

BOARD CHAIR REPORT

TRUSTEES

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With January well underway, it's nearing that time again when some of us need to make some important decisions about our futures. I'm referring to students, parents and that annual high school event known as "course selection."

Today's students have more choices than ever. This has its advantages as well as its drawbacks. Make no mistake, our school system has progressed a long way since the days when "one size fits all" was the only option on the classroom shelf. In 2016, the goal of public education in BC is to offer a "fit for every size."

But with increased choice comes extra considerations, and even confusion, for consumers - in this case, students and parents. Those considerations are both of a short-term and long-term nature.

Personalized learning, where students are free to pursue their passions, encourages learners to take courses that interest them. And while as parents we all want our children to be satisfied with their subjects and schedules, it's also our duty to look out for their long-term interests and guide them onto the right course, pardon the pun, in their academic journeys.

In today's rapidly changing global economy, where exactly their journeys should lead them is not an easy question to answer.

Education expert and author Dr. Yong Zhao was recently invited by the Burnaby District Parent Advisory Council, in collaboration with the Burnaby School District, to speak to parents and staff about the future of education, and how to assess whether your child's schooling is putting them on a pathway to "success" (personally, Dr. Zhao claims to measure that nebulous word by whether or not his children are still living in his basement).

Kidding aside, Dr. Zhao argued our goal should be to graduate more job creators, and less job seekers, and asked the audience at the Michael J. Fox Theatre to consider 3 questions: (1) Do you want to fix your children's deficits or do you want to enhance their strengths? (2) Can your children do things that machines can't do? (3) Can your children do things that can't be done cheaper in other countries?

These are big-picture questions. And they won't be on high school course selection forms in the coming weeks. But the answers will help shape our children's futures for years to come.

**Harman Pandher, Vice-Chair
Burnaby Board of Education**