

May 27, 2014

SCHOOL TRUSTEES

Chair
Baljinder Narang

Vice-Chair
Ron Burton

Meiling Chia

Larry Hayes

Harman Pandher

James Wang

Gary Wong

Komagata Maru (1914-2014)

Last Friday, Trustee Hayes and I, had the privilege of attending the Komagata Maru - 100th Anniversary Commemoration Event hosted by SFU Harbour Centre.

It was on May 23rd, 1914 when the Japanese Ship Komagata Maru entered Burrard Inlet carrying 376 passengers, primarily Sikhs and some Hindus and Muslims from the Indian sub-continent who were all British subjects. Upon arrival, the passengers were detained by Canadian Immigration, not granted permission to land, and asked to stay anchored in the harbour. They faced many hardships including lack of food or clean water. They were denied medical attention, communication with their families and proper legal counsel. After two months, the Komagata Maru passengers were forced to return to India where they faced persecution and many were killed upon arrival in India.

The history of this voyage of the Komagata Maru and its passengers has not been forgotten. The resistance of the passengers and their commitment to equality and democracy continues to be inspiring. Their story is not about what happened in 1914, but is part of the long struggle to create a Canada that resists racism and embraces diversity.

As a district we nurture tolerance in many ways including through unique course and program offerings. Students learn about new cultures, languages and history through

- Punjabi, Japanese, Italian, Spanish, French and German secondary language courses;
- Mandarin Language Arts Program;
- Aboriginal Enhancement Agreement; and
- our support of Policy 5.45 on Sexual Orientation/Gender Identity.

The stories of Komagata Maru - and many like it – are stories that all Canadians can relate to today.

For me, their significance as a legacy was vividly illustrated in the school leaving ceremony I attended at Byrne Creek Secondary. There, I saw first-hand, how far we have come as a country in welcoming people from all nations of the world and celebrating their achievements as one. It was a moment to reflect on how different things were today, as compared to 100 years ago. And to realize that while we have made much progress in becoming tolerant of new people that come to our shores, we still have a long way to go in acceptance of our differences, be they based on race, gender, special needs, or sexual orientation.

For trustees and senior staff, school leaving ceremonies are the highlight of our collective work. They provide an opportunity to recognize

- the achievement of our graduates and their families who have supported them
- the many Burnaby principals, teachers and support staff who have been a part of their lives
- and the many partners throughout the Burnaby community and beyond who support our school communities

On behalf of the Board, I would like to congratulate the Burnaby Schools Graduating Class of 2014 as well as the adult graduates from Burnaby's Community & Continuing Education Program. We are indeed proud of you and wish you every success in the future.

Thank you for your interest in public education in Burnaby.

Baljinder Narang
Chair, Burnaby Board of Education