

CTA NEWS



SD33 Board of Education Trustee Election Candidate Responses to CTA Questionnaire

Trustee Candidates:

Katie Bartel
Barbara Bednarski*
Brooke Bouwsema-Cardinal
Michael Carter*
Marina Garmon**
Hugh Hamilton*
Paul Henderson
Sadie Hesketh
Leah Kelley
Christine Kruger
Sudakar Meganathan*
Cary Moore*
Darren Ollinger
Hayden Rampton
Willow Reichelt
Margaret Reid
David Swankey
Brian Vangardenen

General voting day will be Saturday, October 17, 2026, 8am to 8pm at the following locations:

Landing Sports Centre - 45530 Spadina Ave
Chilliwack Heritage Park - 44140 Luckakuck Way
Cultus Lake Community School - 71 Sunnyside Blvd
Rosedale Traditional Community School - 50850 Yale Road
Yarrow Community School - 4595 Wilson Street

Advance Voting: October 7, 8am - 8pm

-Landing Sports Centre, 45530 Spadina Ave

Advance Voting: October 14, 8am - 8pm

-Chilliwack Heritage Park, 44140 Luckakuck Way

Mail Ballot Voting: for information go to City of Chilliwack

**Did not respond*

***Declined to participate in survey*

Each school trustee candidate was sent 10 questions. Their corresponding answers can be found on the following page:

1. What do you believe is the role of a School Trustee in relation to staff, students, and the broader public education system? *Page 2 & 3*
2. What does respectful leadership look like to you when working with fellow trustees, district staff, union and the community? *Page 4 & 5*
3. How would you balance individual beliefs with the responsibility to uphold Board decisions, district policy and the Trustee Code of Ethics? *Page 6 & 7*
4. How will you ensure Indigenous education and reconciliation remain meaningful priorities beyond symbolic commitments? *Page 8 & 9*
5. What is your understanding of the importance of safe, inclusive and welcoming schools for all school community members, including Indigenous, LGBTQ2S+, people with disabilities and the marginalized? *Page 10 & 11*
6. How will you ensure your decision making is informed by evidence, educational expertise, and the lived realities of classrooms? *Page 12 & 13*
7. What are your thoughts on transparency and meaningful consultation with education partners, including teachers, support staff, Indigenous rights holder, parents, and students? *Page 14 & 15*
8. How would you advocate for adequate provincial funding and improved classroom conditions for students and staff? *Page 16 & 17*
9. What do you see as the biggest challenges currently facing public education in our district, and what role should trustees play in addressing them? *Page 18 & 19*
10. What kind of public education system do you want future generations to inherit, and how will your leadership contribute to that vision? *Page 20 & 21*

1. What do you believe is the role of a School Trustee in relation to staff, students, and the broader public education system?

K Bartel: I see the role of a School Trustee as governor, advocate, and supporter of public education. Trustees are there to set direction, ask good questions, listen carefully, and make sure the decisions made at the Board table reflect what is actually happening in schools. Through my years in parent advocacy and as DPAC Chair, I have learned there can be a real gap between how a policy is intended to work and how it feels to the students, families, teachers, and support staff living with it every day. Trustees need to understand both. That means listening, continuing to learn, and being willing to speak up when something is not working. It also means respecting good process and not stepping into operational decisions that belong to staff. Trustees also have a responsibility beyond the district. When funding, staffing, class composition, or other provincial decisions are creating problems locally, I believe trustees, through a unified voice of the Board, should say so clearly and advocate through BCSTA and directly to the Ministry for change.

B Bouwsema-Cardinal: My role as Trustee will be to represent the voices and wishes of the members of the SD33 community in collaboration with the rest of the board and in accordance with the ministry of education. I intend on approaching this work with a collaborative approach and to consider multiple approaches and perspectives before "hanging my hat" on anything.

P Henderson: To paraphrase a more knowledgeable person than I: A trustee's role is lay the tracks and maintain the rails, but don't play with the trains. To use a hockey team for a different metaphor, trustees aren't coaches or trainers or even support staff nor are trustees team owners, they are the general managers. They should make sure everything is running smoothly, tweak policy and budgets where needed and oversee the team, but a hockey GM doesn't suggest who the starting goalie should be or who gets more ice time. Student achievement is the goal of everyone in education and school trustees should support teachers in every way possible so THEY can help our students achieve. Trustees should listen to parents, students and staff, and advocate for the interests of the entire district, not just a certain school or the pet interest of a certain set of parents.

S Hesketh: The role of a School Trustee is to act as a planning leader, budget manager, and community champion. They serve as the main link between local families and the public school system. A trustee's job is not to run the schools day-to-day, but to set the big-picture goals, create school rules, and make sure the whole system works properly. For students, the top priority is keeping them safe and happy. Trustees make sure tax dollars go directly into classrooms to pay for important resources like counselors, modern learning tools, and clean, safe school buildings. For staff, it's showing respect for their expertise. This means carefully listening to them and working collaboratively with unions to build a supportive and positive workplace. For the system, it means debating fairly and working as a team. Trustees must practice respectful debate before a vote – But they stand completely united once a decision is made.

