

# Good things are happening

New Westminster Schools 2019–20



New  
Westminster  
Schools



**Pictured:** NWSS remembers  
with a powerful performance.

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Anita Ansari,  
Chair of the  
Board of Education

*At New Westminster Schools we like to think of ourselves as small, but mighty. And it felt especially true in this unprecedented year, where we managed to achieve some really big things despite all the challenges.*

Like every year, we saw lessons taught, connections built and the spark of so many of those small moments for students, the ones that will later become pivotal memories for them as adults. And there were many opportunities for our students and teachers to be recognized for their amazing achievements in the arts, sports, technology and more.



Karim Hachlaf,  
Superintendent of  
Schools / CEO

We broke ground on the new Richard McBride, leveraged partnerships to forge new child care options in Queensborough, and engaged in a review that will pave the way for improvements in how we support students with diverse needs. Then COVID-19 hit.

We adapted and pushed forward as we took direction from Provincial leads as we worked hard to make local plans to keep our students, staff and families safe ... while continuing to do everything we could to provide learning opportunities. We didn't always have answers. But we did our best in each moment – individually and collectively – as we acted with kindness, made extra efforts to help people in our community, and continued to engage our students.

The outbreak changed things. It made teaching more challenging, it slowed construction on the new high school and it impacted the way we were able to celebrate achievements like graduation.

But the pandemic also taught us to see the opportunities ... instead of taking the wind out of our sails, it forced us to shift course and find new angles to pursue learning and moments of growth. We channelled innovation, built stronger connections with families and looked at the barriers we could help reduce.

In so many ways it was a year that challenged us all to rise. And we did it together – guided by the strategic work we had laid out the year before, and always centred around the well-being of our students, colleagues and neighbours.

We have been impressed and grateful for the collective commitment this community has shown. So thank you for being part of this extraordinary year and we are excited to kick off the 2020-21 school year.





*Above: Time for learning: A student at one of our Child Learning Centres for Kids of Essential Service Workers chips through her daily assignments.*

# Our learning journey

*Our Learning Journey is the name of the five year strategic plan that was launched in 2019.*


It's a roadmap that paves the way to build on the strengths of the district and improve places we can do more – informed by students, parents, staff, community members, trustees and others. And it looks at everything from what we can do inside our classrooms, to our hallways and out into our community ... because our ability and responsibility – to connect people, to enable learning of all kinds and to be partners in building healthy neighbourhoods – extends past the front doors of our schools.

Our Learning Journey is about being there to support the whole child. The whole learner. Certainly in their educational pursuits, but also, in some ways, in their personal growth too.

## **THE STRATEGIC PLAN IS BASED AROUND FOUR KEY DIRECTIONS:**

- Transforming the student experience
- Building meaningful relationships
- Leading into our future
- Ensuring full participation in learning

As we review the year, we'll do it through this lens. What you'll start to see is a connected web of goals and action items that demonstrate how well the key directions work in collaboration ... with stories about the year's successes often feeling like they meet the goals of multiple key directions.

A photograph of a young boy sitting at a desk in a classroom, looking towards the camera. He is wearing a dark jacket. In the background, a teacher is standing and looking at a laptop on the desk. The entire image has an orange tint.

*Pictured: A student at one of our Child Learning Centres for children of Essential Service Workers gets teacher guidance as he works through his daily remote learning assignments.*

**“...Our ability and responsibility  
– to connect people, to enable  
learning of all kinds and to be  
partners in building healthy  
neighbourhoods – extends past  
the front doors of our schools.”**

# Transform the student experience

When we talk about transforming the student experience, we're talking about all efforts made to listen, collaborate and support the improved experience of both learning and growing in our schools ... to help us create a future where students experience joy in learning, staff feel supported with the resources and training they need, and our community feels connected to their local schools.

