

June 27, 2023

One need only scroll through social media or visit news sites to see a disturbing and seemingly increasing trend of people attacking inclusive culture.

Social media and online news feeds are designed to ensure people see that which they agree with. The posts and stories echo over and over until they become an individual's or a group's engrained truth.

When this Board and District takes action towards developing a more inclusive learning environment, the opinions formed with social media show up in our email inboxes. Emails filled with ultimatums and unacceptable language to Burnaby School District staff and to members of this Board. Words that would never be uttered in a face-to-face interaction in a civil society.

Instead of radicalized reaction, with its roots in bias and under education and amplified in a social media echo chamber, as a society we need to move towards well-informed conversation, respect, and understanding.

We want to take a moment to reiterate, as the Burnaby Board of Education, what we stand for: we work to create and support a culture of kindness and inclusivity that encourages students to be proud of their authentic selves. We take seriously the responsibility to translate our ideals into action.

As we approach the end of the school year, this month we celebrate both National Indigenous History Month and Pride. Amidst the excitement of end-of-year events, graduation, and school leaving ceremonies there have been many opportunities across the Burnaby School District to show our unequivocal support for the diverse community that makes up our schools.

Throughout the year there have also been several occasions for students to come together in friendship, allyship, and joyful celebration of being fully and freely who they are. The strength in our differences and the richness of what makes us unique is honoured. Diversity is a part of the fabric of who we are both within classrooms and in the community.

For students and staff to see themselves and their stories reflected in the world around us, such as in school environments, sends strong messages of love, support, and inclusion. This is especially important for children and youth. Building understanding of our shared history and the diverse society in which we live lifts us all up.

Learning firsthand about other perspectives - whether it be about cultural awareness or additional expressions of who you are - benefits everyone. We strive to make classrooms and school communities reflective of Indigenous peoples, histories, and perspectives. We have also been focused on system-wide action and efforts to be actively anti-racist.

We want to thank students, all staff across the District, families, and partners - both in education and in the community. There is much success to celebrate from this school year. What we are doing together makes a difference for every child. When students feel welcomed, supported, represented, and safe, they are more engaged in learning.

As we head into the summer, schools remain vibrant, active places with learning opportunities in Summer Session.

As Trustees, we will be gathering in July at the Burnaby Board of Education table at Burnaby Pride, and in August we will walk with the Burnaby School District in the Vancouver Pride Parade to continue to celebrate and uplift our 2SLGBTQAI+ community members. We encourage you to join us there.

We want to end with a strong message about our belief as Trustees: treating each other with dignity and respect, regardless of our differences, is non-negotiable. As a Board, we will continue to advocate for and celebrate each child, as well as for the values of inclusion and the power of diversity that strengthen our community.

Bill Brassington, Chair
Burnaby Board of Education