

April 22, 2014

SCHOOL TRUSTEES

Chair
Baljinder Narang

Vice-Chair
Ron Burton

Meiling Chia

Larry Hayes

Harman Pandher

James Wang

Gary Wong

Last week, the Board held its annual public budget meeting, attended by the largest crowd in recent history. We listened to parents, employee groups, special interest groups and members of the public who spoke with candor and passion. They spoke with pride of Burnaby's programs and with frustration of the potential budget cuts.

Over the years, Burnaby's Boards of Education have been forced to make some very difficult budgetary decisions. They have always done so, however, through sound decisions and, each one, for the betterment of public education in Burnaby.

Burnaby has sustained enrolment and continues to attract students to our schools by developing creative and innovative programs, including our International Education program, Challenge programs, academies, and one of the strongest Advanced Placement programs in the country. We continue to lead the way in energy efficiency and management programs. We are fortunate to have fostered incredible support from the City of Burnaby for our crossing guards, community schools and investment in our facilities, such as our new track at Burnaby Central.

Conversely, we see our operation costs increase every year--at a rate too large to sustain. We are told there is more money in education than ever before. Somehow, this is difficult to believe.

Through sound fiscal management, building partnerships and innovative programming, we have managed to garner surpluses and keep our budget shortfall to a minimum. After years of chronic underfunding by the provincial government, however, we can no longer hold off the deeper cuts.

There is no doubt that we are facing difficult times.

But this Board will not take the easy way out. We have been elected to represent our community and make decisions that will have the least adverse effect on public education in Burnaby, through a balanced budget.

We have done so with the thoughtful input of our many contributors and our very capable administrative staff. And I would like to thank the efforts, in particular, of Secretary Treasurer, Greg Frank and Superintendent of Schools, Kevin Kaardal.

Please know that we have taken our deliberations very seriously.

A recent poll reported a real disconnect between people's perception of our education system and what is actually happening in schools. In Burnaby all the evidence demonstrates we offer a world class system. To ensure people understand the truth, we must all work together.

It is time for the provincial government and the Minister of Education to stop the rhetoric and properly fund education. It is time for the Government to be leaders and reverse the acrimonious climate of labour relations. It is time for them to address the recent court decision on class size and composition once and for all.

We thank you for taking the time to share your thoughtful insight throughout this budgetary process. And thank you for your interest in public education in Burnaby.

Baljinder Narang
Chair, Burnaby Board of Education