

**March 30, 2021**

Good Evening,

Yesterday the Provincial Health Officer updated public health orders for all of BC – more information will be sent to families shortly. Throughout the last year, our school communities have shown flexibility and resilience as we shift in response to new information, orders, and guidance.

What has helped us as a district respond to the changing dynamics of this pandemic, has been the focus on safety and connection. The culture of caring that is intrinsic in Burnaby Schools has helped maintain connection to our schools for students, families and staff in our district and has been instrumental as we pivoted to virtual learning opportunities and supporting students in different ways.

Thank you to our staff, students and families for your continued adherence to District guidelines and the safety measures in place. The pandemic has truly shown how our school communities support each other.

Unfortunately, the pandemic has also highlighted a darker side to society as well.

The horrific murders of eight people in Georgia have focused a lens on anti-Asian racism in the US and here at home and highlighted the intersection between racism and misogyny.

According to a statement from the UBC School of Public Policy and Global Affairs, “In 2019, half of UBC students who identified as ethnically Asian reported experiencing discrimination. Since the onset of the pandemic, half of reported anti-Asian racist incidents in Canada took place in BC, with women targeted in 70% of incidents, half of which took place in public spaces”.

In Vancouver, a 717% increase in anti-Asian hate crimes were reported last year.

Anti-Asian racism is an issue that hits close to home and has been a catalyst for many in our community to speak up and share their experiences. As a board, we want to reiterate that we are committed to anti-racism and condemn anti-Asian racism.

Racism affects us all differently, but there are some commonalities within a cultural group. For many, the unique nature of anti-Asian racism is connected to the myth of the model minority. The model minority myth focuses on stereotypes of Asians as hard-working, quiet & submissive. It is rooted in these stereotypes that have a long history.

When anti-Asian racism is pervasive in our society, it becomes normalized. The current increase in racist attitudes, microaggression and behaviours towards Asians and people of Asian descent that have escalated during the pandemic has had a negative impact on the well-being and safety of our community, including our school communities.

For myself, I have been reflecting on my own experiences growing up in the Lower Mainland. Growing up, I would get called racial slurs or told to go back to where I came from. I would see friends made fun of for speaking in their language. These were common occurrences and, unfortunately, still happen occasionally to this day. What is different is that, as I've gotten older, I've grown a thicker skin. But no one, especially our youth, should have to grow a thicker skin to endure racism. No one should feel unsafe because of their race.

Our community deserves better.

I would like to thank community members who have reached out to learn more about our district anti-racism work, and I am looking forward to discussing this further tonight.

Understanding our own privilege and the experiences and perspectives of others does not diminish our own lived experiences. It gives us a better understanding of how our experiences collectively contribute to the whole picture.

Addressing systemic racism will be a long process and education has a vital role to play in it.

It is a journey we are committed to as a board to support our staff, students and families and to foster safe and caring communities.

**Jen Mezei, Chair**

**Burnaby Board of Education**