## **This year we've had many examples of how we're starting to transform the student experience:**

- There was the shift to remote learning in this year of the COVID outbreak. It changed learning and teaching for every student, staff person and parent in our district. And while it wasn't perfect or easy, collectively, we managed to achieve a lot of really beautiful things while under a lot of pressure.
- Throughout this process our teachers and other educators shone as they collaborated and channelled creative and innovative new ways to teach lessons to their students ... also often supporting the personal growth of their peers along the way.
- Our extensive Inclusive Education Review laid the path for changes that will be applied to improve support to students with diverse needs, and provide more equity between all students and their ability to succeed.
- We broke ground on Richard McBride! The replacement school will feature open spaces and a design that's intended to support revised and modern curriculum needs. And, in addition, it will also feature a significant expansion to the child care centre with new infant and toddler spaces opening up to better support local families.
- We are a big step closer to adding many new classrooms to the fast-growing Queensborough community: the Province gave formal support to move ahead on our work towards an addition to Queen Elizabeth Elementary School. This year's announcement means our architectural lead will now be working with teams of quantity surveyors, mechanical and structural engineers, and more to help build the Concept Plan and the Project Definition Report – the final step required to give us the go-ahead needed to secure provincial funding.
- Budget consultations across trustees, parents, teachers, union representatives, student representatives and other community member groups made sure everyone's voice was heard as we built the plan for next year.

And it wasn't just around budget priorities that we engaged our students, but we also engaged them in core discussions about what their learning experiences were like inside our District's schools ...





**Above:** Breaking ground at Richard McBride Elementary School.

**Left:** Ready for loan: our Technology and Information Services team packaged and distributed almost 1,000 Chromebooks to support New Westminster families in the move to online learning.

## Students drive the agenda at Student Symposium 2020

The topics ranged from mental health to vaping. The participants ranged from slightly nervous middle schoolers to outspoken teen mentors in their last few months of high school. And the adults – the teachers, school trustees, district staff and the Superintendent – they sat at a table in the back, ready to listen.



*Above: Organizers from NWSS Student Voice take a moment to gather before welcoming all the students to the symposium.*

Student Symposium 2020 was hosted by the school district, but the day was presided over by four of New West's up-and-coming leaders: Brianna Haiduc, Jalen Bachra, Rebecca Ballard and Sierra-Rose Hand. And, under the supervision of teacher Stacy Brine, a large committee of teens from the NWSS Student Voice group planned the day themselves, led the sessions and guided kids from across the District in a wide series of discussions – 30 kids from NWSS, 15 from each of our three middle schools and two teens from the Royal City Alternate Program (RCAP).

Those wandering the room heard snippets of stories, reflections and concerns being shared. Kids thoughtfully discussing the realities they were facing, the resources that helped make some of it easier and the list of issues they hope will be addressed to improve their experiences.

According to the four leaders, “the student-led approach created discussions where the kids were so engaged that they were almost talking over each other” ... feeling safe enough to share personal stories and excited about the commonalities that connected them.


Throughout the day, breakout groups took careful notes that documented the discussions. And those notes were later presented to New Westminster's Trustees and District staff to help make sure our kids' voices and ideas were part of the considerations as 2020/2021 budgets and priorities were set.

Teacher Stacy Brine said this event – now in its second year – marks an important shift in showing how the district is valuing student voices, “Getting students engaged in discussions about issues that matter to them is difficult. We think we know what they need, but we don't often give them a chance to speak for themselves. And they have great ideas. So this opportunity to connect around issues that affect them, it's how we can help them be more successful.”

The teens echoed that sentiment, commenting that “sometimes it feels like our opinions don't matter. But here we have a whole bunch of students who are just excited they can change their experiences in their classrooms and at their schools.”

At the end of the day's activities, the young leaders also laughed as they talked to School District staff about the experience, and they suggested that part of what helped make the day extra special was that they were just awesome. We agree. They really are awesome.



A group of approximately 15-20 students are gathered in a circle on a paved outdoor area. Some are sitting on folding chairs, while others are sitting on the ground. They are all looking towards the center of the circle, suggesting an active discussion or activity. In the background, there is a modern building with large windows and a series of tall, thin trees. The entire image has a blue color overlay.

*Pictured: Breakout sessions were led by student leaders which allowed space for each participant to share their thoughts and experiences.*

**“The student-led approach created discussions where the kids were so engaged that they were almost talking over each other.”**

# Build meaningful relationships

We want strong, healthy relationships to be at the heart of all we do. That will help us create learning environments where students experience support and belonging – with health and wellness prioritized – where families feel meaningfully engaged in teaching and learning, and where our teachers, staff and administration are engaged and respected. This is the difference we seek to make.

