



**Central Okanagan
Public Schools**

Together We Learn

**THE BOARD OF EDUCATION
CENTRAL OKANAGAN PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

CHAIRPERSON'S ANNUAL REPORT – OCTOBER 2022

Board Policy states that the Chair of the Board shall provide an Annual Report at the Board's Annual Meeting. In an Inaugural year, the report is delivered at the last public meeting before the swearing in of the new Board.

I have taken the liberty of reporting on both the 2021/22 year and the last four years as we come to the end of the 2018/2022 Board of Education's term of office.

Throughout the school year, the Superintendent of Schools provides regular reports and updates. Posted on our website are the *Superintendent of Schools/CEO Report on Student Achievement 2022* and the *Annual Enhancing Student Learning Report – Review of Year 2 of the Central Okanagan Public Schools 2021-2026 Strategic Plan*, which outline student achievement within the District. Also, recently the Superintendent of Schools/CEO presented the *School Opening Reports 1 and 2* to the Board which are also posted on the District website.

With approximately 24,000 students and over 4,040 staff members associated with 48 schools and sites, Central Okanagan Public Schools is a large and complex organization. We are the largest single employer within the Central Okanagan, with an annual operating budget of over \$303 million. As the fifth largest school district in the province's fastest-growing region, which continues to grow by hundreds of students each year, we still have urgent needs for school spaces - especially the need to build new schools and replace older schools.

The 2021/2022 year started with Board and Committee Meetings being held in person and then reverting back to Zoom meetings in January of 2022. In March, we were able to return to in-person Board/Committee Meetings. The Board of Education continued its work by both Zoom and in-person. This allowed us to participate in school and community-based events, including seven School Community Learning Plan Conversations. We also met with municipal councils, the Westbank First Nation, and our local MLA's. During our virtual and in-person Board meetings, trustees continued to enjoy learning about the many innovative programs in the District through the "Inside 23" portion of our meetings. The Board thanks staff and students who joined us virtually and in person and created videos such as the Black Mountain Elementary School virtual concert and the Westside Kindergarten Students' Advice to Graduates. Students continued to connect to our community through musical, dramatic, and artistic performances such as Okanagan Mission Secondary's *Mama Mia*, Mount Boucherie Secondary's *Romeo and Juliet*, and the District Music Program *Ukrainian Fundraising Event* which took place at Prospera Place involving over 450 students from 11 various schools. Many events were highlighted in our now-digital version of the "Together We Learn" publications which can be found on the District's website.

The Board also thanks Kelowna Art Gallery for hosting two beautiful exhibits this year: the *36th Annual Art in Action* and the replica of the *Witness Blanket*.

This year, École Bellevue Creek Elementary was reopened to Kindergarten and Grade 1 English and French Immersion students as a result of increased enrolment in the Okanagan Mission area. Due to receiving the capital funding for a new Westside Secondary School, English students at École George Pringle Elementary were moved to Webber Road Elementary and French Immersion students to École Glenrosa Elementary and École Hudson Road Elementary effective September of 2022. Other capital projects include an addition to École Dr. Knox Middle and purchasing property in the Wilden area for a future school site.

At the end of the 2021/22 school year, Graduation celebrations continued to be innovative in the face of COVID-19 restrictions, and graduates across the District were able to celebrate with conventional or virtual ceremonies. Graduation/Blanketing ceremonies for the Indigenous Education Program were held outside at each secondary school site.

Our six-year graduation rate remains high, at 96.9%. For Indigenous graduates, the graduation rate is now 83%, which is 10.5% above the provincial average, and I was pleased to celebrate with the Westbank First Nation the fifth year in a row that 100% of Westbank First Nation Grade 12 students graduated. The Board of Education once again expresses gratitude to all the donors of the many bursaries and scholarships which supported our students as they move on to post-secondary education.

In June 2022, the Board signed the 8th Local Education Agreement with Westbank First Nation. We are committed to continuing to build relationships with our Indigenous partners and to acknowledging Canada's history with the First Peoples. We are steadfast in our commitment to Truth and Reconciliation.

This is a snapshot of the past year, but this meeting also marks the end of the 2018/2022 Board of Education's term. To say that this term was unlike any other, would be putting it mildly. It has been a period of ups and downs.

There have been countless bright spots over the past four years. Canyon Falls Middle School opened in September 2019 and École Hank Grenda Middle in September 2021. As well, there have been many opportunities to interact with students, parents, and staff, especially before March 2020, and in the past few months.

During the past two and a half years we, along with the entire community, province and country, have coped with COVID-19, provincial guidelines on COVID protocols, and to be honest, breakdowns in relationships, both personal and professional. Trustees did not always agree on how to move forward, or on what message to send to our employees, students and families. The Board made decisions supporting provincial COVID guidelines. Most of our decisions did not sit well with a passionate, well-organized, vocal group. Some trustees and staff members received abusive phone calls, text messages and emails containing foul language and threats. No-one deserves to be treated that way.

