

May 25, 2021

Good evening and welcome,

As we quickly approach the final weeks of school before summer break, planning is well underway for the 2021-22 school year, including preparation of the budget. Before we get to it in the agenda tonight, I want to take a moment to share some context.

Under the *School Act*, Boards are required to have a balanced budget. This year, achieving that requires some difficult decisions.

There is no doubt that the pandemic has had an impact on areas that affect the budget, such as enrollment of international students and the ability to rent out our facilities when they are not in use by schools.

The Board was pleased to receive one-time Safe Return to School funds for the 2020-21 school year from both the Federal and Provincial governments. These funds allowed us to develop program options and put supports in place to best meet the needs of our local community. The grants also provided for flexibility in staffing and resourcing these programs. At this point, we have not received any indication from either level of government that these funds will continue for the next school year.

Additionally, we have also been tasked to plan for Stage 1 for September.

All of these factors add up to get us to a place where maintaining the status quo budget would leave us with a significant shortfall.

That fiscal reality runs alongside another reality: any budget adjustments have the potential to directly affect students and their families, teachers, and other school-based and district staff. As a result, we have had to align resources and staffing levels to match that of our revised student enrollment numbers. From whatever angle you look at it, these are not easy decisions.

There are a number of factors that have guided us as trustees through this process. The first is listening. We have sincerely appreciated the chance to hear directly from our partner groups representing parents, students, teachers and support staff, as well as principals and vice-principals. We have also heard from individuals who offered their perspectives. We deeply valued all the input provided to us. We heard how these decisions would impact the school, classroom and students. And we heard your ideas.

In making decisions as a Board, we took a deliberate approach to look at everything through the lens of having the least possible impact on students, staff and families – especially for vulnerable students and students with diverse abilities and disabilities.

In this regard, the priorities and values outlined in the strategic plan that put students at the centre and reflect the power of diversity, equity, access and inclusion helped us navigate through these difficult choices.

We have applied the surplus to this year's balance as much as possible, recognizing that we must also be fiscally prudent for future years.

We are not the only Board of Education across BC wrestling with this difficult reality. For our part, trustees and I have met with local MLAs to discuss the situation in Burnaby and to advocate. We also advocated earlier in the school year for more funding for public education through our submissions to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services. This was done as part of the provincial public budget consultation, as well as through the Funding Model Review consultation process. And we will continue to advocate and take advantage of any financial relief directed to school districts.

Budgets are always difficult, but we are hopeful that as we look to the year ahead, we will see a recovery across the province that will also positively impact factors that affect revenue for school districts.

In the meantime, we will continue to spend the bulk of our budget where it is needed most: in classrooms on students. And we will continue to do it with a focus on engagement, mental health, well-being and connection, which has become even more important since the onset of the pandemic.

While COVID-19 has changed all our lives and greatly affected education, it has also given us an opportunity to reflect on how we operate, and we will continue to look for ways for renewal that can best support students and families.

We remain committed to creating the best possible path forward together in these challenging times and always.

Jen Mezei, Chair

Burnaby Board of Education