissions. If you believe something important was missed or misrepresented, please contact hdeboer@seabirdisland.ca.

2. Context and Legal Foundation

Democratic Foundation

This consultation follows the democratic Law-Making Protocol that Seabird Island members approved with 96% support in December 2021. This protocol outlines how Chief and Council must:

1. Present proposed changes.
2. Listen to community feedback.
3. Make decisions after consultation.

The process provides structured opportunities for discussion, disagreement, and honest feedback, building trust through two-way communication, even when the conversation was difficult.

Community Participation

Community members engaged through multiple channels: Some spoke during the meeting, others shared feedback in writing, and some listened without speaking.

Written submissions provided perspectives that might not have been shared aloud, ensuring a broader range of voices were heard.

3. Feedback on Proposed Education Law Changes

The proposed changes to the Education Law 2025 introduce three main governance changes:

- Creating a new Board of Education made up of a subset of a minimum of three Chief and Council members.
- Disbanding the current Education Committee.
- Strengthening the structure and governance of the Parents' Committee.

Clarifying the Scope and Impact of Proposed Amendments

Community members sought clarity which parts of the education system would be impacted by the proposed amendments, including:

- Early Childhood Education program.
- Off-reserve education support.
- College and university support programs.
- Support services for students attending schools outside the community.

Note: The proposed Board of Education would be responsible for kindergarten to Grade 12 (K–12) education services and programs delivered within the community.

Concerns About the Board of Education

Community members raised concerns, including:

- Why were the Education Committee and Parents' Committee paused right before the law changes were introduced?
- Has Chief and Council been following the current accountability requirements under the existing Education Law?
- Will three Council members have enough time and the training and experience to lead this Board?

- How will this new Board improve upon the current Education Committee if it includes fewer voices and less representation?
- Why not allow broader community representation beyond just Council members?
- Could Council members on the Board have conflicts of interest?
- Could a small Board of only Council members lead to bias or misuse of power?
- Should there be another community vote (referendum) before approving these changes?

Suggestions for Improvement

Community members made several constructive suggestions:

- Add representatives from across the community—elders, youth, teachers, early childhood education specialists, and cultural knowledge keepers.
- Diverse voices can bring knowledge, history, and lived experience to help guide decisions.
- Review the Education Law regularly with community members' input.
- Set clear performance goals for the Board of Education.
- Include parents from other Nations whose children attend the school.
- Create clear goals for student success.
- Establish clear accountability mechanisms for the Board of Education to report back to Chief and Council and the community.
- Define specific training requirements for Board Members.
- Create a process for community members to raise concerns about Board decisions.

Feedback on the Parents' Committee

What we heard:

- Many supported automatic membership for all parents of current students, though some were unsure if that would improve participation.
- Some questioned requiring parents to sign the Respectful Workplace Policy.
- Some want a say in the Committee's Terms of Reference.
- There was frustration that the Parents' Committee was not consulted on the proposed changes to the Education Law, especially since it was paused right before the new draft was introduced.

- One member was unsure about the difference between a Board and a Committee.

Note: Typically, a Board has decision-making authority and is responsible for leading and overseeing the whole area it governs—in this case, education. A Board can create Committees to help with specific tasks. Committees do not have authority on their own. Instead, they are given their roles, responsibilities, and powers by the Board and must report back to the Board.

- Some said the Parents' Committee had felt "toxic" in the past—that members without children in the school were dominating conversations and making decisions without knowing what current students really need.

Questions About Legal Protection and Governance

Community members also asked:

- Will the new structure give better legal protection to the Nation?
- What happens if the Board and full Council disagree?
- Could Council members face conflicts of interest in both roles?

Communication and Engagement

Representation and Inclusion

Community members asked important questions about representation:

- Where do elders, matriarchs, and cultural knowledge keepers fit into education governance?
- How are youth voices included in education decisions?
- What role do neighbouring First Nations communities whose children attend Seabird Island School have in governance and planning?
- How will the Board ensure that traditional knowledge and cultural teachings remain central to the education system?
- What mechanisms will ensure that off-reserve members have meaningful input into education governance?

Communication and Engagement

- **Regular Reporting:** Community members want clear, regular reports from the Board of Education about decisions made, budgets approved, and progress toward education goals.
- **Consultation Protocols:** Members want established protocols for how and when the Board will consult with the community on major education decisions.

Additional Community Priorities

- **Youth Voice:** There was a desire to include youth voices in education planning and decision-making.
- **Consultation Timeline Too Short:** Some felt that the August 29, 2025, deadline for consultation is not enough time to properly review the proposed changes to the Education Law and gather more community members' input.
- **Governance Training:** Community members suggested that Board members should receive formal governance training to ensure effective leadership.
- **Performance Metrics:** Members want clear metrics to measure the Board's effectiveness and the education system's success.