L Kelley: I want to be an advocate for policies and practices that advocate for students, while supporting existing successes and continuous improvement. I am committed to protecting public education, and working with others to ensure that our schools are welcoming, safe, and accessible places for all students, aligning practices and policy with best practice and human rights. I also see opportunities for building understanding in our community about the role and mandate of school trustee, particularly in the context of public education. It is important to acknowledge the amazing and innovative work that SD33 (Chilliwack) is already doing well, and to support opportunities to build upon this. I aim to work alongside others to hold public education in trust and to renew and adopt policies that support the current needs of students, educators, and families within our public school system through meaningful consultation. I intend to continue to educate the community about the role of a trustee, for instance, dispelling misconceptions about issues such as curriculum choice being within the mandate of the school board. There is ongoing work that must continue to address the circulation of harmful information that creates animosity toward marginalized groups, and it is the responsibility of boards to establish policies that protect students.

C Kruger: In terms of the broader public education system, the province sets curriculum, manages the legislation of the laws that govern education such as the School Act, and provides the funding. Trustees help set the overall vision and goals for the school district, focusing on student success and improving schools. They are responsible for the budget by reviewing and approving how the district spends money. The board helps create local policies and guidelines that help schools run smoothly and fairly. The board is responsible for hiring the superintendent, who is responsible for managing the day-to-day operations of the school district. Finally, trustees represent the community. They listen to parents, families, and community members, bring their concerns and ideas to the board, and help ensure the district is focused on the success of each and every student.

D Ollinger: The School Trustee, I believe, is to act as a bridge between parents and guardians with the teachers offering directives that the students be educated within the parents' desires, who make life choices on behalf of the student before they leave home.

1. What do you believe is the role of a School Trustee in relation to staff, students, and the broader public education system?

H Rampton: A School Trustee's role is to represent the community and make responsible decisions that support students, staff, and families. Trustees should listen to teachers, support staff, students, and parents, while making sure the school district is being run effectively and responsibly. Trustees should help set clear priorities, oversee the district's budget, and make sure resources are being used where they have the greatest impact on students. They should also work with staff and the community to create safe, respectful, and positive learning environments. Most importantly, a trustee should keep students at the centre of every decision and work to strengthen public education in Chilliwack.

W Reichelt: School trustees should be passionate defenders of public education and should aim to create a school system where staff are respected, students and families feel welcome and valued, and every child receives the support they need to be successful. Trustees set policy and work with partners to develop the strategic plan, and these things guide the operational work of the district. Trustees also advocate to other levels of government for things like increased funding.

M Reid: Trustees are each one part of a governing Board elected by the community to oversee District direction from a governance lens. Individual Trustees hold no legal authority- they act as part of a governing body and cannot speak on behalf of or make decisions for the Board. Aside from the core tasks of creating the strategic plan, hiring the superintendent and approving the budget, Trustees advocate to higher levels of government on behalf of the District, represent the Board in the community, and liaise with partners to make sure that all voices are heard at the table. Trustees are non-operational- they do not involve themselves in the day-to-day running of school sites. Trustees do not supervise, hire or fire teachers, principals or other school staff. They do not set curriculum or have any say in Ministry mandated resources.

D Swankey: Our role as trustees is to support district governance while modelling values that inform the delivery of public education in Chilliwack, specifically kindness, equity, inclusion, innovation, and collaboration. By taking this approach, individual members serve to support and strengthen confidence in our district and the public education it provides. Trustees also have a responsibility to support the culture and priorities of the district, and to advocate, most often to the province, when local circumstances require greater understanding or action. Chilliwack is an increasingly diverse community and every school operates in its own context; good governance requires trustees to listen, learn, reflect, and respond to unique needs in our communities and in our schools. Ultimately, our responsibility is to bring different perspectives to the table, to listen thoughtfully, to make decisions with care, and to keep the well-being of students, staff, and our broader school community at the centre of that work. That starts with decisions guided by a greater vision, most often through the strategic plan, which reflects significant input from our community, including students and staff.

B Van Garderen: School trustees are a key piece in driving and improving learning for all students. This is done by setting policies, guiding funding and holding those running the district accountable for decisions they make. It is also a way to enhance a voice for support for our most vulnerable students in our district through a partnership with the ministry of education and child care.

Strategic Voting

Boost the power of your vote with strategic voting! In a multi-candidate election, each candidate is running against each other. Therefore, if you don't want to split the vote, sometimes it is better to 'plump' for fewer stronger candidates. You do not want to dilute the power of the vote by voting for someone who could end up beating your preferred candidates.

2. What does respectful leadership look like to you when working with fellow trustees, district staff, union and the community?

K Bartel: Respectful leadership as a Trustee starts with how you conduct yourself at the Board table and in public. Trustees are elected leaders, and I believe we have a responsibility to model the behaviour we expect from others. That means being prepared, listening carefully, disagreeing without becoming disrespectful, and remembering that our conduct at meetings, community events, committees, and on social media reflects on the Board and effects staff and students in the district. I also think good leadership means doing the work before taking a position. I want to understand what is working, where the gaps are, who is affected, and why people hold the views they do. Through DPAC and BCCPAC, I have learned that strong working relationships are built through both formal meetings and informal conversations. Trust makes hard conversations easier. When conflict happens, Trustees should stay engaged, follow good process, and keep the focus on the issue rather than the person. We will not always agree, but we should be able to work through disagreement in a way that gives staff, unions, students, families, and the community confidence in the Board.

K Bouwsema-Cardinal: Respectful leadership in practice looks like utilizing colonial/Western pedagogy, Indigenous Teachings, and my own heart space to navigate different scenarios in a meaningful, and informed way. Additionally, Educating peers and community members where necessary and being educated by them when it my turn to expand my tool belt.

