

May 27, 2025

Good evening and welcome.

Your tummy rumbles as the morning drags on. You look up at the clock and know that lunchtime is coming soon. You don't have to worry if there will be anything to eat today because just like every other student in your school, you'll get a hot, comforting meal. You'll line up with your friends, maybe chat about which dish it'll be today. Maybe it's the mac and cheese you love, or pizza day that always draws a cheer from your table. Whatever it is, you know that food is coming. You know it's yours, no questions asked. You don't feel different from anyone else. You don't feel left out. You feel like you belong. Because at your school, no one goes without.

That is the power of Feeding Futures.

In a time of growing economic uncertainty - when inflation, housing costs, trade instability, and tariffs are making life more difficult for families across our community - Burnaby Schools continue to see the very real impacts on students and their learning. Food insecurity is no longer a fringe issue. It is one faced quietly by many families, including those who are working hard but still struggling to afford the essentials. The Burnaby Board of Education is deeply aware of these challenges and remains committed to ensuring that every student has the opportunity to thrive, no matter their circumstances.

That's why we are so grateful for the Province of British Columbia's Feeding Futures funding. This special-purpose investment provides districts with critical support to address food insecurity in schools, and the impact is profound.

On May 16, I had the privilege of visiting Stride Community School alongside Vice-Chair Mezei, Trustee Wong, Superintendent Hachlaf, District senior staff and Minister of Education and Child Care Lisa Beare. The visit was not just informative, it was heartwarming and deeply moving. We had the opportunity to see firsthand how Feeding Futures dollars are being used to power a thriving hot lunch program that feeds children not just with nutrients, but with dignity, belonging, and love.

We were welcomed into the hustle and bustle of the kitchen and serving area, where staff work hard to prepare meals. We were honoured to serve alongside student leaders, joining them in handing out plates of delicious food to their peers. There was laughter, kindness, and a deep sense of community in the room. The program is student-centered and student-powered with young people helping to run it, reinforcing the idea that everyone has a role to play in building a caring community.

After serving, we sat down with a group of students to share lunch and conversation. I asked them what their favourite meals are, and their faces lit up. "Mac and cheese!" one said without hesitation. Another added, "Spaghetti and meatballs!" followed by, "Hot dogs, for sure!" These weren't just throwaway answers; they were moments of joy, connection, and comfort that these students associate with their school. It was a powerful reminder that a hot meal is more than just food. It's security, stability, and a moment to just be a kid.

Equally moving was seeing the dedication of the staff who lead and sustain this program. These are people who do far more than serve food. They are the eyes and ears of the school. They know which students might be having just this one meal for the day. They recognize who needs an extra granola bar tucked into their backpack, or a loaf of bread for home, or a little bag of carrots and celery with lots of ranch dressing, of course (a fan favourite!). They offer not just food, but compassion, consistency, and deep care. They ensure every student feels seen, heard, and valued for who they are.

These staff members are not just the face of the program; they are its heart. Their efforts extend well beyond the school walls. They reach into the realities of the homes and lives of students. They are trusted adults who listen, support, and advocate, often becoming a primary support system for children and families in need.

The Board of Education extends its sincere thanks to the Province of British Columbia for initiating and sustaining Feeding Futures. This program is a lifeline for students. It is grounded in the understanding that education and food security go hand in hand. Because the simple truth is this: when a student's stomach is empty, their mind cannot focus, and their potential remains locked away. No child should have to sit through class in hunger. And thanks to Feeding Futures, many no longer have to.

This year also marks the launch of the new federal funding through the National School Food Program. We welcome this important initiative and are heartened to see the federal government stepping into this space. But as it currently stands, the funding allocated to Burnaby for the 2025/26 school year is just \$7,800, which is equivalent to 29 cents per student for the entire year across 27,000 students. While we appreciate this beginning, we know there is much more to be done.

It is our hope that this federal funding stream continues to grow and evolve, becoming more responsive to the real needs of communities like Burnaby. The intent is strong, and with collaboration and continued advocacy, we believe the program can become a meaningful complement to provincial initiatives like Feeding Futures. Together, these investments can build a system that reflects the actual scale of need.

Public schools have always been more than places of instruction. They are the heart of communities, places where people turn for help, connection, and opportunity. This is especially true in challenging times. That's why wrap-around supports, from food programs to mental health services, are not extras; they are essential infrastructure in helping students learn and grow.

The Board of Education plays a critical role in advocating for these supports. We continue to call for sustained, adequate funding for core K–12 operations, in addition to targeted supports like Feeding Futures. The reality is that our schools are doing more with less. And Burnaby Schools staff - the educators, support workers, administrators, meal program coordinators - are stretching themselves every day to meet the needs of their students.

To every staff member who greets students with a smile, who checks in with them quietly, who stays late to prepare food or arrange donations: you are doing life-changing work. And we thank you. You knew, when entering this profession, that you would be teaching ABCs, 123s, and perhaps Do-Re-Mi. But what you may not have expected is that you'd also be a counsellor, a social worker, an advocate, and a provider of basic needs. Your dedication is extraordinary, and it does not go unnoticed.

To our community: we ask that you continue to stand with us in supporting public schools. Join us in believing that every child deserves to be well-fed, well-taught, and well-loved. Help us keep schools as places of care, connection, and community. When students are hungry, tired, or worried, they cannot learn. But when we nourish their bodies and their spirits, we unlock their potential and their belief in themselves.

This is what Feeding Futures makes possible. And this is what we must protect, grow, and champion together.

Thank you.

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