And while the health crisis drove us to come together in new ways, there were also many efforts throughout the year that were about supporting students to live as whole and healthy people.

## **Over this year, we've been proud of the gains we've made when it comes to building meaningful relationships:**

- Teachers stepped into the homes of all their students as the shift to remote learning engaged every parent and guardian in teaching and learning in a deeper way than we've ever seen.
- We launched six Child Learning Centres in April to support the daytime care and educational needs of the kids of our district's many Essential Service Workers ... which later extended to every school for the June 1st phased-in optional return.
- Bargaining concluded and collective agreements were successfully signed with both the New Westminister Teachers' Union and CUPE 409 ... achieved with no disruption to service, enhancing the relationships and providing greater stability to all for the next few years.
- Under the leadership of BC Housing, we worked alongside the City of New Westminister, Fraser Health and the Lookout Housing and Health Society to provide use of what was unneeded space, during the reduced phases of in-class instruction, at our Massey Complex ... in order to create a temporary emergency response centre that supported people experiencing homeless, in their efforts to find safe shelter and self-isolate through the COVID crisis.

*Below: New Westminister  
Secondary Students  
organizing Christmas  
Hampers to be donated.*







## Wellness fairs: giving students tools to thrive

Why did a plane crash survivor show off his professional skateboarding tricks in our district's middle school gyms? And no, it's not the leading line into a joke ... Dave Jonsson was invited to New Westminster schools to share his inspirational message with our students. And through a series of stories and reflections, he pushed them to consider this one core question over and over: what matters most?

**The answers he kept coming back to? Family, the dreams we hold, a belief in yourself, and the healthy relationships we have with people around us.**

That presentation kicked off both the Glenbrook and Fraser River Middle schools' Wellness Fairs this year (unfortunately the Queensborough Middle School fair had to be cancelled amidst COVID related issues). And then, following the inspiring start, students spent the rest of their day travelling between pre-selected workshops and activities.

The options were varied. Some friends gathered and learned how to make new snacks, while they reflected on how food can affect their well-being. Other students wrestled with the heavy and potentially life-changing risks faced when pressured to share intimate photos in a digital space – as guided by New Westminster Police Constable Michelle White in her *It's a No* workshop. Those up for a physical challenge dawned full firefighter gear and raced the school stairwells as they got a taste of the heavy work our city's public servants take on. And other students tried their hand at practicing woodworking skills with an emotional twist ... collectively creating a 2x4 version of Jenga, burning emotionally charged words on one side of the blocks and the solutions on the other side.

The sessions offered at *Feeling good! A Day of Wellness* were centred around personal well-being, but applied those lessons outward as students were also challenged to consider the responsibilities we have to people around us.

**Above:** Guest speaker Dave Jonsson inspires students and staff to reflect on what's most important in life.



**Above:** Suited up ... racing the stairs in full gear to learn how physically challenging the job can be.

**Below:** Students burned emotions and solutions into opposite ends of a full-scale Jenga game.



“In the session *Party Safe* we talked about how to keep ourselves and our friends safe in party-like situations,” said workshop leader, Karen Janzen.

