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Section 1 – Accountability

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

The role of the parents – and School Councils – is to be a key partner in the Board's decision-making process. The Trustee should facilitate the communication and be the conduit for parents' concerns to the Board.

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

I see the decision making process as an iterative process between the Board, staff, Trustees and the community.

At the Board level, Trustees must make important decisions based on concerns and issues that parents and School Councils have raised. But Trustees also must listen to the suggestions of the professional staff who are hired by the Board.

I expand on this last sentence in #5 below.

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

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?

In the 21st century, can we not film Board proceedings and make them available live on the Internet?

If Trustees are aware that their every move, whether or not they are present, and what they say, would they not be more conscious of being held accountable.

Plus, dedicate a few dollars to a public education campaign with the goal of educating and making aware Ottawa communities of the existence of the video. This is an inexpensive and realistic idea that should be implemented regardless of the outcome of the election in Zone 6.

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?

Input of parents and communities

Please explain.

At the Board level, Trustees must make important decisions based on concerns and issues that parents and School Councils have raised. But Trustees also must listen to the advice of the professional staff who are hired by the Board.

The trick – in my view (and I experienced this first hand as a municipal Councillor) is to find that balance between the advice received by the staff and that by the community as a whole. But, again from experience, I have found that in the end, it must be the wishes and views of the community that carries the most weight in the decision-making process. That is how democracy works, correct?

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

Of course I would do so. One of the main reasons I am running for Trustee is to increase the accountability and the transparency and accountability of the role of the Trustee and that of the Board.

There are clearly outlined reasons for going in-camera and it must be for these reasons alone that the doors to Board proceedings are closed.

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?

This decision has directly impacted one of the programs in a Zone 6 school – the consolidation of the Alternative Program at Manor Park PS.

There are instances where the continuation of a Program is simply not feasible due to lack of demand or lack of infrastructure needed to deliver the program efficiently and effectively.

Yet those at the Board table rely on the professional advice of the staff in order to judge whether or not a program is efficient or effective or needed. Trustee positions are part-time roles (theoretically) and are, for the most part, not trained educators or program evaluators. That is why staff are employed – they play these roles.

There must be a balance between the advice received by the staff and that by the community as a whole. If the advice goes against the wishes of the community, then the Board must have some very solid and good reasons to heed the staff instead of the community that it represents. After all, if the Board exists only to rubber stamp staff decisions, then why have a Board at all?

I think the answer to this – specific to the examples you have provided above – would be to have a good understanding of the data behind the staff recommendations and to ask staff the following:

- 1) What are the other alternatives other than “do-nothing” and “phasing out”? Have these been looked at carefully? If staff have not considered alternatives, then they must do so before a decision is reached.
- 2) Have a Social Impact Assessment been carried out? Sometimes the impacts of a decision may be so far-reaching and damaging to the local community, that it is preferable that a Program continue in spite of relative inefficiencies.
- 3) Finally, has there been full local community consultation? This should be the role of the Trustee, but being that this is sometimes not seen as a Trustee’s role by some, the staff should ensure that it has taken place.

This was a difficult question. But I think this plays to the Board/staff roles questions asked elsewhere in this questionnaire.

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 think that timeliness and accuracy are very important. But I would also include accessibility on this list.

As I understand it, the Board website is being redesigned as I type this. So perhaps many of the suggestions I make here have will be addressed when the new site is switched on.

1) As with all communications between the Board or Trustees and the communities that they serve, there must be a set of service standards that are in place and followed. These spell out the maximum elapsed time period between when a meeting takes place or a report is released, and when it is published on the site.

2) The information must be accurate, yes. I am unsure whether there is a designated quality control manager in place who goes through all published documents with a view of ensuring accuracy, but if there has been a history of inaccurate information being published, perhaps this is one approach. But in the end, it must be the individual Trustees who read the reports and minutes, etc. to ensure accuracy and give final approval And this should be done before such items are published on the site.

3) Last, all documents have to easily accessible on the website. By accessible, I mean two things:

a. All reports, recent or archived must be easily retrievable and in a file format that allows for downloading to all operating systems. There should also be a “printable version” button to allow for easy printing of a document.

b. The Board should also look into making most documents – at least Board and Committee minutes – accessible to those who are visually impaired. This may also already be in place but I have not yet found any reference to such an initiative on the site.

4) Finally, as a Trustee, I will use my own website, newsletters and other media to explain Board decisions, their relevance and their impacts on the community.

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?

I believe that this is the case because there may be a perceived conflict of interest if educators had a greater role in Board decisions. This may have been the case when the Board held the purse strings of contract negotiations, but that is not the case as contracts are now managed by the province.

