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Section 1 – Accountability

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

Parents have vested interests in the schools their children attend and the schools in their communities. They know their neighbourhoods and they know their children and their children's needs. Parents often have expertise that can help trustees make better decisions. The lines of communication must be open, transparent, and accessible. And in return, trustees have an obligation to inform their constituents, including parents, of the opportunities to provide input, advice and criticism, and of upcoming events in a timely fashion and to assist parents in any consultation process

Parents have a number of formal and informal roles in the Board's decision making process, acting individually, acting in groups, and acting through their associations. Parents constitute the majority membership on every school council and many school councils are involved in the umbrella organization Ottawa-Carleton Association of School Councils (OCASC). School trustees should frequently attend meetings of the school councils in their zones and of OCASC and thus become informed on issues as they arise. Parents participate on school accommodation studies and related activities – for example, parents typically choose the name for new schools, which the board usually ratifies.

Through these organizations parents can influence school-based decisions and, through trustees, board decisions. Parents sit on board advisory committees (e.g., alternative schools, arts), and attend board and board standing committees including SEAC, the legislated Special Education Advisory Committee. Public questions and delegations are permanent items on board agendas. Staff reports are to include a summary of the consultation which took place in the preparation of the reports.

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

Trustees are elected to make decisions. These decisions must be fiscally responsible, promote excellence in the education of our children, and be fair. I will be responsible to my constituents and will give priority to hearing their concerns and advocating on their behalf at the board table. Given the professional advice of staff, and having been pro-active in seeking the advice of constituents, trustees acting in concert as the board then make formal decisions within their jurisdiction, in open session, and these decisions are binding. Trustees should not make all of their decisions based on pre-fixed philosophical or political agenda, but must be sufficiently flexible to adapt to changed circumstances or new information.

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)?

[no response]

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?

There is always room for improvement. For example, turn-around times for decisions are sometimes too short for proper consultation – by proper I mean alerting parents to the need for a decision and the deadline for the decision, informing parents of the implications of the decision, and providing opportunities for input. Staff reports should include options that were considered, including the recommended one, and pros and cons for each with a conclusion that explains the rationale for the chosen option.

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.

Trustees are elected to make decisions. The needs and concerns of my constituents will always be my priority. Both professional advice (by which I mean hard data and reasoned analysis) and constituent input are important for trustee decision making and each has its place. There are some matters for which professional advice is not required, and there may be options which are equally supported by professional advice; in such situations parent and community input should be the deciding factor.

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?

[no response]

Additional Comments

There are other reasons for holding meetings in camera including contract negotiations and sale and purchase of property. In my experience, in camera meetings have been limited to personnel, property, and contract negotiations in accordance with the law, and, as a trustee, I will ensure that is always the case.

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 want to know the reasons why the stakeholders are opposed to the staff recommendations and why the staff is making those recommendations. The staff should report on the consultation which took place, options considered, pros and cons for each option, and a rationale for the option chosen. I would also like to know the implications if the staff recommendations were turned down.

You mention specifically the alternative schools review. I have been involved with the alternative schools almost since their inception, and for some time was

the superintendent responsible for all of them, so I have deep knowledge and understanding of the philosophy and practice in the schools. A child-centred, team-teaching, multi-age grouping, non-competitive, parental involvement approach was not the norm in elementary schools in the early 1980s, and the approach that Lady Evelyn and then Churchill took was refreshing and innovative. It is reasonable to review the program from time to time, since circumstances change, including the amalgamation of the OBE and CBE and capping of class size in the primary grades. Alternative schools must continue to innovative teaching practices that serve children's learning needs.

With respect to the secondary gifted program, I believe that some children have learning needs, talents, or abilities that are so exceptional that they cannot benefit fully from a regular classroom placement, and for these children we must continue to provide special classes. I believe in a continuum of special education service from full integration with support, through partial withdrawal, to congregate classrooms, with integration to the extent the child can benefit, training and resources for the teacher, and without disruption to the learning of the other children.

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?

