

November 26, 2024

Good evening and welcome.

To begin this first Board Chair report, I would be remiss if I didn't first acknowledge and thank the Chairs who came before me. The most obvious recognition is owed to Trustee Brassington who has just concluded two successful years as the Burnaby Board of Education Chair, but additionally, I want to recognize the other three Trustees seated here this evening who have also led the Burnaby School District: Trustee Mezei, Trustee Wong, and Trustee Hayes.

Through the leadership of these individuals, the Burnaby School District has been able to navigate many storms the School District has faced over the years such as a global pandemic, a generation of provincial underfunding and under-supported classrooms, and anti-2SLGBTQIA+ backlash after adopting one of the first SOGI school district policies in the province of BC. These are but a few examples of the challenges this District has weathered and come out the other side even stronger. Whatever the challenge of the day, I'm proud to say that past Boards, and in particular, this Board continues to stay focused on, and committed to, the overarching goal of ensuring every learner has equitable access to education in a safe, inclusive learning environment where they are valued and respected.

As I take the helm as the Board Chair, it is not lost on me that there are likely more storms on the horizon. But I know this Board and, indeed, this community can and will overcome the challenges ahead if we continue to hold true to our values, our beliefs, and our priorities:

First and foremost, that means walking a path of Truth and Reconciliation, both organizationally and individually.

When I reflect on the learning experiences I had in BC's K-12 and when I look at what my children and their peers are seeing and learning a stark contrast is painted. I graduated from high school a few years *after* the last residential school in Canada closed and yet my classes never talked about this dark history in Canada, nor did we recognize and acknowledge the intergenerational trauma that Indigenous learners and their families continue to live through and endure. Reconciliation as we know it today, was not part of our common vernacular. And most certainly the truth part of truth and reconciliation was not something our education system was ready to give voice to.

That willingness to learn and, indeed, unlearn has grown substantially. But that journey is far from complete. It is a daily practice and not a check box looking to be marked off.

This past June I attended a school assembly at Brentwood Park Elementary to celebrate the culmination of the school community's 'Project of Heart,' a school-wide project that was in collaboration with artist Rain Pierre of the Katzie Nation. The project aimed to honour survivors of the residential school system, their families and community and remember the children who never made it home.

As heavy as this subject matter was, this art project created so much joy and hope amongst the students, staff, and community at that assembly it was palpable. Rain Pierre spoke to the piece that has since been installed at the school and he explained to us that when you "put your heart into things, great things will happen."

A truer statement could not have been spoken. For this statement is not only true of art, but it is also accurate of Truth and Reconciliation and the work before all of us.

In speaking specifically to the work ahead of this Board, I'm sure many are aware of the ongoing work to develop a new Strategic Plan. Already, work is underway to solicit input and insights from students, parents, caregivers, staff, and community for the development of the Board's next Strategic Plan.

Integral to this work is the Board's belief in *listening*. As a Board, we know that we must listen to the diverse voices of the Burnaby Schools community to guide us forward. However, this important work of listening goes beyond obtaining validation from the mainstream voices. It is a priority of this Board to not just seeking out the voices who are habitually included, but to recognize those who are often tokenized, silenced or ignored and to listen deeply to lived experiences of students, staff, families, and community members even when their voices are hard to hear.

Over the weekend, a few of us attended the annual BC School Trustee Association's professional learning academy where some of these themes were touched upon by speakers. Most notably was speaker Shane Saffir who impressed upon us the importance of looking to the margins and allowing those voices to be the truth-tellers and moral compasses for our work on equity, inclusion, and diversity. As the Burnaby Board of Education engages in this work on the Strategic Plan development, Shane Saffir has taught us that it's integral we look to the margins as places of belonging, cultural wealth, and community wisdom rather than places of weakness or impoverishment.

This intention will not be limited to the Strategic Plan exclusively. This intention will guide much of the work ahead of us in the balance of this Board's mandate, whether it's annual budget process, capital planning, reporting student success to the Ministry of Education and Child Care via the Enhancing Student Learning Report or revising and developing School District policy as part of our ongoing policy manual review.

To say that our plates will be full for the next two years of this Board's term is a bit of an understatement, but this is work we all believe in, and it is *the work* needed to strengthen a quality public education system that is both inclusive and responsive to the needs of learners, staff, and community.

Of course, we know BC's education system stretches beyond the borders of Burnaby and we as education partners are in a constant struggle with other competing priorities at the provincial level. That is why it is my belief that as Trustees we must keep K-12 public education at the forefront of public dialogue and stress the importance of well-funded public services in BC.

With the election of a new government, there is a new Minister of Education and Child Care, which comes with new opportunities to continue the advocacy work that we, as a Board, have already begun.

As we face increasing enrolment pressures and capacity constraints, I anticipate that these issues will focus a lot of our discussions with the new Minister, Ministry staff, and our Local MLAs, but if know anything about this Board it's that we know quality public education is not just about buildings and land. This Board will also continue to advocate that every learner has the supports they need to succeed. Yes, that means advocating for the classrooms and the education staff need to support their learning environments but it also means the protecting the safety of students, staff, and community members so they can show up authentically from where they are and as **who they are**. I can say unequivocally that this Board will not waver on this commitment regardless of any changes in the makeup of BC's Legislative Assembly.

So, to reference where I started this report, whatever storms may be brewing in the distant future or in the coming weeks, I am of the firm belief that while it may be safer to keep one's ship in the harbor during a storm, that's not what ships are built for. And that's not what this Board will do. Instead, we will hold fast and recommit ourselves to building a School District and education system we can all be proud of.

That concludes my Chair report for the November Board of Education meeting.

Kristin Schnider, Chair
Burnaby Board of Education