Educators are the front line workers whose opinions and insights should be welcome. We have a Parental Involvement Committee that has 10 voting members including 7 parent members, two trustees, and the Director of Education. I am not one to create more Committees and the ensuing meetings without good reason, but perhaps one way to enhance the Board / Educator link would be to establish an Educator Involvement Committee. The Terms of Reference of such a body would need to be carefully scoped out, but this may be a way to tap into the vast amount of knowledge and experience that our educators possess.

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 suggest the following:

- 1) I think it is important to look at new revenue sources instead of always searching for areas to be cut. Generating energy by using solar panels – a new initiative by the Board – is a good idea. And I am sure there are more good ideas in our communities.
- 2) Work with local communities and businesses to find synergies that can be used to preserve and enhance program delivery.
- 3) Actively lobby the Province to re-visit the need for two separate school systems. Many of the under funding issues that are due to declining enrolment and aging infrastructure could be addressed by merging the separate with the public school systems.

4) Realizing that 3 above will not happen overnight, continue to look for ways that the two Boards – along with the two French language Boards – can use common facilities, resources, etc.

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

The OCDSB is home to some of the highest concentrations of francophone communities in Canada, outside Quebec. The City is also home to tens of thousands of public servants – many of whom are bilingual.

As such, the everyday career market and day to day life requires a population that is bilingual to as great an extent as is possible. French Immersion is key.

But should the call for augmented and expended French Immersion programs be instituted to the detriment of other core English programs?

I am honestly not sure.

Not every student is well-suited to French Immersion programs and require a unilingual education in their mother tongue in order to attain their educational objectives.

we also must keep in mind the needs of the newcomer populations who require ESL or FSL training in order to integrate into and participate in their new communities.

Lots of needs for all types of education. while French Immersion is a priority, I am not certain that it should be an over-riding priority.

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.

This is one of the more difficult questions in this survey.

On the one hand, it must be recognised that planning for resources and classroom sizes is very difficult when parents “migrate” from one school inside their catchment area to another outside of this area. This obstacle to good planning can create many problems at the start of the school year such as having to institute unplanned combined classes, being short on staff / overstaffed, and transportation problems where demand unexpectedly outstrips supply.

However, in the end, a child’s right to a education in a setting where they are most suited to attain their education goals must override logistical concerns. The learning environment and learning programs at the students “home” school may be not entirely suitable for all. School programs cannot be treated using a cookie-cutter approach and nor can the schools themselves.

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 do not have a magic pill for this problem. I would of course lobby the province for more funding in order to cut wait times. I would also look to the community to see if there are resources that are not linked to the Board that may be able to help deliver some of these valuable programs. I think this is an under-funding issue – and perhaps a lack of long term vision as well.

But, while I do not have all of the answers, I would work constructively to find them.

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?

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?

Yes

Please explain.

Much of the program is mandated by the Province and is funded as such.

I would have to see data showing where the reduced access has taken place and the policies and decisions taken by the Board vis a vis their discretionary spending before being able to answer this question in a meaningful manner.

If the data show that there is a statistically significant correlation between decreased numbers of specialized educators and student performance, then students may not be receiving the specialised teaching they require.

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?

I would answer a qualified "yes". The qualification linked to funding for other programs such as special needs learning.

Most other developed countries integrate environmental education into their schools and we should not lag behind.

As an environmental statistician who, through a classroom outreach program sponsored through work, has helped to educate children about the importance of the environment and how to use statistics to interpret changes in the environment. While this is useful and interesting, it has been my experience as a

parent that students are much more keen to learn about subjects like the environment if they are removed from the classroom and taught about nature and the environment in situ. Outdoor education centres are ideal places for this type of learning.

That being said, decisions like these would, of course, have to be taken in the context of other spending priorities, e.g., special needs learning.

There are many, many NGOs in Ottawa who would embrace an opportunity to assist in teaching students about the value of the environment and how the environment fits into the environment / economy / human activity triangle. One approach to preserving or enhancing these programs would be to seek out partnerships with organizations like these in the delivery of such programs.

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?

This must be recognised when the Board embarks on its new strategic planning exercise over the coming months, so my first effort would be to ensure that this happens. Alternative School programs should be a part of the Board's long term plans.

In addition, I think the research showing the benefits of these types of programs should be more widely circulated to demonstrate to the public and some Board members that these are programs that almost always result in positive outcomes.

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?

Yes

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.

I would promote better communication, which fosters better links within the communities, improves transparency and fortifies the importance of public education and local control over education-related decisions.

Specifically, I would establish a Zone-wide Trustee Advisory Group (TAG) comprised of the Chairs or their designates of each of the school Councils in the Zone. This TAG would meet with me on a regular basis to advise me and to inform me on Zone issues and concerns. Minutes will be kept and I will be held to account if a commitment I make to this TAG is not followed through.

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

Schools are hubs of our communities. And the health of our schools is therefore vital to the health of our communities. Enhance our schools and our communities will become likewise enhanced.