This 2018/2022 term began following a trustee election which focused on the introduction of SOGI resources to British Columbia schools. Four years later, at the 2022 election, this topic was once again front and centre. It is a great source of frustration and disappointment to me that during municipal elections the school board elections are mostly ignored. Apart from the Zoom meeting hosted by COPAC and the District Student Council, no public forums were held which could focus on the real issues facing this School District and provide the public with an opportunity to question candidates.

During this last election I was asked many times what can a Board of Education do and not do. Although it is true that the Provincial Government provides both operating and capital budgets to school districts, and sets the provincial curriculum, Boards do have opportunities to make decisions for their school district. These include whether or not to offer French Immersion programs and whether they should be single or dual track, or whether to provide a transportation system throughout the district. Running an International Education Program is also a Board choice. Boards make decisions about grade configurations, whether to

use a middle school model, and if so, which grades should be in middle school. Boards can also decide to amalgamate or close schools. Providing Dual-Credit programs and partnering with Okanagan College, UBCO and BCIT is also a Board prerogative.

It is up to a Board to decide how often public meetings are held, whether a standing committee meeting structure is used, and how partner groups and the public are included in those meetings. Also, Boards annually decide on the amount of remuneration and expenses paid to trustees.

One of the most important undertakings of a Board of Education is advocacy. This includes lobbying the provincial government for resources for inclusive education, for extra funds for classrooms, and for capital funding for new or replacement schools. As local politicians, the Board is able to be forthright in its requests and challenge provincial government decisions. Recently we reminded the Ministry of Education that we currently have 129 portable classrooms on school sites. This number is expected to increase next year. Unlike bricks and mortar schools which are funded by Ministry capital dollars, the cost of portables comes from our operating budget. At \$350,000 for a new portable, crucial dollars are taken from classrooms and other essential services.

I am sure that the new Board will continue the important advocacy work begun by the current Board. As we come to the end of the Board's final year of its four year term, it's important to acknowledge how deeply we appreciate the many community partnerships that continue to grow and enrich the lives of our students. Community members volunteer their services, provide funds for projects at schools, and generally show a great deal of support to our schools and our students. These are non-profit groups, service clubs, and individual volunteers.

Also, our Parent Advisory Councils and the Central Okanagan Parent Advisory Council work on behalf of all students, parents and guardians in the School District. I am also very proud of the District Student Council. For many years, I advocated for opportunities to hear the student voice, and I always find their perspective honest and thoughtful. The District Student Council brought the issues of vaping in our schools and gender inclusive washrooms to our attention and the Board acted on their advice.

It has been a privilege to work with the executives of the principals, teachers and support staff and to have them at the table during standing committees along with parents and students. These voices are important as trustees consider issues and options.

As well, the Board appreciates everyone who works in our School District. Every day we see or hear of exceptional service to our students. While this is most often seen in classrooms and in schools, there are many who work behind the scenes and remain focused on why we are involved in this endeavour – the support, and encouragement of the students in our care.

I should particularly mention the three senior staff members I have worked with most closely: the Superintendent of Schools/CEO Kevin Kaardal, Secretary-Treasurer Delta Carmichael, and Deputy Superintendent Terry Beaudry, who have been tireless in their commitment to the Board and to public education.

Senior staff members serve as liaisons to our Board Standing Committees and to the Trustees who chair those committees. In the Board Office, three Executive Assistants provide support to Trustees, Board Meetings, and Committee Meetings. Mona Essler, Yvonne Hildebrandt and Lise Bradshaw, are always positive and this has been especially appreciated as we have transitioned from Zoom to in-person meetings during the past couple of years.

Also, thank you to my fellow trustees for providing the governance and oversight of our School District. To those who have chaired standing committees, served as the Board representative on Provincial bodies, or served on the BCSTA Branch Executive, thank you for the extra time you have given on behalf of the

Board. Also, as your Board Chair, I have found the support of the Vice-Chair to be invaluable this two and a half years. Trustee Desrosiers willingly took on much of the responsibility of talking and meeting with parents who were extremely concerned about changes in the District, such as the movement of students to École Bellevue Creek Elementary and from École George Pringle Elementary.

On November 9th, five of you will take the Oath of Office for another four year term. Trustee Norah Bowman and I will be leaving the Board, and two new trustees will join it. I wish Trustee Bowman all the best in her future endeavours. I have appreciated her willingness to speak up on issues she is passionate about and I know she will remain active in the community.

To the new Board, I send my congratulations to each trustee on your re-election or election, and wish you good luck as you begin the 2022/2026 term of office.

Respectfully submitted,

Moyra Baxter

Links:

- Superintendent of Schools/CEO Report on Student Achievement 2022:
<http://www.sd23.bc.ca/Publications/Student%20Achievement%20Report%202022.pdf>
- Annual Enhancing Student Learning Report – Review of Year 2 of the Central Okanagan Public Schools 2021 – 2026 Strategic Plan
<http://www.sd23.bc.ca/Publications/Annual%20Enhancing%20Student%20Learning%20Report%20September%202022.pdf>
- School Opening Reports 2022
Part 1
<http://www.sd23.bc.ca/Publications/2022%20School%20Opening%20Report%20-%20Part%201.pdf>
Part 2
<http://www.sd23.bc.ca/Publications/2022%20School%20Opening%20Report%20-%20Part%202.pdf>