P Henderson: Empathy. One of the great challenges for those who seek political office is they are often natural leaders, strong thinkers, people with conviction and opinions. That's great, but sometimes that comes with an unwarranted hubris that is not conducive to growth. Successful leaders are like scientists with hypotheses. They should suggest ideas, try things and when the results turn out different than expected, accept the truth and learn from the experience. So trustees need to listen, truly listen, to try to understand the perspectives of people whose lives are different from theirs. Once you truly listen to people, then you can empathize and understand, then you can help where possible, guide where needed and get then back away with your hands off the train set.

S Hesketh: Listening. Respectful leadership involves actively listening to all of the above. Specifically, with fellow trustees – it involves healthy debate that ends with unified accountability. With district staff, it means their deep professional knowledge. Our educators and staff are trained professionals with firsthand experience in our schools every single day. Their training and daily working lives give them a clear, accurate view of the realities in our classrooms. As a board, we need to carefully listen to, consider, and act upon the input they share with us. With the community - Accessibility and transparency. It means families, parents, and community members never have to wonder why a decision was made. It also means a continued open door policy for board meetings – as well as being accessible via email/social media to the community.

L Kelley: It is important to me that I align my leadership style with my values. I am involved with and connected to my community, and I have worked to bring people together, motivate them, and have difficult conversations in a respectful manner and I seek to understand perspectives that may be different from mine. I am effective at collaborating to address issues and problem solve, and to work alongside various stakeholders (fellow Trustees, district staff, unions, and community members) in order to have a positive impact upon our schools.

C Kruger: Respectful leadership looks like a circle: no one person or entity is more powerful than another, each voice represented and listened to with empathy and a genuine desire to understand and, where appropriate and possible, help. Respectful leadership models regulated behaviour, is solution focused and able to compromise for the greater good (in this case, student success). It is fair, transparent, flexible and objective rather than emotional and competitive.

D Ollinger: Respectful leadership is the ability to treat with respect, fundamentally, the regards of differing opinions while engaged in debate.

H Rampton: Respectful leadership means listening to different perspectives, treating people fairly, and being willing to have honest conversations, even when there are disagreements. As a trustee, I would work to build positive relationships with fellow Trustees, district staff, unions, parents, and the broader community. I believe disagreements should be handled professionally and respectfully, with the focus staying on finding solutions that benefit students. I would also be open to feedback, willing to admit when I am wrong, and committed to making decisions based on facts and the best interests of students and the school community.

2. What does respectful leadership look like to you when working with fellow trustees, district staff, union and the community?

W Reichelt: Respectful leadership means having a clear vision and values while also respecting the input and expertise of others. It's important for trustees to understand that what might sound good on paper might look very different in the classroom, and we must listen to feedback from our educators. Both the CTA and CUPE are recognized partner groups, and trustees must respect their role in advocating for and speaking on behalf of their members.

M Reid: Trustees should know their role in the system, understand the Human Rights Code, be committed to Reconciliation, and uphold the Trustee Code of Conduct. Respectful leaders consider these standards, hold others accountable when they are not met, and practice lifelong learning about their own privileges and blindspots so they can continue to serve in a safe way. The safety and dignity of all staff, students and families should be a foremost priority in all communication, considerations, and actions.

D Swankey: Respectful leadership starts with honesty and integrity. As elected trustees, we have a responsibility to model the leadership we expect from others and to respect the role we have been entrusted to serve. That also means being prepared, doing our homework, and showing up when we are called upon. But preparation should not be predetermination in our position. Respectful leadership requires us to listen, ask questions, challenge our own assumptions, and recognize when we don't know what we don't know. This applies when working with fellow trustees or along-side district staff, students and families, unions, Rights Holders and the broader community. We may not always agree, but we can disagree respectfully, engage honestly, and remain focused on the work. Respectful leadership also means being present beyond the board table. Listening to community, and learning from those closest to the work in schools, helps us better understand the impact of any proposed decision. Finally, respectful leadership is about elevating others. Success in public education doesn't happen in a board room, it happens on the front lines, in classrooms, in schools, and in communities. Trustees have an opportunity to recognize the work, celebrate those who contribute, and support confidence in public education.

B Van Garderen: Respect is being willing to hear different opinions and ideas and making responsible and informed decisions with all the perspectives and opinions shared. There are experts and people that experience the needs of the district and community members that can help create a well rounded picture when guiding policies and regulations.

*Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely.
The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education. Franklin D. Roosevelt*

3. How would you balance individual beliefs with the responsibility to uphold Board decisions, district policy and the Trustee Code of Ethics?

K Bartel: I think this starts with recognizing that being elected does not mean my personal beliefs get to override the responsibilities of the role. I bring my own experiences and perspective to the table, as every Trustee does, but I also have a duty to uphold Board decisions, district policy, and the Trustee Code of Ethics. My years as DPAC Chair taught me a lot about this. I have represented members' directives that did not always match my own view, and I have had to separate what I personally wanted from what the integrity to my role required. Sometimes that meant asking hard questions. Sometimes it meant supporting a process or outcome that was not my first choice because the broader responsibility mattered more. My approach as Trustee would be the same. Stay curious, ask questions, get more information, and challenge ideas respectfully through the proper process. There may be times when I vote against a decision. Once the Board has made that decision, though, my responsibility changes. Good governance requires both independent thinking and collective responsibility.