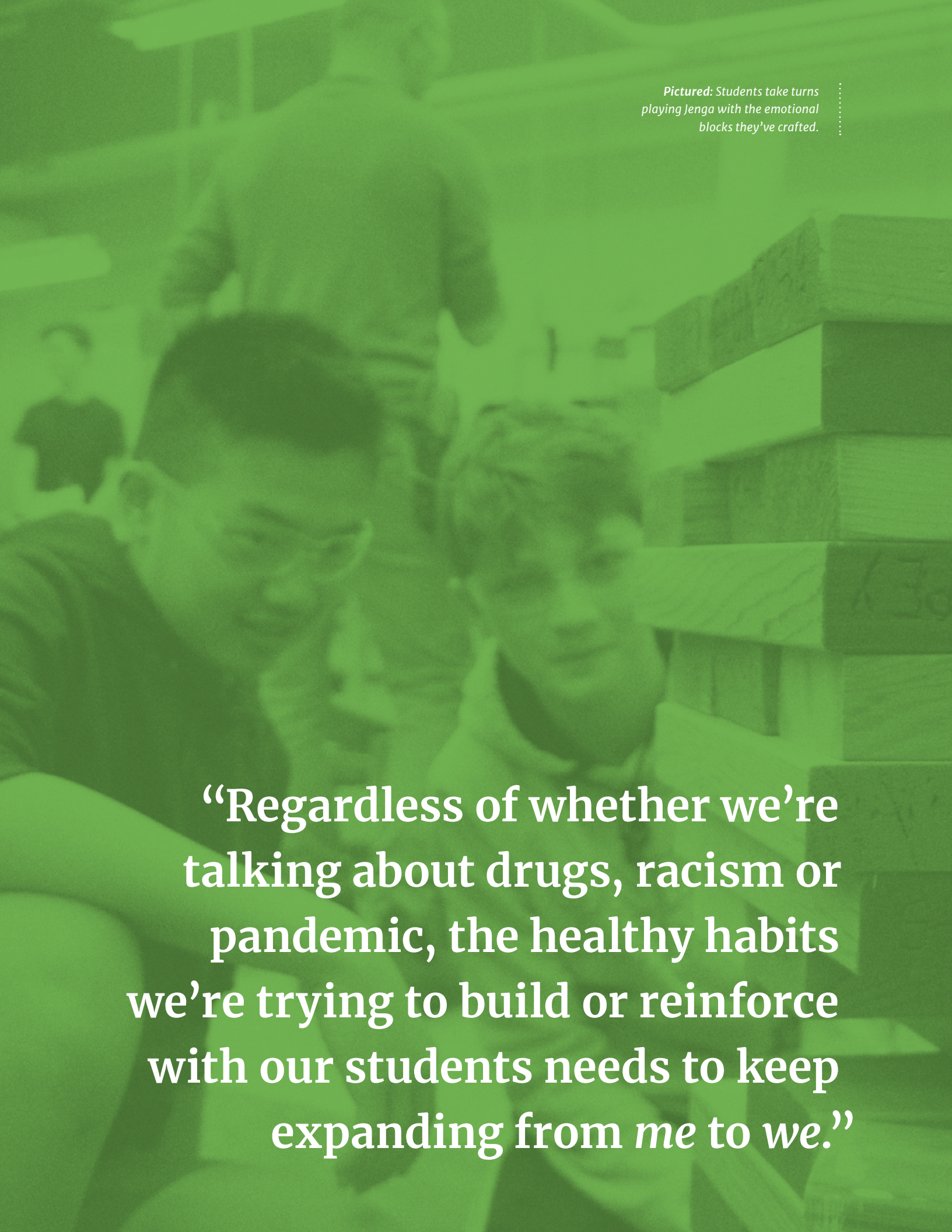
“While there was some discussion on chemical dangers, such as Fentanyl, the emphasis was constantly on taking care of ourselves and taking care of each other. Because, regardless of whether we’re talking about drugs, racism, or pandemic, the healthy habits we’re trying to build or reinforce with our students need to keep expanding from *me* to *we*.”

Overall, it was easy to see that the students were energized ... actively engaging in conversations and enjoying the opportunity to apply social, emotional and life learning in new ways.

### Why is that so important?

“We want students to understand the interconnected nature of social, emotional, mental and physical well-being” said Maureen McRae-Stanger, the district’s Director of Instruction for Learning and Innovation. “We want them to see that they have to have all those factors working in balance to be fully grounded. And we want to give them the skills and resources needed to identify and adjust when they don’t. Setting that foundation will make learning easier and more successful for our students now, but will also benefit them later in life in many other ways.”



A photograph of students playing Jenga with wooden blocks. The image is overlaid with a green tint. The text is positioned in the top right corner.