4. Analysis of Feedback: Common Themes and Areas of Disagreement

Common Areas of Concern

- **Governance Accountability:** Some community members asked for stronger accountability from Chief and Council, Board members, and senior staff. There were concerns that matters raised by some parents, past/present teachers, and students are sometimes ignored or not taken seriously.
- **Representation:** Concerns about whether a Board composed only of Chief and Council members provides sufficient representation of diverse community voices and perspectives.
- **Transparency in Decision-Making:** Need for clear, transparent processes for Board decisions and regular communication with the community about governance matters.

Areas of Disagreement and Tension

- **Role of Members Without Current School-Aged Children:** There were mixed views about how much say community members without school-aged children should have in education decisions.
- **Governance Structure:** Disagreement between those who support the streamlined Board of Education approach versus those who prefer broader community representation in education governance.
- **Authority and Accountability:** Tension between the desire for efficient decision-making and the need for community input and oversight of education governance.
- **Parents' Committee Consultation and Structure:** Some members were frustrated that the Parents' Committee was paused without warning, just before the law amendments were introduced. This raised concerns about transparency and process. Opinions differed about whether all parents should automatically be members of the Committee, and some were still unsure whether the committee gives parents space to be heard.

5. Voices We Still Need to Hear

Missing Perspectives

Although many helpful insights were shared, some important voices were missing:

- Parents with children in Early Childhood Education or at Lalme'lwesawtexw—including those from neighbouring Nations.
- Recent graduates of Lalme'lwesawtexw who could speak to their experiences.
- Younger community members who may have different views on education.
- Off-reserve members whose children could benefit from stronger education options.

Opportunity for Broader Engagement

The meeting had a relatively low turnout, showing the need for other ways to reach members. These have included:

- Small, informal sessions with families currently using the school.
- Ways for off-reserve members to share feedback.
- Follow-up conversations with specific groups — parents, youth, and Elders.

6. Next Steps and Moving Forward

Celebrating Member Engagement

The meeting demonstrated important strengths:

- Deep care for children's education.
- Willingness to have honest, difficult conversations.
- Respect for democratic decision-making, amid disagreement.
- Desire to improve governance rather than accept the status quo.
- Commitment to the importance of inclusive, transparent decision-making processes.

How Feedback Will Be Used

The feedback provides input on:

1. The specific Education Law amendments: These suggestions, like changes to the representation on the Board of Education or Parents' Committee, will help Chief and Council make decisions about the proposed law.
2. Feedback about broader operational and administrative matters: These concerns will be addressed by ongoing community engagement opportunities, school administration and governance teams through defined administrative channels, separate from the law-making process.

Clear Information Requirements

The feedback highlights the need for Chief and Council to provide clear, direct answers to community members' questions about:

- How different voices (youth, elders, matriarchs, neighbouring First Nations with students at Lalme'lwesawtexw) will be included in education governance.
- How the Board of Education will be held accountable to the community and Chief and Council.
- What mechanisms will be available for community feedback and appeals.
- How conflicts of interest will be identified and managed.
- What training Board members will receive.

Next Steps

Chief and Council will:

1. *Review all feedback received up to August 29, 2025.*
2. *Continue to reach out to groups to share their views, especially families with children currently in the Early Childhood Education program and Lalme'lwesawtexw.*
3. *Consider amendments to the proposed Education Law based on all input.*
4. *Provide clear, direct answers to community members' questions about education services, supports, and governance structures.*
5. *Work with the CAO and Lalme'lwesawtexw teams to address broader issues.*
6. *Develop clear policies and procedures for Board accountability and transparency.*
7. *Keep engaging with the community to hear governance perspectives.*

7. Conclusion: A Foundation for Growth

The July 30 meeting was an important part of Seabird Island's journey to self-govern its education system. While concerns were raised, the discussion showed strong commitment to creating effective governance for better education.

The message from community members was clear: they want to be partners in building a stronger education governance structure, not just recipients of decisions made without them. The feedback on the specific Education Law amendments will help guide the law-making decisions, while broader operational concerns will be addressed through appropriate administrative channels. Chief and Council's decision to hold this meeting and listen to difficult feedback shows their ongoing commitment to transparency and member involvement.

What emerged from this meeting is an opportunity to use this feedback to build something better—governance structures that truly represent community voices and ensure accountable, effective leadership of the education system.

The feedback received emphasizes community members' need for clear information, direct communication from leadership, and inclusive governance that represents all voices—from youth to elders to families from other First Nations whose children attend Lalme'lwesawtexw.

The goal is clear: build an education governance structure that reflects Seabird Island's values, supports children, and strengthens its future. The voices heard on July 30 are part of that work, and more voices are welcome.

This report summarizes what we heard on July 30 and from written submissions. Chief and Council are committed to honest, ongoing dialogue as we move forward together to improve education governance at Seabird Island.

The focus must remain on creating a governance structure that is accountable, transparent, and representative while ensuring efficient decision-making for the benefit of all students and families served by the Seabird Island education system.