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Section 1 – Accountability

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

Trustees are elected to make the best, most well-informed decisions they possibly can. This is done through consideration of input from at many different sources (see answer to question 2) one of the most important being the views of the public. We listen through e-mail, phone calls, organized public input sessions, meetings, public questions and delegations and other means.

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

As well as listening to public input, trustees also pay close attention to the technical advice given by staff through reports and staff recommendations based on their years of experience and expertise in the educational system. Another source of information may be the advice from committees such as Area Review Committees (ARCs) or representatives (eg. students, federations) who have studied the situation in depth or have certain perspective. Occasionally, we may do our own research or draw from our own experience. We then listen to each others' perspectives through active meaningful debate and come to a final decision.

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.

Trustees are elected officials and therefore, almost by default, feel an obligation to our constituents to make sure the public school system addresses their concerns in a reasonable and fair way. We have no individual authority and cannot compel Board s

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?

I believe the Board's decision-making process should be fully transparent, except where privacy or contractual concerns are over-riding.

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?

Please explain.

As was outlined in my answer to #1, trustees must listen to a number of sets of input and use judgement as to how to weigh each of these. In some circumstances parents have a unique perspective to that considered by the staff recommendations. On the other hand, the needs of the larger system also have to be considered in each and every decision.

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

The need for In-camera meetings is often questioned by trustees, but, in most cases, the topic of the meeting justified the closed nature of the meeting. I hope that many fewer of these will be needed in future.

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 not support the phase out of the Alternative program or the Secondary Gifted program until staff had been able to demonstrate that equal or better alternatives were being proposed and implemented (either now or in the immediate future). Unfortunately, quite the opposite was demonstrated throughout the process and the anxiety of the community in losing these programs was clearly justified in my mind.

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?

As Chair of the French as a Second Language Review Ad Hoc Committee, I worked to make sure that the decision-making process was fully transparent and include public feedback from the beginning. The proposed objectives of the review were published as were the sources of input for evaluation, the data, the research that would be used, and how the input would be evaluated. This was published in a series of reports before the actual decision-making process began. Opportunity for public to comment on these reports was given. This process made it possible to do the review with relatively little angst from the community and strong support from trustees for the final recommendation where much disagreement had existed beforehand and many long nights of futile debate had occurred.

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?

Better decisions are always made with better information. And who has better information than the front line workers in the classroom?

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?

It is pretty clear that the salary gap (the difference between what we pay our staff and what the province pays us) is a large source of under-funding for the

OCDSB. This gap grows each year as the increase – mandated by the province during negotiations – are applied to provincial benchmarks and not our actual salaries.

The trustees were not in a position to address the salary gap, given that the framework for salaries was dictated by the province during the negotiation period. We are forced to cut positions or raid the “non-salary” component of our budget (about 20% of the total budget) each year to cover the ever-increasing shortfall. We have cut positions such as overlay teachers and learning support teachers which has had a clear impact on student learning. An example of this is how intermediate students have lost access to specialist arts teachers and guidance support.

The province however would be able to address the problem with the political will. This could be done by:

Using higher salary benchmarks in metropolitan areas like Ottawa, Toronto, etc, where the cost of living is higher; or

Giving higher increases to boards where salaries are lower and lower increases where salaries are higher to move everyone to a standard salary grid across the province; or

Giving boards a fixed amount for the increase and allowing boards to apply only that fixed amount to their salary baseline. The 3,3,3 and 3% over four years province-wide increase might translate to 2.8,2.9,2.9 and 2.9% for example at the OCDSB. This would take a longer time to reach parity, but at least would lead to a lessening of the problem rather than increasing it as is done now.

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?

Very important

Additional Comments

During the French as a Second Language (FSL) review, it was very clear that French Immersion and learning a second language generally is good for students’ overall learning. The FSL Review Committee also recommended that better supports be given in French Immersion programs to allow kids with learning disabilities or other learning needs to fully participate in the program.