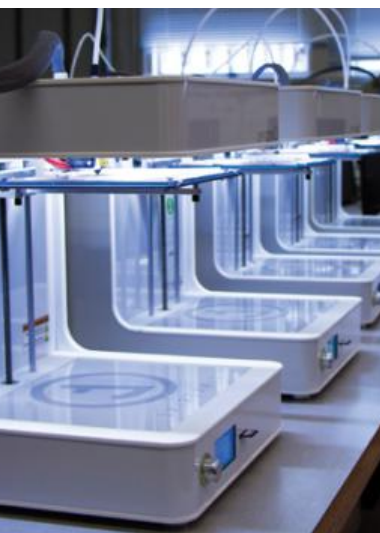
*Pictured: Students take turns  
playing Jenga with the emotional  
blocks they've crafted.*

**“Regardless of whether we’re  
talking about drugs, racism or  
pandemic, the healthy habits  
we’re trying to build or reinforce  
with our students needs to keep  
expanding from *me* to *we*.”**



# Lead into our future

*We will put innovation, learning along with students, and being open and adaptive at the core of how we operate.*



**Above Left:**  
3D printers ready to make face shields parts that will protect frontline workers through the COVID crisis.



**Above Right:**  
Our Game of Apps participants take a minute away from innovating and learning to take a picture.

## How did we do that this year?

- When a crisis broke out, a small handful of teachers took it upon themselves to make a difference and support frontline workers.

They coordinated across the district to borrow and centralize the 3D printers from our schools, and set to work making parts for face shields that were sent to local hospitals and other needed locations.

In collaboration with Tinkerine (the local company who makes the printers and called out for support), the teachers worked through days and weekends to help produce parts for over 10,000 masks!

- As part of our commitment to sustainability – as a core tenant of leading into the future – we phased in

paperless report cards at every school. As we move forward, the MyEdBC Family Portal will become a tool that will continue to connect parents to their kids' education.

- Our students are also leading the way when it comes to channeling innovation and technology. This year three New Westminster teams competed in the Game of Apps – with team EcoWorld taking home the top spot at Provincials, having created an app that was designed to help make fighting climate change a little easier.

But when it comes to telling the story of leading into our future, there was one example that spoke to what is truly possible when people work together...



## Remote learning in a covid world

COVID-19: it is perhaps “the story of the year” in many ways. It is the event none of us predicted, and also the singular factor that touched and changed the lives of every single student and staff person in our district.

The whole community showed its strength by pulling together and working hard to achieve something we might have previously questioned the possibility of: a shift to remote learning. We leaned into technology as a solution that could keep our classrooms together, while keeping apart.

What most didn’t see was the amount of work done to get to the place where we could even start broadcasting into the homes of our district’s families.

Right away we knew equitable access would be an issue. We launched surveys to assess need and engaged Principals and Vice-Principals at every school to reach out to the families who couldn’t receive or read the emailed survey. In the end we loaned out almost 1,000 Chromebooks to help facilitate access for students and we worked with telecom providers to set up internet service to families without.

When it came to equipping our staff, our Technology and Information Services team quickly researched options and landed on two options teachers could select from: Google Classrooms and Microsoft Teams. There was much training to do, systems to upgrade, passwords for thousands to set and more to be done. Every teacher, education assistant and other employee had to learn new systems and figure out how to do their job from home.

### **Not only were the systems new, but so were the teaching strategies.**

The staff portal on our website filled with guides, tools, training opportunities and lists of weekly resources that were created and populated by school board staff, the District’s facilitators and other teachers. Then off to teachers, education assistants and other educators ... where new lessons were developed, contact made with each student, and new plans were enacted to continue to deliver learning opportunities for students who were now stuck at home.



*Above: A participant at this year’s Student Symposium shares her story to help build a better future for others.*



### **What was the result?**

One teacher turned his basement into a TV studio style science lab to deliver demonstrations that would help his students learn. Another hosted a virtual teddy bear picnic for her class. Some teachers worked with their classes to make videos showcasing their community spirit and others reproduced great works of art by posing Lego figurines and stuffed animals for photos. Staff pushed their comfort zones and made collaborative school-wide videos to help connect with students at home. Teacher-librarians fleshed out websites to increase access to digital catalogues. And Educational Assistants used technology to deliver one-on-one support in new and meaningful ways. Even Board and Parent Advisory Council meetings were delivered through digital forward platforms.

