

Good evening and welcome to our meeting. I am glad to see so many here virtually and in-person this evening considering winter has hit us once again today.

There are two questions we are asked most as trustees: What are trustees, and what do they do?

We listen and we advocate.

A search of the BC School Trustees Association website describes trustees as locally elected representatives. Representatives that best understand their respective communities' strengths, challenges, and demands. Trustees engage their communities in building and growing an evolving school system that reflects local values and priorities. School trustees listen to their communities, guide the work of their school district and set plans, policies, and the annual budget.

Building through listening. That is what Burnaby Trustees do.

This Board continues to listen and to learn from the voices of our Burnaby community about racism in our schools. We have listened to families that need the support of their child's school as life becomes more unaffordable. We have heard from school communities about the escalating operational costs associated to the "new normal" in a pandemic-era – costs covered by money that in the past was spent in classrooms. And we most recently have heard feedback from students, families, teachers, and staff on our District's Long-Range Facilities Plan (LRFP).

A special thank you to all those who came to one of our LRFP in-person engagement sessions and to those who provided feedback online. We have had hundreds of responses so far, and there is still time to have your voice heard before our online ThoughtExchange closes tonight.

Trustees listen and build. But what happens in-between? Advocacy. Advocating for Burnaby students and families.

Advocacy happens quietly and rarely loudly. It takes place both publicly and behind the scenes. Advocacy occurs at our local, provincial, and even sometimes at a national level. Earlier in this meeting we heard about the four motions our Board is bringing forward to advocate provincially to enhance student learning and family affordability. Those motions are first steps in advocacy.

Our new Brentwood school site is an example of advocacy in action, although incomplete. On behalf of the Board, I would like to once again thank the Mayor and Council for working with this Board, and City of Burnaby staff for working with our District staff over the last year to identify the site. We are now in a position to work through the necessary steps to secure the site and our District staff will continue to work with the Ministry while this Board advocates at the political level with our local MLAs and the Minister of Education and Child Care.

As Trustees, our role is to advocate and build safe, inclusive schools and spaces within our schools for every Burnaby student, family, teacher, and staff member to feel welcome and supported.

We are listening.