B Bouwsema-Cardinal: I think it's important to have your own beliefs and values, but also understand that being a trustee comes with responsibilities. Human rights, the Trustee Code of Ethics, district policies, and decisions made by the Board need to be respected and upheld. I would always try to approach those responsibilities with respect for others, even when I may have a different opinion. Once the Board has made a decision, I understand that my role is to support that decision and represent the district appropriately. I also believe it's important to be open to feedback. I'm comfortable being told that there is something I could do better or a way I could grow. I don't expect to have all the answers, and I think being willing to listen, learn, and improve is an important part of being a good trustee.

P Henderson: As a person without strong ideological or spiritual or cultural beliefs that I cling to, this is no balancing act at all. The Trustee Code of Ethics makes perfect sense. I trust those who carefully enacted district policy over the decades. I believe strongly in our democratic institutions. If there is Board decision I voted against and disagreed with, I need to accept it as the decision of the majority of Board members elected by the community and move on.

S Hesketh: Balancing individual beliefs with the collective responsibility of a School Trustee boils down to engaging in respectful debate during decision-making and maintaining unified accountability once a decision is made. Before a vote happens, a trustee's job is to represent everyone in the community. During this time, I will speak up, ask questions, and bring forward any facts. Having open, honest disagreements is a healthy and necessary part of making good decisions. Once the school board has debated a topic and a final vote is cast, a decision has been made. By law, the board must stand by its decisions as a single team. Even if a vote doesn't go my way, my job changes from arguing for my side to making sure the decision is run properly. I will respect and uphold whatever the board decides. School rules and ethical codes exist to keep our school system running smoothly and to make sure every single child has a safe, welcoming place to learn. A trustee's legal and ethical duty is to serve every student in Chilliwack.

L Kelley: I understand and believe in the importance of the Trustee Code of Ethics. School Trustees are also bound by the School Act which, in alignment with the Human Rights Code, supports the human rights of all. I also understand how democratic organizations work and that once decisions are made those decisions must be upheld by all members of the board, and that this may supersede my individual opinion in some matters. I am committed to operating with integrity and grace, while ensuring that employees, students, and others feel safe and welcomed.

C Kruger: I have been a social worker for 35 years and as such am well versed in the ability to balance my personal beliefs with my responsibilities of the job and abide by the Standards of Conduct and Code of Ethics. Fortunately for me, my personal beliefs align well with district policy, and I am a proud supporter and advocate for equality, inherent Indigenous rights, and diversity.

D Ollinger: By keeping a rational and open mind, individual belief should be subject to the established codes in check with majority decisions.

H Rampton: I believe trustees should be able to have their own beliefs while still respecting their responsibilities as an elected Board member. I would express my views openly during Board discussions, listen to other perspectives, and make decisions based on the facts and the best interests of students and the community. Once a Board decision is made, I would respect and uphold that decision, even if I personally disagreed with it. I would also follow district policies and the Trustee Code of Ethics and hold myself accountable to the standards expected of a School Trustee.

3. How would you balance individual beliefs with the responsibility to uphold Board decisions, district policy and the Trustee Code of Ethics?

W Reichelt: Trustees have a right and a duty to speak at the board table in support of or in opposition to motions. We come from different backgrounds and belief systems, and we are not always going to agree. Once a motion is passed, that is the will of the Board. It is not appropriate for trustees to be working against board decisions. When some trustees act as opposition members instead of members of a corporate board, it leads to strife at the board table and confusion and upset in the community.

M Reid: I would not make the decision to run as a Trustee if I did not have a strong understanding of the Human Rights Code, UNDRIP, District Policy, and our Trustee Code of Conduct as well as a confidence in my ability to uphold them. Once elected, a Trustee represents all constituents and I have never personally had any difficulty making sure that my speech and actions have been safe (emotionally and legally) and free from hate. I also feel very comfortable holding colleagues accountable when their actions don't align with those foundations.

D Swankey: As trustees, we each bring our own values, experiences and perspectives to the table. That diversity is important and can strengthen the work of a Board. At the same time, we also have a responsibility to approach decisions with an open mind and not be predetermined in our position. Where a members perspective differs from the direction of the board, we should be able to express those differences honestly and respectfully in the appropriate setting. Once a decision is made, our responsibility is to uphold that decision and act in accordance with Board policy, the Trustee Code of Conduct, and to speak with one voice to uphold sound governance practices. Trustees must also understand the legal framework within which the Board operates. The BC Human Rights Code, WorkSafe legislation, collective agreements, and other legal obligations are not optional. Respecting diverse perspectives does not mean creating space for decisions or actions that contravene these responsibilities and fail to uphold the fiduciary duty each member of the board committed to in their oath.

B Van Garderen: While my personal beliefs are fundamental to who I am it is important for me to be objective and critically think about policies and board decisions. I have my foundation of beliefs that I will continually support and advocate for. I will uphold and support district and board decisions if my voice has been heard even if I might not agree with I will uphold them until it creates barriers, unsafe and unwelcome environments for staff and students.

Time to make a choice!
On October 17th, vote for the candidates who are committed to
QUALITY PUBLIC EDUCATION!

4. How will you ensure Indigenous education and reconciliation remain meaningful priorities beyond symbolic commitments?

K Bartel: For me, keeping Indigenous education and reconciliation meaningful starts with listening, learning and action. Our students are learning Indigenous history, language, and culture in ways many of the adults around them never did. That includes parents, Trustees, and sometimes the people supporting that learning in schools. There is a responsibility on adults in the system to recognize those gaps and do the work to close them, rather than expecting Indigenous students, families, and communities to continually educate us. As a Trustee, I would keep learning directly from Indigenous students, Elders, families, and local Nations, and pay attention to what we are hearing through the Indigenous Education Committee and the Learning Enhancement Agreements. Those agreements help guide priorities, decisions, and accountability. Reconciliation cannot just live in a strategic plan, land acknowledgement, or annual event. It should show up in the questions we ask, the relationships we build, the decisions we make, and our willingness to act when Indigenous students and communities tell us something is not working.

