

February 26, 2019

Good evening and welcome.

As a four-term elected school trustee, I want to take a moment to reflect on some of the rhetoric I've heard during recent election campaigning. I witnessed a similar kind of "us and them" tone during the civic elections, where trustee candidates in Burnaby and elsewhere tried to make voters fearful. Being so-called "anti-SOGI" was seen as an easy way to garner votes. I'm proud to say that none of the candidates standing on that platform were elected here.

In Burnaby Schools we have a long history of inclusion, such that diversity is now simply a part of the fabric of who we are. When students feel welcome, supported, represented, and safe, they are more engaged in learning. We continue to encourage the ideals of inclusion through policies and initiatives. This week our schools are participating in Pink Shirt Day. It's one of several opportunities to explore kindness and respect for others. Additionally, just last month we approved doubling – to four – the number of rainbow crosswalks that greet our secondary students. They serve as powerful symbols of inclusion.

Sometimes the political rhetoric I mentioned earlier makes me worry about the future. Then I hear our students speak to us at a board meeting or in their school and my spirits are lifted. Many of our children could teach the politicians, and other adults, lessons about how to treat each other with dignity and respect – regardless of our differences. When it's our students' turn to lead, they will reflect their true colours and, I hope, take strength from the pink and rainbows of their school days.

On behalf of the Board—thank you.

Gary Wong, Chair
Burnaby Board of Education