And thousands upon thousands of students and parents turned bedrooms and kitchens into modified classrooms – each doing their best to take advantage of the continued learning opportunities being sent their way. And while managing complicated lives that changed family to family, everyone came together to support our District's learners ... doing the best we each could given the restrictions.

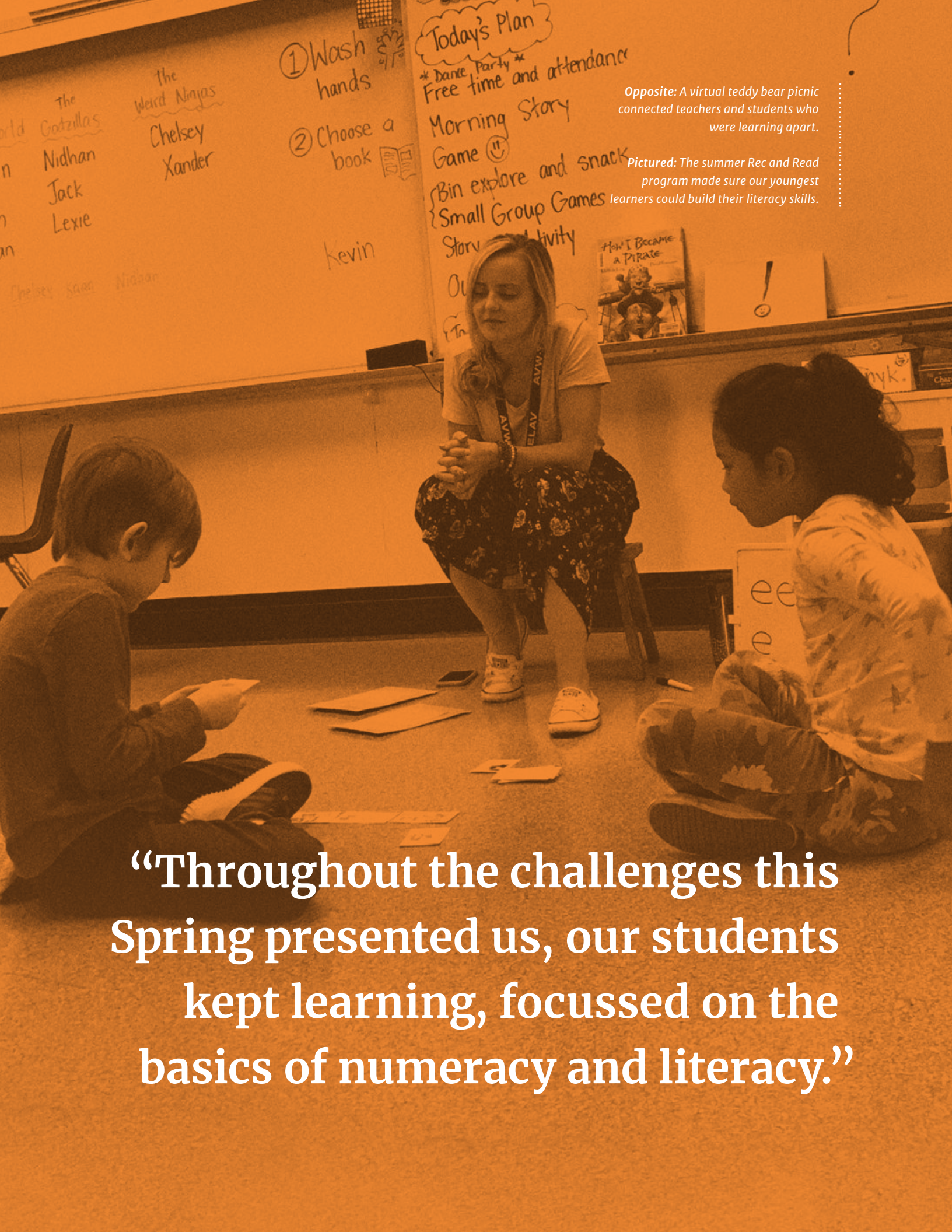
It was far from a perfect process ... with updates sometimes feeling like they posed as many questions as they provided answers. But with patience, kindness and a lot of effort, on the whole, it came together.

