

The Board of Education would like to welcome students and staff to the 09-10 school year. As you will hear tonight school start up went very smoothly, with students now placed in classrooms with their teachers and classmates. We continue to offer Burnaby public school students many opportunities for unique and challenging programs, with staff working very hard to meet the diverse needs of all students. Burnaby, unlike most districts in the province, has not had a significant decline in enrollment and we believe that is in part due to the opportunities for Burnaby students to be involved in new educational initiatives. Two examples of this are the Advanced Learning program for elementary students and an ACE-IT Computer Support Technician program at the secondary level.

Our district has been described as a “leading edge district” and to maintain the high quality of education for our students it is vital that we are provided adequate and sustainable funding by the Ministry of Education. This Board sitting here tonight is outraged over the most recent substantial cuts by the ministry to the Burnaby school district. In spring we were forced to make cuts including services and supplies to the amount of \$1.8 million to meet our legal obligation of a balanced budget. Staff and trustees worked hard to keep those cuts away from classroom instruction this budget year, but next year’s projected budget shortfall of more than \$5 million dollars will make that virtually impossible.

Recent announcements in the Provincial budget speech will increase this negative impact on our district with the added HST, an increase in Medical Services Plan premiums and a change in funding process for Community Link, which helps some of our most needy and vulnerable students and families. As well, during the summer, without warning, the ministry of education withdrew the annual facilities grant of \$4.3 million from Burnaby. This grant is used for the repair or upgrading of school heating and lighting systems, the installation of playground equipment, and to generally maintain all school buildings in the district. The ministry justification for cancelling the AFG is that most districts had a “surplus” at the end of March. Realistically however, repairs, upgrading and major renovations are planned, with contracts signed in spring but the work is done in the summer so as to lessen impact to students and staff. District staff were very cautious in committing to projects until they were sure there would be funds and only a small number of projects actually proceeded over the summer, lessening the district’s financial shortfall. However, the impact will be to the students and staff in the schools as they return to class, and to the overall quality of lifespan of our many school buildings.

What's particularly troubling about these cuts is that the government on one hand is promoting carbon neutral energy use, but then removes the funding from districts that would be used to provide retrofit of more energy efficient heating and lighting systems. Districts will be penalized even further when this same government brings in the carbon tax to be levied against our energy usage. For several years, Burnaby has been very proactive in working towards reduction of energy costs; in fact BC Hydro has provided the district with a staff person to aid in selecting potential new energy reduction opportunities. It is too bad now, as the funds used to make those important upgrades came from the annual facilities grant, and we stand to not only lose these energy savings, but the expertise of valuable outside resources.

During the last provincial election, our Board and partner groups urged voters to stand up for public education. That message is no different now. BC's future is built in our public schools today and requires a sustainable, predictable fully-funded public education system. The Burnaby Board of Education strongly believes that all students in Burnaby deserve the opportunity to learn and achieve success in our schools. We ask for your support for sustainable and adequate funding of public education. Please contact your local MLAs and tell them that fully-funded public education is a priority in Burnaby. Our students deserve no less!!