B Bouwsema-Cardinal: I think Indigenous education and reconciliation need to be part of the everyday work we do, not just something we talk about on special occasions. I would advocate for Indigenous ways of knowing and teaching to have a meaningful place in our schools and district. I also believe in leading by example and bringing my own teachings into the work I do. When possible, I would look to include local Nations and make sure their voices and perspectives are part of the conversation. I would also encourage staff, trustees, and the wider school community to build relationships and bridges with local Nations in their day-to-day practice. To me, reconciliation is about building those relationships over time and making them part of how we work, teach, and make decisions...not just throwing on an orange shirt and calling it a day.

P Henderson: Knowledge is power. We need to ensure we all learn the history of Canada since European contact. We may come to different conclusions, have different ideas about how to properly reconcile with Indigenous people, but too often people spout opinions on the issue of reconciliation and settler impact on Indigenous people without even knowing what happened. The adults in the room need to have mature conversation about this topic, ensure our kids are learning about Canada's history and the legacy of residential schools, which echo today across all areas of life, from education to housing to criminal justice. Dog whistles such as a pamphlet recently mailed out by our local Conservative MP about the need to "protect private property rights" is trying to solve a problem that doesn't exist. Extreme positions by a fringe minority of provincial MLAs outright denying the genocide of residential schools is toxic to reconciliation. Both are examples of distractions from the meaningful work that the majority of Canadians want to undertake and should be noise blocked out by school trustees who can help with practical ideas for the district beyond land acknowledgement platitudes.

S Hesketh: If elected as your School Trustee, I will treat the Indigenous Education Advisory Committee (IEAC) as the vital governance partner it is. I commit to attending IEAC meetings and integrating their guidance into planning and policy decisions before they hit the main board table. I will advocate for transparent, plain-language reporting on Indigenous student success, ensuring equity funding directly resources classrooms and honors IEAC feedback. Finally, I will work with the board to scrutinize the budget to secure the multi-year funding required to sustain and renew the goals of the SD33 Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement.

L Kelley: Reconciliation must be more than land acknowledgements at the beginning of a meeting. It should shape how we make decisions, build relationships, and support Indigenous students and families. It is critically important to support and continue the strong relationship between the 10 First Nations and the current School Board in Chilliwack, formalized through the Local Education Agreement (LOA) and signed by First Nations Leadership. The LOA outlines services and deliverables for students, emphasizing identity and belonging and recognizing their intrinsic connection to student success. Trustees have a responsibility to listen, learn, and act with care. This means respecting the Indigenous Education Council, supporting Indigenous student success, strengthening relationships with local First Nations, and ensuring Truth and Reconciliation is reflected in Board decisions, not treated as a separate topic. Every decision should consider its impact on Indigenous students, families, rights, language, culture, and belonging. Strong public schools must be rooted in respect for the land, the people, and our responsibilities to this community.

C Kruger: I will ensure I continue to spend time listening and learning. For me that means spending time with elders and in community, attending local events, listening to podcasts, reading books and enjoying Indigenous cultural entertainment. The Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action should be regularly reviewed and uninvited settlers such as myself must be mindful of the myriad of ways colonization continues to impact all people. In the trustee role that means always looking critically at policies and planning to ensure they do not perpetuate colonized practices.

D Ollinger: I have no objection to the teaching of indigenous culture as an elective; but would rather have students under my care to honor the veterans of the great world war in appreciation to the gift of living in a democracy.

4. How will you ensure Indigenous education and reconciliation remain meaningful priorities beyond symbolic commitments?

H Rampton: I believe Indigenous education and reconciliation should be reflected in meaningful actions, not just statements. As a trustee, I would listen to Indigenous students, families, staff, and local Indigenous communities and support the district in following through on its commitments. I would also support education that helps students understand Indigenous history, cultures, and the experiences of Indigenous peoples in Canada. I would look for clear goals and accountability so that reconciliation remains an ongoing part of our work rather than a one-time commitment. Most importantly, I would approach this work with respect, openness, and a willingness to learn.

W Reichelt: The current board has been very committed to making Indigenous education and Reconciliation central to our work. We intend to continue this moving forward. Indigenous content should be imbedded across curriculum and grade levels. We need to continue to recruit Indigenous educators. Continuing to honour local Stó:lō cultural practices is also a priority. Targeted supports for Indigenous students to get graduation rates at parity are also essential.

M Reid: I have been very proud of the work being done by staff and admin in our District in regards to Reconciliation. Although we have a long way to go, I believe that we have done a lot of work to keep it at the heart of what we do and to align all of our guiding documents with those principles. I would like to see the voices of Indigenous learners and staff amplified even more, and I would like to see reports on how that feedback has been put into action. I would also like to see more Indigenous community members in leadership roles (including on the Board) and have done what I could personally to encourage that growth whenever possible.

