

May 26, 2026

Good evening and welcome.

Last week, the School District's eight high schools held their annual school leaving ceremonies for Grade 12 students up at Simon Fraser University. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend this year's ceremonies because I was out of town for work until last night. To say the least, I was disappointed to miss these important events. Over the last four years, graduation ceremonies have become one of my favourite responsibilities as a Trustee. They provide an opportunity – a moment – to see the depth of student success on full display with more than a little pomp and circumstance.

As each ceremony day passed, I found myself reflecting on the significance of these moments, not just for graduating students and their families, but also for the school communities that have supported and learned alongside the graduates throughout their journeys in Burnaby schools.

This season naturally invites reflection. Graduation is often spoken about as the end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood: the moment when young people step into the world beyond school. Increasingly, though, I find myself reflecting on that fact that many of today's students are already deeply engaged in shaping the communities around them long before they cross a stage or receive a diploma. Quite frankly, students are no longer waiting to turn the tassels on their mortarboards before pursuing bold ideas, raising their voices, supporting others, and making meaningful differences in the lives of those around them.

We see evidence of this throughout the District. Throughout this year alone, we've seen students across the District advocate for issues that matter to them. They've taken action within their schools and beyond, demonstrating true leadership in both visible and quiet ways. Whether it was through academics, athletics, the arts, service, social justice, or community involvement, students continue to remind us that the qualities we once expected to emerge later in life are already being lived out in our schools each and every day.

Burnaby students are leading conversations on equity and inclusion. They're mobilizing, and calling for a stronger voice in decision-making. We've seen them advocate for better supports and services, while they are actively building community, uplifting arts and culture, and advancing reconciliation and Indigenous rights.

What stands out to me most is the growing confidence many students carry both in the hallways and in community, understanding that their voices matter. They know that they are more than capable of influencing the environments around them and are choosing to do so now. Burnaby students are not simply preparing to participate in community at some point later on. They are already active, engaged participants today.

When students are already contributing in these ways, I believe it changes how we think about our responsibility as a Board. For me, this reality reinforces the critical responsibility we hold as Trustees when it comes to the stewardship of the District's finite resources. Our role is not just to support academic success; it's also to create the conditions where students can discover their voices, develop their confidence, build relationships, and contribute meaningfully to our communities.

Unsurprisingly, this responsibility is often discussed in relation to the District's operating budget and the difficult decisions that Trustees too often have to make. Without a doubt, fiscal responsibility remains an important part of our role. However, stewardship extends beyond budgets and balance sheets. I believe our fiduciary responsibility also requires us to keep students at the centre of every decision we make. Our

choices must consider how Burnaby schools foster belonging, opportunity, inclusion, well-being, and the confidence students need to see themselves reflected in their learning environments and communities.

This evening, our agenda includes the approval of next year's operating budget, a process that has necessarily involved many conversations focused on students and their needs. But before beginning the work of balancing budgets, it's important to note that we are ultimately making broader decision about priorities, supports, relationships, and the opportunities we create for students in Burnaby schools.

And it's critical that we recognize this work cannot happen without students helping to shape the decisions that affect them. Earlier this month, I had the opportunity to meet with the District Student Advisory Council, soliciting their feedback on a potential student voice policy for the District, one that would formally enshrine the importance of student input on policy development and decision-making. If there was ever any doubt about the value of student engagement, that conversation reinforced how essential student engagement is for the work ahead. Every speaker was thoughtful, intentional, and grounded in empathy.

As we recognize graduating students across the District, I hope we celebrate not only what lies ahead for them, but also the many ways they have already shaped our schools and communities while learning alongside us. Their leadership, compassion, and contributions have left a lasting mark on their peers, staff, families, community, and most certainly this Board.

So, to conclude this report, I want to extend a sincere congratulations to all Burnaby students who have reached the important milestone of graduation. At the same time, I also want to say thank you. Thank you for the energy, the care, and perspective you have brought to your schools and communities throughout your learning journeys.

Perhaps more importantly, thank you for reminding us that student success is not solely defined by a diploma or a ceremony. It's also realized in the ways you already contribute to the people and communities around you. As you move into their next chapter, you do so not as passive participants in your futures but as people already shaping them.

Thank you.

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