

TO: MAYOR & COUNCILLORS
FROM: GENERAL MANAGER PARKS, RECREATION AND CULTURE
SUBJECT: **SWIM LESSONS IN PARTNERSHIP WITH BURNABY SCHOOLS**
PURPOSE: To update Council on the Learn to Swim pilot program between City of Burnaby and School District 41.

RECOMMENDATION

THAT the report titled “Swim Lessons in Partnership with Burnaby Schools” dated July 22, 2024, be received for information.

1.0 POLICY SECTION

The advancement of this project aligns with and complements the following Council-adopted policies and strategies: Corporate Strategic Plan (2017), Health Community Strategy (1991), and Benefits Based Approach (2023).

2.0 BACKGROUND

Swimming is a crucial life skill that enhances water safety, physical literacy, confidence, and overall health among children.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on access to swim lessons. Burnaby followed the provincial public health orders for operations of public swimming pools and once health regulations allowed, was one of the first cities to return to offering swim lessons during the pandemic. Access to lessons was very challenging due to the limitations in class sizes imposed by health regulations, which in turn impacted many families trying to access this vital life skill. A backlog of demand existed following the lifting of provincial health orders that has taken roughly 3 years to address. In addition, recent data from the Lifesaving Society shows that drownings are increasing in B.C., with 14 occurring so far in 2024.

At the City Council Meeting held on February 6, 2023, a two-part notice of motion regarding swimming lessons was brought forward. This report refers to the second motion directing staff to explore a partnership with the Burnaby School District for a swimming program for elementary students.

Prior to the mid-1990's, the City of Burnaby supported the Grade 5 provincially funded Learn to Swim program, allowing all interested schools to bring their Grade 5 students to a Burnaby pool for a series of five swimming lessons. This program provided foundational water safety education to the students who might not otherwise have access to formal swimming lessons.

Following the withdrawal of provincial funding in the 1990's, only schools capable of self-funding have continued to participate in swimming lessons at Burnaby pools. Currently, ten private and public schools participate in these self-funded programs.

3.0 GENERAL INFORMATION

Over the past year, staff have engaged in multiple discussions with representatives from Burnaby School District regarding the development of a pilot Learn to Swim program. This program would be designed to address the critical need for comprehensive water safety education and swimming skills development among the youth population in Burnaby. Providing swimming lessons and water safety education through schools ensures equitable access for children whose families may face multiple barriers to participation in the City's regular swim lesson offerings.

The key goals of the Learn to Swim pilot are:

- Provide all Grade 5 elementary school students in Burnaby with basic swimming skills and water safety education in four 30-minute lessons with 30-minute open swims;
- Promote life-long physical activity through aquatic education;
- Increase water confidence and reduce water-related accidents;
- Develop a curriculum tailored to the needs and abilities of Grade 5 elementary school students, focusing on fundamental swimming techniques, water safety practices, and introductory rescue skills led by certified Burnaby aquatics staff;
- Address transportation logistics to ensure equitable access for all participating schools;
- Introduce Grade 5 students to swimming at the City pools and provide them with the Grade 5 swim pass to use on their own time outside the school lessons.

There are important logistical considerations to implementing a swim program that is equitable for all:

- Student Support: Ensure that one-on-one staff support from both the schools and the City is in place for students requiring additional assistance, guaranteeing full participation. It is estimated that in each class, one to three students require one-on-one support and additional staffing is required for each of these students. Specialized training will also be required for each member of staff providing one-on-one support;
- Aquatic Staffing: Ensure sufficient aquatic staff to support the weekday daytime lesson program. Currently, 75% of Burnaby aquatic staff are aged 16 to 25 years and are engaged in school or training programs during the day, which will impact availability to support this Learn to Swim program.

Pilot Program Overview:

- Schools attend at their closest indoor pool;

- City and School District staff collaborate to create a schedule for each school/class and determine 1;1 support as required;
- City to provide required instructors, lifeguards and 1:1 support;
- School District is responsible to coordinate required transportation for all students and forward transportation costs to City for reimbursement;
- City program provides each student with four 30-minutes learn to swim lessons and four 30-minutes open swims; and a recommendation of Learn to Swim lesson program level to participate in after program completion;
- Each class participating will need to make a commitment of up to half of a school day, per lesson, to accommodate this program.

While the Learn to Swim pilot will not reduce swim lesson waitlists, it will provide students with basic swimming and life-saving aquatic skills.

4.0 COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Not applicable.

5.0 FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

Staff developed a preliminary budget to deliver the program of \$200 per student, with a total cost of approximately \$412,000 allowing all grade 5 students to participate in the pilot for one school year. This budget includes a 1:6 instructor to student ratio, 1:50 lifeguard to student ratio, staff training and curriculum development, transportation subsidies and administrative support. The budget is prorated according to the students and schools participation. Curriculum development and administrative support is a set cost independent of the overall level of attendance.

The School District is supportive of the pilot program but indicated they are unable to assist with the costs noted above and not all schools/classrooms will wish to participate.

This program will be brought forward in the 2025 Parks, Recreation and Culture budget request for Council’s consideration. Staff will bring forward funding options as part of the budget process as Council may wish to consider re-allocating funding from other School District initiatives to fund the swim program pilot.

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Morrison-Clark, General Manager Parks, Recreation and Culture

REPORT CONTRIBUTORS

This report was prepared by Carol Chard, Manager Recreation Services, and reviewed by Judy Hamanishi, Director Recreation.