
TO: The Board of Education
FROM: Katrina Stride, Secretary-Treasurer
DATE: January 29, 2024
RE: **Student Connections**

Background

Student Connections meetings were scheduled as part of the 2024-2025 Budget Development Process.

Student Connections Meetings

Trustees and members of the Senior Leadership Team met with school administration/staff and/or students at each of the high schools, including SJ Burnside Education Centre. The purpose of the meetings was to connect with students on site at their school and engage in conversation around priorities for the 2024-2025 Budget.

Notes taken during these meetings were provided to Trustees. A summary of the themes emerging from these meetings are noted below.

Themes from Student Connections Meetings

- Mental Health
 - Counsellors important and very busy
 - School counsellors more focused on course selection than mental health support
 - Not enough counsellors for the number of students
 - YFCs important, but hours reduced and challenging to connect
 - Need more emotional supports
 - Improve understanding of how to access available mental health resources
- Sexual Health
 - More sex education outside of PE 9/10, offer until grade 12
 - Consider alternatives to PE teachers
 - Should be mandatory
 - Island Sexual Health program is excellent
 - Increase diversity
 - Provide gender affirming care
 - More balanced education on menstruation, not split by gender
 - Education on what is available to students, e.g. reproductive health products

The Greater Victoria School District wishes to recognize and acknowledge the Esquimalt and Songhees Nations, on whose traditional territories, we live, we learn, and we do our work.

- Sexual assault not being talked about and impacting student mental health
- Substance Use
 - Students do not understand impacts of drug use
 - Every student should receive substance use education
 - Offer early supports to guide to healthier place
 - Improved anti-drug and anti-vaping awareness
 - Lots of vaping in bathrooms
 - More harm reduction education and resources
 - Naloxone sessions and kits for those open to learning how to use them
- Indigenous Students
 - More supports for Indigenous students
 - Targeted resources and scholarships
 - Provide trigger warnings and options to opt out
 - Support teacher education
- Course Selection
 - Indigenous Grad Course:
 - Add direct conversations with Indigenous individuals
 - More pro-d for teachers
 - Release course schedules earlier
 - Process not working
 - Improve access to course changes
 - Gender selection for PE not being honoured
 - Would like ability to cross-enroll between regular and online offerings
 - Not enough Grade 12 classes offered
- Menstrual Products
 - Products need to be in all washrooms and stocked regularly, basic need
 - Uncomfortable to go to office and ask for products
 - Install functioning dispensers and stop using baskets
 - Products are uncomfortable, need to upgrade to better quality, not meeting needs
 - Find balance between single-use plastic and cardboard
- Food Program
 - Schools with cafeterias value them
 - Products in cafeteria not always good quality or healthy
 - Cafeteria does not open on Fridays at some schools, some students have no access to food
 - Meal programs - no stigma, everyone can access food
 - Option to pay could improve quality and reduce costs and stigma
 - Students don't always have access to cash to purchase food
 - Incorporate gardens
 - Consider timing of breakfast in relation to school start, students unable to access
- School Safety
 - Theft in schools is an issue
 - Unsafe spaces outside school, e.g. shared community spaces, low lit areas
- Racism
 - Casual discrimination is prevalent
 - Need funding for education of teachers and students on how to handle racism
 - Need cultural competence training
 - Use inclusive language that respects and promotes all students
 - No counsellors of colour at school to assist with impacts of racism

- Network and Technology
 - Wi-Fi access is not good or not functional
 - Need district-wide discussion on cell phones
 - Limited cell phone service in some schools
 - Shortage of Chromebooks, some not working or damaged
 - Chromebooks have limited use at secondary level, need PCs
 - Limited access to desktops and printers, sometimes unable to access if library used as classroom
- Student Space
 - More quiet spaces
 - Need space to eat lunch
 - At the teacher's discretion to open classroom and allow students to use space
 - Common spaces are small for the number of students
 - Cafeteria and library being used as a classroom, unable to use during spare
 - All empty spaces being used as classrooms due to being over capacity
 - Hallways are crowded
 - Want space to gather and build community
 - Consider alternative seating options for common spaces, e.g. long tables with stools
- Facilities
 - More gender-neutral washrooms
 - Need washroom upgrades
 - Washrooms often closed due to vandalism or crowded
 - Need more bike racks
 - PA system not working
 - Heating issues
 - Expand composting beyond Foods, can use compost for gardens
 - Workout gym needs improvements and new equipment
 - School does not have daytime custodian and things are getting missed
- Accessibility and Accommodations
 - Accessible parking spots near accessible entrances
 - Improve understanding of the impact of non-visible disabilities
 - Education on process of accommodation for students
- Equity
 - Inequity between girls and boys sports, e.g. funding, promotion, tournaments, etc.
- Budget Reductions
 - Noticing impact of budget reductions on supplies for classroom projects, shops, etc.