D Swankey: Indigenous Education and Reconciliation remain meaningful priorities when they are reflected in the learning we support, the resources we provide, and the relationships we build. The board cannot expect staff and students, to engage meaningfully in work we do not participate in ourselves. As trustees, we have a responsibility to continue our own learning and modelling that commitment is an important part of leadership. We also need to provide the professional development and resources necessary for educators to feel confident in upholding a distinctions based approach. This includes making available the appropriate tools to support teachers in upholding the ninth standard as a professional obligation, and respecting legislated requirements that have expanded through the implementation of Bill 40. Finally, reconciliation is about relationships. Our work as a district needs to be informed by and connected to the Nations we serve and the territories upon which school sites are situated. That means listening, learning, and building trust, to support the work of the district at every step.

B Van Garderen: As we continue to grow and learn as a community our Indigenous partners are at the centre of it. As a part of calls to action it is important to continue to push towards improving education attainment levels and success through policies and funding as well as having local Indigenous partners at the table leading and guiding the district. Providing meaningful opportunities for learning and sharing throughout the district by inviting community members and other Indigenous figures to share and teach to our community.

5. What is your understanding of the importance of safe, inclusive and welcoming schools for all school community members, including Indigenous, LGBTQ2S+, people with disabilities and the marginalized?

K Bartel: A lot of my understanding comes from my own family and from years of extensive advocacy within the disability community. As a sister and parent of people with disabilities and LGBTQ2S+ family members, I have seen how closely safety and inclusion are connected. Feeling safe is not only about being protected from harm. It is also about being able to show up as your authentic self, participate fully, and know you are valued, not simply tolerated. I also know inclusion can look and mean different things to different people. Being physically present is not the same as belonging. You cannot have meaningful inclusion without social inclusion, which is often overlooked. Students need opportunities to build friendships, join activities, participate with their peers, and feel part of the school community. That sense of belonging directly affects learning. Students who feel excluded, unsafe, or unseen cannot fully learn or participate, and teachers who do not feel safe cannot do their jobs well either. Safety has to include physical, mental, emotional, and social safety, accessibility, and freedom from discrimination. For me, the test of whether schools are safe, inclusive, and welcoming is whether people who are most often marginalized are actually seen, heard, valued, and able to participate meaningfully.

B Bouwsema-Cardinal: I believe safe, inclusive, and welcoming schools are essential for everyone to be able to learn, work, and participate fully. I think leading by example is an important part of that. Living my own truth and being open about who I am can show others that it is possible to be yourself and still have a meaningful place in a community. I also believe that lived experience from different perspectives helps us stay curious about other ways of being. We can learn from one another and think about how those perspectives can help us better understand and support the people around us. Most importantly, students and staff need to feel safe. Creating spaces that are safe and trauma-informed gives people the best opportunity to learn, work, participate, and feel like they belong. That means listening to people, respecting their experiences, and being willing to learn when we don't have all the answers.

P Henderson: When I was in school 40 years ago in an upper-middle class community in Ontario, we had very little ethnic diversity. We didn't know who might be LGBTQ because everyone was in their various closets. Maybe I look back with rose-coloured glasses, but even in that white bourgeois world I think we all still knew racism, ableism, and homophobia was wrong. My parents were avid charity volunteers, my mother owned an art gallery in the early 1980s with two gay men, my father was a high school teacher who took in a vulnerable student to live with us because of a broken home. I knew it was wrong then, so I am shocked we still live in a world with racism or homophobia of any kind. Unfortunately, as we have seen with a member of the Chilliwack school board in a fight with the former president of the BCTF that went all the way to the Supreme Court of Canada, these anachronistic beliefs still exist. All we can do is be a good example for kids, to continue to be respectful and honest and truthful, and to call out bad behaviour and make bullying unacceptable.

S Hesketh: Safe, welcoming schools are the absolute foundation for student success. When kids don't feel safe or accepted, they become stressed and anxious, making it near impossible for them to focus and learn. When staff don't feel safe, it makes it near impossible for them to focus and teach. Making our schools inclusive isn't just a legal rule—it's the right thing to do, and it helps every single student and staff members achieve success. I am absolutely committed to protecting these inclusive rules, so every student and staff member feels safe and supported.

L Kelley: The importance of ensuring and promoting safe, inclusive, and welcoming schools should be of the highest consideration in making decisions by the trustees. Our students, their families, and our employees must feel that their identities and contributions are recognized and valued and that they belong exactly as they are. These are foundational values that must be upheld and promoted by public education.

C Kruger: I believe it is a physiological impossibility for students to learn until they are emotionally, physically and culturally safe. Regulated students are successful students and schools have a responsibility to do their best to meet students' need for safety and inclusivity. Exposure is the gateway to empathy and as such, inclusivity is critical to education. For some children, school may be the only opportunity for exposure to anyone different from themselves or similarly to safely connect with fellow students who are the same, thus creating their community of support.

D Ollinger: All students, regardless of disposition to be subject to the same values of chivalry and chastity with no special privileges.

5. What is your understanding of the importance of safe, inclusive and welcoming schools for all school community members, including Indigenous, LGBTQ2S+, people with disabilities and the marginalized?

H Rampton: Every student and staff member deserves to feel safe, respected, and welcome at school. Students should be able to focus on learning without facing bullying, discrimination, or harassment. I believe schools should treat people fairly and with respect, regardless of their background, abilities, or identity. This includes Indigenous students, LGBTQ2S+ students, people with disabilities, and other members of our school community. As a trustee, I would support clear expectations for respectful behaviour and work to ensure concerns are taken seriously and addressed appropriately. A safe and welcoming school environment benefits everyone and helps students succeed academically and personally.

