

December 17, 2024

Good evening and welcome.

For many, the holiday season in K-12 schools is often characterized as a chaotic time, full of energy, emotions, and - most certainly - exhaustion. If you doubt this, I encourage you to visit a Burnaby school this Friday afternoon around 2:55 pm.

As we approach the final week of classes in December 2024, however, I want to take a moment to reflect on the deeper significance of this time of year. The holidays remind us to appreciate the gifts we often overlook or underappreciate - gifts we have in abundance in our schools, like the transformative power of music.

As a Trustee, the weeks leading up to winter break are some of my most cherished. Over the past two and a half weeks, I've had the absolute privilege of visiting many Burnaby schools and sharing in their winter celebrations. Surrounded by melodies that evoke joy and unity, I've been reminded that so much of what we celebrate is made possible by the exceptional music programs in our schools.

Sitting in elementary gymnasiums, rented community churches, the Michael J. Fox Theatre, or drama studios in recent days, I was struck by the power of music. Whether it was children's voices singing, ukuleles strumming, guitars picking, xylophones ringing, handbells chiming, everyday buckets drumming - or, yes, even recorders playing - it's clear that music is woven into the very fabric of our holiday celebrations. And this doesn't even begin to cover the incredible instrumentation and musicality showcased by our secondary music programs: string orchestras, concert bands, chamber choirs, jazz ensembles, concert choirs, marching bands, and so much more.

The many songs and pieces performed by Burnaby students over these past weeks have - without a doubt - brought community together, transcended language and culture, and erased generational divides. Yet music in Burnaby schools isn't just a seasonal gift; it's a gift that we are privileged to enjoy throughout the school year.

In Burnaby, the current Board has continued the intentional decisions of past Boards of Education to support and protect music education in our schools. Together, over the years, we've seen the immense value that music programming offers students, families, and staff. Research consistently shows that students who engage in music education reap a multitude of benefits. They perform better academically, scoring higher in math and reading. Music strengthens memory, enhances focus, and fosters creativity. But beyond these measurable benefits, music is inherently inclusive.

Music invites everyone to participate and share in the joy of song, creating a sense of community. At each concert I attended, I saw firsthand how every student had the opportunity to participate in a way that worked for them. In this way, music education isn't just an "extra" in our schools - it's a core component of a well-rounded education that supports the very essence of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

We also know that music nurtures emotional intelligence. During the holidays, music expresses emotions words cannot capture - the warmth of "Silent Night," the joy of "Jingle Bells," the hope in "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy," the silliness of "Five Little Snowflakes." For children, music education

offers a safe space to explore their feelings, express their identities, and build empathy and authentic connections.

None of this would be possible in Burnaby without the support of the dedicated music specialist in each of our schools. In Burnaby we are truly fortunate to benefit from talented music educators who inspire the magic of the season and beyond. For this I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to the music educators in the Burnaby School District and to the administration staff who support their work. Their tireless efforts do not go unnoticed but can - at times - be taken for granted as we've seen happen in other school districts.

Despite the proven benefits of music education, it's often music programs that are the first to face cuts when school budgets tighten. This short-sighted approach undermines not only our students but our broader communities. A child without access to music education loses the opportunity to unlock their full potential - not just as a musician but as a learner, a creator, and as a contributing member of a something bigger than themselves. Music fosters connection, collaboration, and community, which are more critical than ever in today's world.

As we celebrate this season of giving, let us remember that investing in music education is one of the most meaningful gifts we can offer learners. Looking back on all the concerts I've attended this month, I see all too well that these are the moments that define the holiday spirit and reflect the broader importance of music in all of our lives.

To close this Chair report, I urge all of us - educators, parents, caregivers, and community members - to continue prioritizing music education in Burnaby schools. Let's make sure every child has the chance to discover their own voice, connect with others, and experience the transformative power of music - not just during the holidays but all year round.

**Kristin Schnider, Chair
Burnaby Board of Education**