*(And thanks to the amazing participation in various surveys and our ThoughtExchange by parents, staff and students, we're ready and committed to making changes to improve the process in September.)*

Throughout the challenges this Spring presented us, our students kept learning, focussed on the basics of numeracy and literacy, with additional opportunities to showcase their creativity and collaboration. Our staff doubled down on safety, disinfection and new protocols to keep everybody healthy through each of the phased shifts in the return to in-class instruction. We strengthened relationships between families and their schools; and we worked together as a community to keep everyone as safe as we possibly could.

We were all involved, and we made it somehow work in the face of so much uncertainty ... we made it work because we did it together.






Opposite: A virtual teddy bear picnic connected teachers and students who were learning apart.

Pictured: The summer Rec and Read program made sure our youngest learners could build their literacy skills.

“Throughout the challenges this Spring presented us, our students kept learning, focussed on the basics of numeracy and literacy.”



***Pictured:*** Cafeteria staff at NWSS showcase the meals they stepped in to provide daily, in the midst of a pandemic, for kids whose families counted our supported lunch programs.



**“We’re proud of the innovative way  
our lunch programs help provide  
food security to local families.”**



# Ensure full participation in learning

*Every student deserves an equal chance to learn and grow in school. But some face more barriers than others.*

That's why we're committed to seeking creative ways to dismantle those barriers – whether they are created by hunger, health, ability, access or any other issue.

- We have seen remarkable growth in the graduation rates of our Indigenous learners. In fact for the 2018/2019 school year, we were proud to see our highest ever graduation rate, at 75%.
- It shows us that the commitments laid out in our Enhancement Agreement for Aboriginal Education are working – with strategies to monitor individual students, provide greater professional development and indigenize the curriculum. It also shows us there's more to be done.
- Starting at the end of 2019, the District launched into a formalized Equity Scan, alongside provincial partners. The process has involved deep reflection on the specifics of where we stand with Indigenous learners – looking at the role of pedagogy, assessing data we have on individual student performances and experiences, and addressing the role of policy and governance. The detailed local profile developed over the course of this year will help us build out the action plan that will enable more equitable participation in learning.
- Access to safe and supportive child care can make a huge difference to a family ... sometimes making the difference of a parent being able to work to help support their family or not. That's why we collaborated with the City of New Westminster to announce the opening of a new child care centre in Queensborough – using land and two portables we had,

the City stepped in to pay for the relocation and retrofit needed to make the new spaces possible. The new centre will be operated by our non-profit partners at Westminster Children's After School Society.

- We're proud of the innovative way our lunch programs help provide food security to local families. So, when the suspension of in-class instruction meant those receiving our supported lunch programs no longer were, we reached out and made a plan. Soon after, families of 100 kids in our district started arriving daily at the New Westminster Secondary School cafeteria, where workers there had shifted to creating nutritious and delicious take-home options to feed kids who continued to count on those lunches.
- During the COVID-19 crisis, as soon as it was deemed safe enough to do so, in April there were three limited groups of students brought back into our schools: children of Essential Service Workers who needed both child care and support for their learning through the day, those with diverse needs to connect them with support to supplement where remote learning couldn't fulfill their needs, and students in need of access to counsellors and other specialists.

## Why do we do all this?

Because the approach we take when it comes for advocating for the unmet needs of our students is based in being reflective, thoughtful and collaborative in our learning. And we continue to push ourselves to do better ...

## *The Inclusive Education Review: Building on wins, improvements for all*

What's working? What do we need to do better?  
Those were the two key questions that drove this year's extensive Inclusive Education Review.

The process – the result of a Board proposal – was coordinated by Bruce Cummings, Director of Instruction for Learning Services, overseen by an advisory committee of representatives from multiple stakeholder groups, and then supported by three consultants who were brought in to serve as guides and outside eyes.