W Reichelt: Every member of our school community should feel that they are welcome and valued in our schools. No one should have to change or hide who they are to be accepted. We need to treat diversity as the default position. Happy and respected staff are ready to teach, and happy and respected kids are ready to learn. One aspect of inclusion is that learning resources should be representative of our population. We need to continue working on making our physical spaces, including playgrounds, accessible for people of all abilities. We also need to do more to reduce the barriers for people with hidden disabilities.

M Reid: Safety is everything. A student cannot learn if they do not feel safe, and staff must have a secure and inclusive workplace. Public education is for everyone, and that must be modeled from the top down. Sometimes that will require us to face uncomfortable truths about the systems we run, but those must be faced head on without pride or ego.

D Swankey: Public education serves diverse communities as they are. We don't select our student body and we don't turn students away at the door. That means creating environments where all school community members, including Indigenous, LGBTQ2S+, people with disabilities, and marginalized populations see themselves reflected in our school communities. Safe, inclusive, and welcoming schools help foster a culture of belonging, creating the conditions for students to be themselves, to build relationships with peers, and to learn. For some students, that sense of belonging comes easily. For others, it takes intentional work and the right supports. We need to continue fostering school communities where every student is treated with dignity and respect. This requires support for student and staff well-being, ensuring schools have the resources to respond to local need, while working alongside families, Rights Holders and community partners. When students feel seen, supported, and included, they are better able to learn and to thrive.

B Van Garderen: All students are welcome. Our focus should be and needs to be building a system where students and staff can share, learn and represent each other in a safe and respectful way. The statistics do not lie; this is where our focus should be. For completion rates, connection, and learning we can increase representation, access and support to these members. When we do we create a stronger, more diverse and understanding community that supports each other, rather than tearing each other down.

6. How will you ensure your decision making is informed by evidence, educational expertise, and the lived realities of classrooms?

K Bartel: I would start by building strong, ongoing relationships with the people closest to the work. Teachers, support staff, administrators, parents, students, and partner groups often see different parts of the same issue, and I think Trustees make better decisions when they take the time to hear all of those perspectives. Through DPAC, BCCPAC and supporting families, I have learned that a policy can look good on paper and still create barriers in practice. That is why I would ask questions about what a decision actually looks like in a classroom. Who does it help? Where are the gaps? What is the impact on teacher workload, student learning, inclusion, and school culture? Is there data to consider? What is working well that we should protect? I would also make a point of seeking out educational expertise and evidence before taking a position, especially on issues where I still have more to learn. Good governance means connecting research and policy with the lived realities of the people expected to make those decisions work every day.

B Bouwsema-Cardinal: I think good decision making starts with being willing to listen and stay curious. I would want to understand the evidence and listen to educational professionals, and I also think it is important to remember that numbers and reports do not always tell the whole story. The lived realities of students, staff, and families need to be part of the conversation. My own experiences have taught me that people can see the same situation very differently, and there is value in taking the time to understand those perspectives. I would also want to hear directly from people who are working and learning in our schools whenever possible. That means listening to teachers, support staff, students, families, Indigenous communities, and others with relevant lived experience. I don't believe a trustee needs to have all the answers. I believe we need to ask good questions, seek out different perspectives, look at the evidence, and be willing to change our approach when we learn something new. Ultimately, I want my decisions to be grounded in evidence and expertise while still being connected to what is actually happening in classrooms every day.

P Henderson: Teachers are the most important part of our education system. I can't expand on this without sounding sycophantic to a question from the teachers' union, but it really is my strong conviction that teachers are the key. My knowledge is a mile wide and an inch deep. I have expertise in narrow areas, but more importantly I know what I don't know. Trustees on a board of education can oversee policy and budgets and curriculum direction without being experts on governance or finances or education. A true leader has principles to guide them while relying on experts and advisors and the community. If the role of the trustee underlying all of the roles is to improve academic achievement, the best thing we can do is set the teachers up for success. I had success enough in school to get into a top university only because of the guidance and patience and mentorship of my teachers.

S Hesketh: Making good decisions for our schools means listening to the people who are in them. Our teachers and support staff are professionals who work on the front lines every single day. Their daily experiences show us exactly what our schools need. We shouldn't just guess what's best from a boardroom. We need to dig deep into what these groups are telling us. By combining their firsthand knowledge with solid research, we can make smart decisions that put students and staff first.

L Kelley: I am familiar with the realities of the classroom as a teacher in Chilliwack for 30 years, and as a parent of now adult children who attended public school in this district. I have been on both sides of the IEP table, as both a teacher and a parent, and I understand how educational plans for students must include the resources and supports for both students and teachers in order to be effectively implemented. I also have a Doctorate in Education from SFU, with a focus on inclusive education and disability studies in education. I am well-versed in understanding and drawing from both research and lived-experience to guide decision-making and policy.

C Kruger: As I am not an educator, I will place great value on listening to the advice, experience, and perspectives of those who are. The people doing this important work are often in the best position to understand what students and staff need, and they deserve trustees who listen respectfully and take their input seriously. I also consider myself a lifelong learner and will invest the time needed to research relevant issues and make informed, thoughtful decisions.

D Ollinger: Decision making should be subject to the logic of empirical evidence and statistics and not on conjecture by the uninformed.

6. How will you ensure your decision making is informed by evidence, educational expertise, and the lived realities of classrooms?

H Rampton: I would make decisions by listening to the people who are directly involved in education and by looking at reliable evidence. This means listening to teachers, support staff, students, parents, and district professionals to understand what is actually happening in our classrooms. I would also review relevant data, research, and financial information before making important decisions. I believe trustees should ask questions, consider different perspectives, and avoid making decisions based only on personal opinions or assumptions. My goal would be to combine evidence with the real experiences of students and educators so that Board decisions are practical, responsible, and focused on student success.

