



# SURREY BOARD OF TRADE 2021 SURREY SCHOOL BUDGET SUBMISSION

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Surrey Board of Trade (SBOT) is a not-for-profit organization with a membership of over 6,000 business contacts. The Surrey Board of Trade supports business and attracts business. Our role is to enhance economic opportunities and contribute to city-building initiatives that enhance livability in Surrey.

The Surrey Board of Trade action plan is based upon the philosophy that transportation and education are the foundations of an economy. Without those two assets, we will not be able to provide a standard of living that will attract business and economic development.

Each year, as part of the Surrey School Board's annual budget process, the Surrey Board of Education seeks input from the community on budget priorities for the next school year. In the past, they have sought this input via email, letters, and public consultations.

Over the last three years, the need for more classrooms has been identified as one of the top priorities, with many parents asking for smaller class sizes and a more balanced teacher-to-student ratio. Surrey Schools has been working to accommodate the city's growing student population by building new schools and additions in developing areas and creating more spaces for students through extensions.

The pandemic of 2020 resulted in school shutdowns across the world. This impacted learning, extracurricular activities, sports, social development, and parents. Our public education system was not built, nor prepared, to cope with a situation like this. We lack the structures to sustain effective teaching and learning during the shutdown and to provide the safety net supports that many children receive in school.

The Surrey Board of Trade has composed a budget priority document for consideration by the Surrey School Board. Without sound education investments, our economy cannot thrive. Many businesses choose to relocate or co-locate to various regions based on efficient and welcoming education systems.



## 2. PRIORITIES FOR THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY

The Surrey Board of Trade is a member of Surrey Schools Coalition, with a common purpose: to rectify the crisis in school overcrowding in Surrey. Although there have been many great initiatives made by both the School Board and the BC Government, there needs to be a better effort to provide quality education spaces for students.

### Special Growth Fund

Student enrolment in Surrey is still expected to grow by 1,000 to 1,200 new students this Fall, and simply put, we need continued collaboration and action between the Province, the District and the City of Surrey. The Surrey Schools Coalition wants a special 'growth fund' to be established by the BC Government to pay for portables, rather than out of school district operational budgets.

The Surrey School District diverts \$10.7 million a year away from classroom funds to operate its 361+ portables. This means fewer resources for the projected to top 74,700+ students in 125 schools, including those students in schools with no portables, fewer teachers, less support for special needs students, and fewer course offerings in the whole district. Music rooms, gyms, libraries and computer labs have all been converted to classrooms in some schools in Surrey. All Surrey students are affected and deserve equal access, opportunity, and fair treatment compared to other districts' students when they go to school.

Enrollment is increasing throughout Surrey. The level of investment happening in Surrey's schools is not enough to provide spaces for our current population. With an increase in migration to the South Fraser Region, we will not see portables going away anytime soon with the current investment portfolio.

Education matters to business because both quality curriculum and quality surroundings are needed for our students to be leaders, locally and globally, through career and entrepreneur pathways.

### Closed Catchment Schools

Another significant concern is related to "closed catchment" schools. People who have moved to an area and thought their kids can go there will be disappointed to learn they have to go somewhere else because the school close to them is so full that they cannot take any more students. More schools are needed to be built in already established areas to ensure that there is no more closed catchment.

### Career Education

The Surrey Board of Trade is concerned that there is not enough career education given to students. More youth are pursuing degrees that are becoming obsolete. The School Board must prioritize educating students on careers that are in demand now. Partnering with colleges, program providers,



private sector businesses and relevant associations to distribute information on in-demand careers and the path to securing them.

## Technology Investments

The pandemic has shown that not all students are able to learn in an online environment, nor are they able due to financial constraints. In addition to financial constraints on the end of the student and their parents, is the constraint of the understanding of the educators. If blended learning is pursued, these matters must be addressed.

Additionally, computers do not improve pupil results.<sup>1</sup> Social relationships between parents, teachers, students, and other staff is paramount to creating well-rounded students that are capable of handling real world problems and trials. There are also students that do not learn well in an online environment, who require in-person education to thrive. Excess screen time has also been linked to increased anxiety, alienation, and other deteriorating mental health effects.

## Other Ideas

The budget could consider:

- Funding for elementary and secondary ESL teachers in partnership with the BC Government, field technicians for outdoor learning programs and more educational
- Funding a Tutors in the Classroom program
- Establish a technology baseline program for all schools. We know that technology plays an important role in learning for both students and educators, yet its use varies across schools. This initiative will ensure that, within five years, all schools will have the same baseline of technology. The model should be equitable for all students and sustainable for all stakeholders.
- Investments to improve air quality and ventilation in schools, support online learning, promote student mental health and hire additional staff.
- Consider targeted asymptomatic testing for students and staff, using a combination of lab-processed PCR and rapid antigen tests.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-34174796>