

# Office of the Secretary-Treasurer

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**TO:** The Board of Education  
**FROM:** Katrina Stride, Secretary-Treasurer  
**DATE:** February 23, 2026  
**RE:** **Student Connections**

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## **Background**

The Board-approved 2026-2027 Budget Development Process included a Student Connections event to provide students from all middle and secondary schools an opportunity to provide feedback.

## **Student Connections Meetings**

On February 12, 2026, there were two Student Connections meetings held in the Tolmie Boardroom: a morning session and an afternoon session.

## **Participation**

The Student Connections meetings were attended by 85 middle and secondary students. Students were organized into small table groups, each supported by a facilitator. The Official Trustee and members of the Senior Leadership Team participated by providing comments, presenting information, and guiding the simulation and large-group discussion.

## **Introduction to Budget**

Students participated in an introduction to budget, which included:

- Budgeting in school districts podcast
- Budget overview presentation
- 2025-2026 budget snapshot

## **Budget Simulation**

Students engaged in a budget simulation activity.

Using provided revenue and expenditure figures that reflected a deficit position, students were required to identify at least \$2 million in reductions or revenue increases to achieve a balanced budget. They were also able to propose additional adjustments to accommodate new priorities. Students worked from a menu of

*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.*

potential reductions, revenue enhancements, and new expenditures, and were encouraged to modify existing options or develop their own.

Part way through the activity, students were presented with new information about an unexpected event costing \$750K. The new information required them to reassess their priorities and rebalance their budgets accordingly.

### **Discussion and Feedback**

Students were asked to discuss the following questions at their tables and then share highlights with the larger group:

- What two priorities did you chose to protect and why do they matter?
- What was the hardest trade-off you had to make?
- After the unexpected event, what did you reprioritize and why?

### **Student-Identified Priorities**

Across tables, students consistently prioritized protecting core learning and direct student supports. Frequently identified priorities included:

- Core classroom learning
- Mental health supports, including counselling
- Indigenous student programs
- Consent and sexual health education
- Anti-bullying and anti-racism initiatives
- Educational assistants and literacy support teachers
- Classroom resources, including Chromebooks and reliable Wi-Fi
- Extracurricular activities, particularly sports and music
- Safe and well-maintained school facilities
- Quiet and common spaces for student connection
- Energy efficiency initiatives

### **Student-Identified Challenging Trade-offs**

Students identified decisions that directly affect student experience, access, or well-being as the most difficult. Students noted the tension between maintaining high-quality classroom learning and preserving the broader programs and services that contribute to a positive and inclusive school experience.

### **Reprioritization Decisions**

When faced with a large, unexpected expense, students were required to adjust and rebalance the budget. Strategies included:

- Maximizing potential revenues
- Reassessing new priorities, which sometimes involved reducing or removing initiatives
- Making further reductions based on thoughtful considerations, including:
  - Distinguishing between needs and wants
  - Prioritizing curricular versus extra-curricular activities
  - Prioritizing student safety over cosmetic or non-essential items
  - Choosing between reducing a single item or applying a percentage reduction across multiple items

### **'The One Thing'**

At the conclusion of the session, students were invited to share one final reflection. Their responses highlighted a strong desire to protect programs and supports that directly impact student well-being, identity, and sense of belonging.

Mental health supports, equity across schools, food security, and accessibility for students facing financial barriers were emphasized. Students also identified the importance of maintaining safe, clean, and well-resourced learning environments, including updated materials, reliable technology, and adequate staffing.

Importantly, many students reflected on the complexity of balancing limited resources, acknowledging that difficult trade-offs are unavoidable. They expressed appreciation for being included in the process and underscored the importance of hearing and valuing youth voice in district decision-making.