In Canada's capital city where bilingualism is an important attribute for the job market, not to mention that we live in a bilingual country, I fully support strong French Immersion programs for all students. I also strongly support improvements to strengthen Core French which is offered to students in the English program.

I am excited by the advancements that have been made to Core French through the FSL Review to implement or expand new methods of teaching such as AIM and the implementation of a French proficiency test at Grade 12. By testing students in comprehension and verbal skills, as well as reading and writing, we have already fed back improvements to program delivery that are having an immediate and profound effect in the classroom. We are already seeing vast improvements in our French program delivery!

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.

At the elementary level, most of the schools with high transfer-in rates are already full and were subject to a zero transfer cap already, so that this new policy has made little difference to who gets a transfer and who does not.

At the secondary level, I believe that the solution is to differentially invest in schools with high transfer-out rates. We must place or improve programs and make other improvements strategically to draw students to the school, instead of unduly restricting transfers. Students at the secondary level are starting to specialize and parents will do just about anything to ensure that they get the education they require, in some cases, including moving. We need to recognize and address student needs, not put up artificial barriers.

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?

Students should be integrated into the regular classroom if possible but only when necessary learning supports are provided and learning is shown to be equal to or better than that in the specialized classroom. Where an EA or other specialized support or instruction is needed, it may promote a better learning environment, or may be more cost effective, to congregate students with similar needs into one classroom with a teacher who has expertise and experience in supporting their unique needs.

The funding problem you describe is one that, again, must be resolved at the provincial level. Special Education funding should be provided according to a needs-based allocation, rather than moving towards a fixed amount across all pupils (SEPPA). Boards with higher numbers of high needs students must be able to provide commensurate support to their students. Funding is not adequate for boards with relatively high numbers of special needs students like ours. Students must not be being sent home simply because adequate learning supports are not available.

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.

We do not provide enough specialized programming to elementary students, particularly those at the intermediate level.

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?

Our Outdoor Ed centres are magical places where children can learn about nature and science from teachers who are experts in the field. These should be used strategically in conjunction with the places near schools where children can walk to learn about the outdoors, such as the Ottawa River and our parks.

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?

It was clear during the Alternative review last year that there are still substantial differences between it and the regular program. Staff have been directed to look at how we might apply more of Alternative's 'best practices' in our schools. The Alternative School Advisory Committee and Alternative school councils have been charged with working with staff to find areas where new practices can be piloted in our Alternative schools to keep us moving forward in finding new ways to innovate. It will be exciting to see how this plays out in our schools!

As far as where we might add new Alternative sites, I believe this should be parent led. If there is a critical mass of students in the east/west or south end of the city who would benefit from Alternative programming, I would be willing to listen and work with planning staff to make this happen in a way that makes sense from a system perspective.

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?

Before becoming a trustee, I co-wrote a report with the Community Council on Ethnocultural Equity that made 26 recommendations for improvements to services for immigrant children and youth, particularly in the area of English as a Second Language. Many of these have been implemented (and in some cases vastly improved upon) by curriculum staff under then Superintendent of Curriculum Jennifer Adams. However, we have yet not increased the number of specialist ESL teachers to where they should be nor provided additional supports outside school hours (with the notable exception of the Pathways Program) which is an area where improvements are still needed.

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.

As individual trustees, we cannot really ‘do’ something on our own to further public education. We work as part of a larger board of twelve trustees. Trustees set policy and provide the overall guidance to staff through the strategic planning process.

As a board, we have focused on literacy over the past four years and made enormous strides in improving the reading and writing levels of students at the OCDSB. I would now like to see now focus shifted more towards numeracy and the arts, and also in providing more creative solutions at the board level. Our leadership program under Superintendent Gamwell to be very inspiring and I look forward to seeing practical use made of the creative concepts taught there and applied at the senior management level.

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

Well, of course, education is everything and will define and shape our society! One could write an essay in answer to this question, but where I might differ from others is in emphasizing the importance of our schools in providing a

much-needed sense of 'community' to inner city children. We need small schools located close together (ideally within walking distance) to allow children and their families easy access to schools to help create a sense of belonging to a community.