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Section 1 – Accountability

1. In your opinion, what is the role of parents in the Board's decision-making process?

First the parents, and then the teachers, know students the best. Trustees have to place great importance on the input coming from the parents and the teachers. I believe the trustees should seek out the opinions and the concerns of parents proactively, and not wait for them to come out to the trustees. Many families, due to their cultural backgrounds and possible language limitations, may not go to their trustee (or even to the teacher or to the school principle). But when their thoughts are sought, they will talk and share their views, ideas and concerns. I hope to educate parents about the role of the trustee and encourage them to share their opinions. If the trustees are hearing similar concerns from a number of parents, then they will have to take these into consideration.

2. If you are elected, how do you see your role as a trustee in the decision-making process?

I think the role of the trustee is very significant. In recent years the provincial government has shifted the decision-making powers from the local elected officials, i.e. the trustees, to the ministry. This shift can be resisted. I would like to take the advice of David Moen, a trustee of 10 years, as quoted in the Ottawa Citizen: "Remember you're elected to serve the people, not the system."

3. Do you believe that trustees should serve as intermediaries between parents and the Board and/or their school (when all other avenues have been exhausted)?

Yes

Please explain.

4. Do you believe the Board's decision-making process could be more transparent?

Yes

If yes, what measures would you propose to improve the Board's transparency and accountability?

It has been brought to my attention that the incumbent trustee in my zone has shown inclination towards voting in camera. That would be the ultimate blow to transparency and accountability. In addition to public voting, I also favour public meetings as much as possible. Also, just simple honest, open and direct conduct will go a long way in achieving transparency. I will have no part in back-room deals and lobbying.

5. What do you believe should have greater weight in the decisions made by trustees: the advice of educational professionals or the input of parents and communities?

[no response]

Please explain.

I don't think it would be right to make a pre-determined choice as such. I will need to consider both the advice of professionals, and the input from the parents and the members of the communities, at all times. I will have to consider all the input, discuss with my colleagues and make decisions that I feel will be in the best interest of our children and our education system.

6. This past year has seen an increase in in-camera (closed-door) committee and Board meetings. As a trustee, would you undertake to ensure that in-camera meetings are held only when necessary to protect the privacy of individuals?

Yes

Additional Comments

[no comments entered]

7. Last year, the Board reviewed its Alternative Schools program and its Secondary Gifted program. Despite strong stakeholder support for these programs, Board staff recommended that they either be closed or eventually phased out. As a trustee, what kind of information would you seek and what

kind of questions would you ask in order to come to a decision when staff recommendations are opposed to the views of the community?

I would like to say that I support both Alternative Schools and Secondary Gifted programs. (My daughter went to Churchill Alternative School. During her six years in the program, she and her classmates thrived and flourished. My husband is from a special high school designed for gifted children. I can share our experiences in detail if anyone from OPEN wishes to contact me. I can also provide you with my answers to survey questions of ABC Ottawa Chapter.)

I support these programs.

Recommendations to close or phase-out: I would question the long-term costs, both economically and socially. I would try to balance the information obtained from the staff with the testimonials of the parents.

8. Good decision-making requires good and comprehensive data which is shared with all public education stakeholders. What will you do as a trustee to ensure that Board reports are released to the public in a timely fashion and contain accurate information?

I agree that the board reports should be made available accurately and in a timely fashion. Unfortunately I haven't figured out yet how to go about ensuring this. I will have to consult with experienced trustees on this one.

9. Teachers and support staff who work in the classroom every day with students are well-acquainted with student needs, yet are not permitted to contribute to the public discussion when changes to programs and services are under consideration. Do you believe that the experience and knowledge of the professionals in the classroom should be better represented in the Board's decision-making process?

In my answer to the first question of this survey, I emphasized the input both from the parents and the teachers. Support staff should be included in my answer as well. If elected as a trustee, I hope to establish weekly, Five Teachers and Five Parents (5T5P) meetings. I plan to consult with teachers and parents (those who haven't been heard before) every week, for the next four years.

Section 2 – Educational Issues

10. Given the chronic under-funding of education, what new ideas would you bring to the table to address the Board's ongoing financial challenges?

I think time has come to put the pressure on the government. I have asked some of the current trustees who are seeking re-election, if successful negotiations with the province would be a realistic goal, and they believe that it is, especially with the provincial elections coming up. Hopefully on October 25th, there will be a new board with those of us who have the guts to question the politicians and mobilize the stakeholders to obtain sufficient funding for all the programs we wish to support.

