

September 27, 2022

Good Evening and welcome staff, parents, and community members.

Tonight's board meeting marks a number of firsts.

It is the first board meeting of the school year, it is the first time we've held a public board meeting in our new board office, but it is also the final time that the current board will meet this term.

It has been a tumultuous four years and I'm incredibly proud of the work this board has accomplished. Our work began by developing a strategic plan that honored the culture of the district yet centred our work of continuous improvement on our shared values: students come first, the power of diversity, equity, access and inclusion, collaboration and partnership, curiosity, innovation and discovery, and excellence, success, and improvement. This led to our strategic priorities of thriving students, and inclusive and caring community, and inspired workplace, strengthened by partnerships, and a modern safe and sustainable learning environment.

Straight out of the gate, in addition to our fiduciary role, this board explored ways to meet the needs of our students, families, staff, and community. After broad community consultation, and in collaboration with the provincial government and the city of Burnaby, 773 before and after-school childcare spaces were approved for the Burnaby school district.

With the goal of increasing student voice and engagement, we held the first *We Mean Green in Burnaby Schools Expo*, with 140 students, staff, and special guests to guide the future of sustainability in our district.

And then March of 2020 hit. As we moved from future planning to reacting to a pandemic, what continued to guide us were our strategic priorities and our values as a district. As we focused on community connection and supporting families it became even more apparent that schools are the heart of our community and the importance of connection to community.

It is phenomenal how schools were able to respond and support students and their families with an ever-changing landscape. As students and teachers transitioned to online learning, and for some, back to in-person learning with new protocols, vulnerable families were supported by a district food hub, over 1,000 laptops were distributed to students requiring them and 3,220 students were supported to learn out of school in programs for immune-compromised, at home school, and transition. This is solely due to all 4,500 district employees who responded to these examples and many other challenges with compassion and empathy. Thank you.

In the last two years, despite many pandemic-related operational challenges, there have also been a number of important governance accomplishments.

The board undertook a governance restructure to allow for more partner group discussion and input and revised the reporting format to allow for more transparency. And on the agenda tonight is a revised Code of Conduct for trustees.

In February, the board approved our first sustainability strategic plan that reflects the voices and values of our school communities, includes goals, objectives, and actions to increase our climate action response, and further empowers youth to be leaders in sustainability. The plan includes Indigenous knowledge and creates a foundation to understanding and leading sustainable practices in the district.

We also were able to engage with our community virtually when we could not in person. Over 4,000 students, parents, and staff provided input on the district Programs of Choice review and over 9,000 students, parents, staff, and community partners shared their voices on the district Anti-Racism, Equity, and Inclusion survey. This leads to the report and recommendations we will hear tonight in our work to develop an antiracism action plan that respects and honors the voices and lived experiences of those affected by systemic racism, implicit bias, and discrimination. And it is my hope that the future board will continue to have courageous conversations about racism to create a better path forward together.

We are looking forward to seeing the Indigenous Learning Hub come to fruition as part of the new Stride Avenue Community school that will provide a much-needed community space as part of our work towards Reconciliation.

In conclusion, to my fellow trustees, I would like to say thank you. It has been an incredible honor to serve our community with you. The work we have been able to accomplish together is a testament to what we can accomplish when we keep students at the centre of our decisions and work collaboratively in the best interests of students, staff, and families of the Burnaby School District.

To Trustee Cunningham and Trustee Stewart, who are not running for re-election, on behalf of the board I would like to extend our gratitude for your service to our community. I know the work we have done and the directions we have taken were made better because of your input. Always know your contributions are now woven into the fabric of the Burnaby School District.

Jen Mezei, Chair
Burnaby Board of Education