

December 8, 2020

Good evening and welcome to the final Board Meeting of 2020.

- Normally at this time of year, we would all be attending school holiday concerts and events – a glittering showcase that highlights our commitment to Arts Education and celebrates our school communities. It goes without saying that this year is different.
- What hasn't changed, though, is the many dedicated hours from those behind the scenes who cultivate holiday happiness – something that is perhaps even more important this year. Schools are taking many different approaches to honouring the season, with some moving to virtual celebrations, virtual pancake breakfasts and others doing class projects. On behalf of the Burnaby Board of Education, I want to extend our sincere thanks to teachers, staff, and parent volunteers for all you do to help make the season shine.
- I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge that all of this is happening during a time when the pandemic has caused stress, anxiety, hardship, and even sorrow for so many. Through it all, parents have had to make difficult decisions, including about sending their child into school. Staff throughout the District have been phenomenal, as they focus not just on student learning – whether in person or remote – but also on health and safety, maintaining community connection and supporting students and families in many ways including supporting families who are facing food insecurity.
- As we look ahead to January, we are hopeful for the new year. While we cannot predict how COVID-19 will impact the remainder of the school year, the District is preparing for multiple scenarios and will be ready for what comes next. Thank you to the many parents and staff who have shared your experiences with us, and also a special thank you to our school based staff who have been connecting with families in the Transition Program to ascertain their plans moving forward. Your input is helping us to prepare for an extension to remote learning options.
- The District has also reached out to all families, students and staff for their thoughts as part of an online conversation asking: *What are some important things we should consider about student learning as we develop our plans moving forward?* As of this afternoon, over 1600 individuals have participated in the process. It is especially heartening to see families being able to participate in their home language and have their comments translated on the ThoughtExchange platform. The survey will be open until midnight tomorrow.

- With the pandemic, we have and will continue to make many changes. We want to engage with and learn from the experiences of people both in and out of our schools, including those learning from home.
- We also know that, as the saying goes, necessity can be the ‘mother of invention.’ We have heard that there are some changes people like and want to see continued when COVID-19 is no longer dominating all our lives. For example, we have heard from families, already, about how much they appreciate the additional outdoor learning opportunities.
- And finally, even though this holiday season will be unique for us all, on behalf of the Board, I want to wish you and all the people you care about a safe, joyful and restful holiday – all the best for the New Year.

Jen Mezei, Chair
Burnaby Board of Education