With my fellow trustees, I will hold the director of education accountable for timely release of information and for accuracy of information. Many board agendas contain items related to cycles of reporting and of decision making. These should be announced well in advance, perhaps an annual calendar for such events, so that reports are published in a timely manner, allowing for public consideration and input.

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?

As staff, the input of classroom workers should be reflected in the staff reports. Not every teacher, office staff person or custodian can be consulted on every matter going before the Board. Their union representatives and line supervisors do provide input to staff reports and this input is often based on those first hand concerns and suggestions. This is valuable because it provides a frontline view from the direct service providers.

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?

First I would urge the Board to continue its attempts to get fair funding from the provincial government. Secondly I would look for administrative economies. For example, there are one city government plus four publicly funded school boards operating in Ottawa, each with its own planning department, each with its own adult general interest classes, each with its own adult English Second Language classes, each with its own gyms being used by the community for recreational purposes, each with its own payroll department, each with its own transportation policy (thousands of students in grades 7 and up use OC Transpo), etc. There is already one transportation authority for the two English boards so cooperation is already in place on a small scale. I would ask for reports on what economies could be made by merging some of these functions. Thirdly I would look for school economies. Textbooks are becoming outrageously expensive. Would our students and the Board's budget be better served by providing laptop or notebook computers for intermediate and senior students, assuming safeguards are in place?

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?

[no response]

Additional Comments

It is always important to listen to parents and to other stakeholders. I have heard the concern that schools with French Immersion (FI) programs are becoming overcrowded (First Avenue, an FI-only school has been overcrowded

for some time and has reached the breaking point), while shrinking English programs seem to be given second class status. Over half of the children leaving 5-year old (Senior) Kindergarten take Early French Immersion (EFI) in grade 1, and half of them drop out by the end of grade 8. This needs analysis and remediation.

I am very sympathetic to parents who want their children to have every advantage that the school system can offer, and being bilingual is an advantage necessary to succeed in business locally and in government federally. The recent review of FI programming in the Ottawa–Carleton District School Board accepted that EFI would remain in place and that Late French Immersion (LFI) would be phased out and the locations for Middle French Immersion (MFI) increased.

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.

My priority in decision making is to serve the best interests of children. I am opposed to the cookie cutter approach to schooling in which each school resembles all of the others, since communities vary, as do individual students needs. There are times when exceptions to rules must be made, typically on compassionate grounds and special circumstances, and the path to an exception must not be so onerous as to discourage parents from pursuing the best interests of their children.

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?

When students are first noted as potentially exceptional, there should be some service provided until a final determination is made. Early intervention could include testing, referrals, and some classroom modification by the teacher. Once an IPRC determination has been made that the student is exceptional, service must be expanded to meet the identified needs. I would rely heavily on the advice of SEAC and of the Support Services department to ensure sufficient attention and resources are made 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?

n/a

Answer to 13.c)

Piloting and proper research protocols are needed. Phasing-in is one way of determining unintended consequences and adjusting the program to meet local needs.

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?

[no response]

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 response]

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?

The existing alternative schools were established in response to parental demands. I would support efforts to inform parents in areas of the district not currently served by an alternative school of the practices and value of these schools for some students and their parents. Bearing the label of alternative carries with it responsibility to be alternative and the parents can help define that for their community. I am in favor, for example, of an alternative school associating with the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa as a lab school, as is the case in Toronto.

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.

As a first-time candidate, once elected I will continue my campaign efforts to interest the media in school board decision-making and to help inform the general public on what trustees and the school board do that affects them directly. I commit to being an ambassador for public education, speaking well of the things we do well, and working with staff and at the board table to improve those things that need work.

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

I want every student to feel welcome in her or his school. This is where our young people will learn about each other, to see each other as human beings with feelings and ambitions. This is where our future is being built. Public education is our best investment for our children's future and their children's future.

Most children attend a publicly funded school; our school system provides equal opportunity for each of them to learn and grow into responsible, contributing citizens. School boards provide local control and local accountability to many aspects of schooling. School boards are responsible for the academic achievement of the students in their schools.