Maya Russell and Dee Beattie were the Trustee leads on the review, and they shared this reflection on the process of listening that motivated the project, “This review happened because families opened their hearts to us about their worries and fears for their child. Every parent taking a student to school hopes their child will fit in, feel safe and happy, and be pushed to do their very best. We heard from those parents – and from our district's dedicated Education Assistants and other staff – that we were doing a lot well, but we could still do more to meet the needs of all learners.”

Over the span of the year the review looked at how the district was doing at delivering support to kids with a wide range of needs: students with established designations for their diverse needs and abilities, students requiring support but without official designations, gifted students, those in alternative education programs, children in care, students participating in Aboriginal Education programs, and those seeking support for their mental health.

The extensive information was gathered through surveys, by analysing available data, via reviews of processes and staffing needs, and through of a series of community focus groups and interviews with staff, parents and students.

The end result? A report providing a list of 23 recommendations that can be broadly grouped into five key theme areas: student needs, family support and engagement, authentic team approach, high-quality professional learning and expert knowledge of effective practices and protocols.

**“Parents who have kids with additional needs are already working too hard to support their kids. We heard them clearly: they want more transparency and they need information to be more accessible and easier to navigate” said Bruce Cummings.**

It was findings like this that lead to one of the recommendations: overhauling and creating a more user-friendly handbook ... one that can empower parents by making it easier to access available resources.

The full report – filled with tangible recommendations like the one above – will soon be released to help map the path ahead.

Cummings also had this to say as this part of the process wrapped, “The goal of the review was simple on the surface, and will be complex and multi-faceted in application: we want to improve education for students who face barriers, and for the staff and parents who support them. Now we've confirmed what wins we can build on. Next we'll use the recommendations to continue to adapt, hone and make improvements over the next few years.”



# The year ahead

*As we head into the 2020/2021 school year, we do so thankful of the great work we can build on and aware that there's more to do.*

We also move forward knowing our ability to adapt and learn will continue to be vital to our collective success.

This coming year will likely look different than any other we've walked into. We can't yet say what rules will guide a child's first day in Kindergarten, or how our grads will celebrate the end of their final year ... because nobody yet knows is how COVID-19 will continue to affect our schools.

*Below: Two of our District's young learners showing their excitement for reading and writing.*





*Pictured: District staff and the Board of Education take a Winter tour of the new secondary school.*





**Here's what you can expect to see:**

We'll continue to take direction from the Provincial leads, while working hard to make local plans that best serve our district's specific needs. We'll always make sure the health and safety of students, staff and families come first.

We anticipate we'll be looking at a hybrid of remote and face-to-face learning, which means we'll use feedback that's been provided by all members of our school community to improve upon the plans we developed through the Spring.

When it comes to operations and physical growth, the work will continue. The construction on the amazing new high school will be completed; our other major capital projects will drive forward; and upgrades happening at many of our schools will continue to make sure our students have safe, supportive and up-to-date spaces to learn in.

At a higher level, we'll continue to pursue the values and commitments of our strategic plan. There will be more work done to achieve the goals in our Enhancement Agreement that guides our Aboriginal Education program. The work we're doing around our Equity Review will give us additional understanding and tools to guide future years. And the roadmap of recommendations from the Inclusive Education Review will start to be applied and improve the experiences of our students with diverse needs and their families.

And we also can't forget that in the midst of a pandemic, we watched the rise of the #BlackLivesMatter movement this year. We listened and we heard the effect it had on people living and learning in our community, we recognized the parallels experienced by Canada's Indigenous communities, and we pledged to do more. The next phase of that commitment will come in the Fall: as the Board of Education engages in the process of building anti-racism policies and determines the appropriate ways we can work to be better allies to our staff, students and community.

Throughout all of this work, we'll continue to reach out. We'll listen and adjust as needed. And we'll collaborate with all our partners as we strive to do more.

**But our key commitments come down to this:**

Kids will continue to learn, staff will continue to be supported as they work hard to engage with students, and we'll manage this forward as we have at each stage so far, together.



New  
Westminster  
Schools

*Where students love to learn*

.....

New Westminster Schools recognizes and acknowledges the Qayqayt First Nation, as well as all Coast Salish peoples, on whose traditional and unceded territories we live, we learn, we play and we do our work.

**New Westminster Schools**

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