

January 28, 2025

Good evening and welcome.

When I sat down to write my Chair's report this month, I found myself reflecting on the heaviness that seems to permeate the world around us right now. There's a growing weight of unease and uncertainty - whether it's concerns about events south of the border, the looming federal election in Ottawa, or the budgetary constraints outlined in Victoria's recent ministry mandate letters. The one thing that seems clear is that we should brace ourselves for unexpected challenges in the months ahead.

Closer to home, I've been thinking about the pressures we're feeling in Burnaby schools. For those connected to public education in Metro Vancouver, the mounting challenges of capacity constraints, insufficient infrastructure, and limited resources are all too familiar. These issues are pressing, and the solutions are neither simple nor abundant.

Amidst this uncertainty, the Board and District remain focused on our ongoing work to engage with the community and draft a new strategic plan to guide us over the next five years. In these uncertain times, it's more important than ever to stay anchored in who we are and what we believe. Our shared values will light the way forward, helping us navigate the road ahead and focus our priorities in these challenging times.

To ground myself, I opened our last strategic plan and read the message from then-Chair Gary Wong. The opening line struck a chord with me: *"There's something special about Burnaby Schools that draws us all here."* Later in the message, another line stood out: *"It's the passion of all who work here [and, I would add, all who learn and live here] that has created the exceptionally welcoming, inclusive, and diverse learning community for which Burnaby is known."*

These words remain true today. They remind us of what sets Burnaby Schools apart and inspire us to carry forward that legacy, even as we face the challenges.

Earlier this month, I had the privilege of attending Black Excellence Day, an annual event co-hosted by the Burnaby School District and the Ninandotoo Society. This remarkable event celebrates the brilliance, resilience, contributions, and achievements of Black people worldwide. But more than that it is a call to action - a reminder of our shared responsibility to build a future where every voice is heard, valued, and celebrated.

Students from across the province participated in this powerful event, both in person and online. Hearing from presenters, including students who courageously shared their voices and advocated for change, underscored an essential truth: representation matters. While foundational skills like literacy, numeracy, and graduation rates remain central to our mission, true success is only possible when students feel seen, heard, and valued for who they are. Events like Black Excellence Day highlight what makes Burnaby truly special - our commitment to celebrating diversity, respecting and honouring lived experiences, and valuing every identity.

This month, I also had the opportunity to attend the District's virtual Town Hall, part of our ongoing work to develop a new strategic plan. This gathering provided a platform to share insights gathered from families, students, staff, and partner groups about the future direction of the District. Through

surveys, interviews, and focus groups, we've worked to understand the unique needs, goals, and challenges of the Burnaby community.

Key themes have emerged from this process:

- Equity, diversity, inclusion, and reconciliation
- Enhanced support for diverse learners
- Community and family engagement
- Social-emotional learning and mental health
- Staff recruitment, retention, and well-being
- Curriculum and educational innovation
- Improved infrastructure

We hear you. We understand the challenges facing students, staff, and families. Some of these challenges are significant, but we want you to know that this Board is in your corner. We are determined to support learners in our District as they are, where they are, and for who they are.

Meeting these goals won't be easy. With limited resources and constrained authority over issues like infrastructure and capacity growth, we face an uphill battle. But we are resolute. We will continue to advocate steadfastly for a Burnaby School District that we can all be proud of - one defined by opportunity, engagement, compassion, and optimism.

Achieving the ambitious goals set out in our new strategic plan will require not only our vision but also the extraordinary talent, innovation, and dedication of our staff. District educators, support workers, administrators, and other staff members are the heart and soul of this District. They work tirelessly every day to meet the diverse and unique needs of each student, ensuring that every learner is supported and empowered to succeed.

It is their creativity, resilience, and commitment that make it possible for us to move forward with confidence. Whether it's designing inclusive learning experiences, fostering social-emotional growth, or finding innovative ways to address challenges, our staff are essential to bringing this plan to life. Their efforts will shape the future of Burnaby Schools, and we are deeply grateful for their unwavering dedication to Burnaby students.

To achieve our goals and realize the vision that will be outlined in the new strategic plan, this Board must actively engage with all levels of government and amplify the voices of our District in calling for greater investment in public education and our students. Advocacy is not optional - it is essential to the work ahead of us. Adequate funding is the cornerstone upon which we can provide the resources, support, and opportunities every student deserves. By working collaboratively with our partners, we can push for the increased funding needed to ensure that all students thrive - emotionally, socially, and academically.

As I reflect on that feeling of heaviness that first came to mind when writing this report, it would be easy to give in to the sense of trepidation many of are feeling right now. It would be convenient to say, *We can't do this. The funding isn't there. Let's settle for "good enough."*

But that's not what this Board will do.

I believe in this Board. I believe in our shared determination to uphold the values and priorities our community has entrusted to us. I believe in our collective resolve to do the hard work required to

support and empower learners, inspire staff, and strengthen connections with families and the broader community.

Thank you for being part of this journey with us. Together, we will make Burnaby Schools an empowered learning community where every student has the opportunity to thrive.

Kristin Schnider, Chair
Burnaby Board of Education