

June 22, 2021

Good evening and welcome to our final Board Meeting of this unprecedented school year.

I have two items on the Board Chair Report tonight.

With yesterday being Indigenous Peoples Day, I wanted to provide you with an update on the Community Hub for Indigenous Learning and the community engagement visioning sessions at Stride Elementary.

As highlighted in the project proposal:

As a district we have been focused on bringing the local history of the hə́n'á əmíh'ə́m and sk̓w̓xwú7mesh speaking people forward into our schools, while making our classrooms and school communities reflective of Indigenous peoples, histories and perspectives. A large component of this focus is ensuring there is physical space for Indigenous learning and students in our school and in community. Through consultation on our second Indigenous Education Enhancement Agreement, the Indigenous community provided input into the goals that the School District would work toward in supporting Indigenous learners in Burnaby Schools. One of the three goal areas is Community Connectedness and Belonging, with the goal statement being 'To increase knowledge and understanding of Indigenous history, traditions and cultures for all learners, supported by the wider school and community.'

"Through the development of a Community Hub for Indigenous Learning, Burnaby will provide space and place for Indigenous students and their families to access learning and cultural opportunities in a way that is representative of our diverse Indigenous community. Creating such a learning hub on school grounds will foster a strong connection between the School District and the local Indigenous community, advancing the School District's commitment toward the goals of reconciliation."

The district has been engaging with community stakeholders in a robust visioning process to gather input to help inform the schematic drawings for the new Stride building including separate sessions for families, community groups and staff. In addition, there have been separate sessions with Indigenous community representatives and families, as well as the Indigenous Education Working Group.

Trustee Stewart and I were privileged to represent the board at the June 2 session – within a week of the horrible discovery at Tk'emlups te Secwépemc. It was an incredibly humbling experience to be part of such a powerful gathering, and what was shared by Elders underscores the desire for a gathering space as a safe place and a healing space within Burnaby. and it is with an open heart that I share some of what I heard and what I learned as planning takes place.

I heard that we need to create a welcoming space for everyone to feel at home where their own culture and teachings are respected and welcome. A space that is safe and where others can be invited and come together with one heart, one mind to create space for their children. And a space that inspires, cultural connection, individuality of each child and also promotes unity.

It was a meeting that will stay with me as a milestone on my journey towards reconciliation and I am incredibly grateful to the Elders and community members who are walking with us through this process and who have guided us with conviction and generosity of spirit.

It has been a full school year of virtual meetings and adapted operations. But this year, like every other, trustees have been privileged to virtually celebrate the many incredible accomplishments of our students and staff in public education. We have seen the resiliency and fortitude of students and look forward to virtual graduation ceremonies this week.

This year was only possible because of the dedicated staff at school and district sites who been able to provide a sense of normalcy in a year that was anything but normal. While the words "thank you" feel wholly inadequate, on behalf of the Board, I want to thank all our staff for everything that they have done to make this highly unusual school year a success.

Thank you to our school staff and administrators for adjusting to safety protocols and updated Public Health guidelines and for fostering a sense of community in a time when connection is so incredibly important.

Thank you to our district staff, for being responsive to an ever-changing set of circumstances with coherence.

And a huge thank you, to our teachers and Educational Assistants. Thank you for being flexible in the ways we have been able to support students in their learning in classrooms, online, or in synchronous virtual classrooms and connecting to students and their families with compassion.

On behalf of the board, I wish you all a well-deserved summer break.

Jen Mezei, Chair

Burnaby Board of Education