11. It can be a challenge to meet the demand for French Immersion while maintaining a strong, viable English program. How important do you think it is for the Board to respond to the ever-increasing demand for French Immersion in this region?

Important

Additional Comments

Yes, I see the challenge here. We must not forgo robust and effective English.

I am a big fan of bilingualism and I envision a truly bilingual Canada. Students who may wish to remain in Ottawa as adults, will need French to find good employment. Jobs that do not ask for French are becoming a rarity in the capital. If parents are looking for French Immersion, we should be in a position to supply this demand. While doing this, we must not put English at risk. I think it is possible to give our students the power of both of our languages (and encouraging to maintain their first tongues as well, when applicable). We may need to study how multi-lingualism is achieved in some of the European countries. So, the bottom line is, we must meet the demand for French Immersion which also have strong English programs.

12. Do you favour the Board's revised student transfer policy that restricts students' ability to transfer from their neighbourhood school to the school of their choice?

No

Please explain.

Going door-to-door in Orleans, I hear that this is the single biggest discontent with the current trustee in Zone 8. I believe in giving the students and their parents an option. Schools other than the ones in their own neighbourhood may have the programs they wish to follow. We gain nothing by forcing a teenager into a school when his or her heart/talent/strength is with another school.

13. While the Ontario Ministry of Education is encouraging school boards to integrate students with special learning needs into the regular classroom whenever appropriate, it recognizes specialized classes as one of a range of options for exceptional students. At present, the OCDSB provides specialized classes for students with autism, Asperger's syndrome, developmental disabilities, giftedness and a number of other exceptionalities. Do you support the continued provision of specialized classes for students with these and other special educational needs?

Yes

13. a) If yes, what would you do to reduce waiting lists and improve student access to these classes?

I would like to see a proactive look at the supply and demand. Better data collection and better projection based on population increases should help the school board plan better. We need to offer more classes. Instead we have had closures or reductions. Obviously cutting back on the program is not going to help the waiting lists.

Board-wide screening processes seem to be the best method in improving student/family access to the gifted classes.

13. b) If you answered no, how would you ensure that both exceptional students and their peers without special learning needs receive the support they need in order to learn and thrive in the regular classroom?

[no response]

13. c) When changes are proposed to special programs, would you agree that any proposed changes should first be evaluated through pilot programs with well-defined, measurable outcomes?

Yes

14. Recent changes to program delivery at this Board have reduced access to specialist teachers in the arts, science, physical education, and other subjects, especially at the intermediate level. Do you believe that students are receiving enough subject specialist education in the elementary/intermediate years?

No

Please explain.

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15. At the same time as students have less access to outdoor education centres, research is showing that children need experiences in the natural world for improved learning, for their well-being, and to be informed citizens about the environment. Would you increase the role of outdoor education centres in our students' education?

Yes

If yes, how?

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16. The Alternative Schools program was reviewed this past year and found by the Board to have many benefits for students. As a trustee, would you ensure this program is continued and is extended to zones where it's not currently available?

Yes

If yes, what are your ideas to make this happen?

As I mentioned above, I support the Alternative schools wholeheartedly and would work towards the continuity of the program.

It would be wonderful to have one in the east end. However, I would not initiate such a process within the next couple of years until I fully understand the demand in the east end and the capabilities of all the schools here in the east. If for other reasons one or more of the east-end schools require recommendations, then I would ask for a feasibility towards converting to and/or adding an alternative program.

17. Ottawa receives more refugees than any other city in Ontario, has the second largest immigrant population in the province, and the first language of approximately one third of Ottawa residents is neither English nor French. Do you believe that the OCDSB is doing as well as it could to serve the needs of students and families that are new to Canada?

No

If no, what changes would you propose?

Section 3 – Philosophy

18. Current trustees: Please give an example of something you did last year to further public education. Other candidates: Please name a specific effort you would promote if you were elected.

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Embracing diversity and nurturing each unique child to achieve his/her full potential. One size does not fit all. We are lucky enough to live in one of the richest countries in the world. We deserve the best public education.

19. What is your vision of education and its role in our community?

Education is the backbone of a community. Most of the solutions to the concerns expressed above require funding. There are a few things a nation cannot/must not cut the funding from. Education and health care are the top two. I am worried that our public education system may go through the 10-year decline our health care system went through before public outrage set it in the right direction once again (and it will take years to catch up).

I envision a vibrant public education system, one that is financially robust and can keep up with the changing times and demographics.