W Reichelt: Trustees must be involved in ongoing conversations, both formal and informal. In addition to scheduled partner meetings with the Board, I talk to my friends with children in the system about struggles and successes they may be having. I talk to my teacher and EA friends about their working conditions. Education has changed drastically since most trustees were in school, and it continues to change. We cannot assume that we know what is happening in classrooms unless we talk to people who are there now.

M Reid: One of the most valuable assets a Trustee can have is curiosity. We must be constantly asking what we know and how we know it. The challenge is to look outside of the established data norms (which are also important) and question who is not captured in that picture, and why. I had to learn to balance quantitative data with qualitative, and to remember that every data point we see represents a unique set of circumstances that can never truly be captured in a graph. Trustees must continue to ask questions, invite new sources of information, listen to lived experiences, and not presume that one side tells the entire story when considering information.

D Swankey: Trustees have a responsibility to ask questions, do their homework, and to pursue the information needed to make informed decisions. Leading with curiosity and working to recognize what we don't know is essential in contributing to sound decision-making. This means looking for both qualitative and quantitative evidence, and recognizing that data may help us understand what has happened after the fact, but it does not provide the full picture. Listening to the people closest to the work including students who know their experience in the classroom and educators and staff who bring professional expertise and lived-experience help ground evidence in story, and connect the abstract to lived realities in the district. Our strategic plan provides an important foundation that helps inform the decision-making of the board. It reflects input from community and establishes shared priorities for the district. Decisions should be considered through the lens of the strategic plan, while also recognizing when new evidence, changing circumstances, or community experience tell us we need to adapt. Being evidence-informed means listening, learning, and questioning our assumptions so a position or a strategy can change when evidence, expertise and experience indicate it is warranted.

B Van Garderen: Informed decisions take time and effort. There are many different people involved in education who all share and live different experiences and perspectives. When we hear from everyone involved and continue to rely on what our data shows we can create the best informed decisions that will support the learning for all students. As I currently work in the school system, in a different district there are many commonalities and experiences I can draw on from my own work. However each district and community have their own strengths and struggles and being able to connect to those is important for decisions on guiding a stronger education system in Chilliwack.

7. What are your thoughts on transparency and meaningful consultation with education partners, including teachers, support staff, Indigenous rights holder, parents, and students?

K Bartel: I don't actually like the word consultation because too often it's tokenistic or happens after most of the work has already been done. I prefer meaningful collaboration. Teachers, support staff, Indigenous rights holders, parents, and students should have meaningful opportunities to shape decisions before they are made, especially when they will be directly affected by them. Partnership and collaboration are at the heart of how I work. Transparency means more to me than making information public. It means sharing information in a way people can actually understand, being clear about how a decision will be made, and being open to questions along the way. I have spent years advocating for parent involvement in public education, but I also want to be clear that I believe in parent partnership, not control. No one group has the whole picture. Teachers bring professional expertise. Students and families bring lived experience. Indigenous rights holders bring rights, knowledge, and responsibilities that must be respected. Meaningful collaboration is needed with all groups. When people understand the process, know where their input fits, and can see how it influenced the outcome, trust grows. That trust matters, especially when the final decision is not the one everyone wanted.

B Bouwsema-Cardinal: I think transparency and meaningful consultation are really important because decisions are better when the people affected by them have an opportunity to be heard and participate directly. I would want to listen to teachers, support staff, Indigenous rights holders, parents, and students, and make sure those perspectives are part of the conversation rather than being an afterthought. For me, meaningful consultation means more than simply asking for opinions. It means actually listening, asking questions, being curious about experiences that are different from my own, and considering what I hear when making decisions. I also think it is important to be honest about what can and cannot be changed and to communicate the reasons behind decisions. I believe relationships are built through consistent, respectful communication. I would encourage building bridges with our education partners and local Nations and Indigenous communities in both the day-to-day work and the larger decisions we make as a district. I also know I will not always have the right answer. I am comfortable being challenged and learning from others. If people are willing to tell me where we can do better, I want to listen and take that seriously.

P Henderson: I presume this refers to transparency regarding board decisions with the affected parties. Open meetings, published minutes, and more regular communication with the media can help all parties understand what is happening behind the scenes. I do not know how much of this might already occur, but I think trustees should regularly meet with teacher representatives, PACs, and other groups in the community to ask what their concerns are and to listen. Without being disruptive, trustees should also regularly visit school sporting events, assemblies, schools and visit classrooms. I also think that meeting minutes should not only be provided but exact transcripts should be published akin to the Canadian Parliament's "blues," the unedited transcripts sent to MPs and to the press gallery. Given advancements in technology, this would be much easier today.

S Hesketh: Transparency and meaningful consultation are crucial for our public schools. To make the best decisions, a school board must listen closely to the people who know our schools best: teachers, support staff, Indigenous rights holders, parents, and students. I am committed to open-door communication, clear and easy-to-understand financial tracking, and a collaborative approach that respects the voices of all education partners to move our district forward.

L Kelley: I will connect with community in my role as School Board member and liaison, and continue to advocate for public education funding and policies that support students, learning supports, resources, and systems that support student growth and development. The role of School Trustee is to be outspoken advocates for their communities and to seek greater support for our public schools from our provincial government. From a funding perspective, the story of public education has been losses instead of gains. We have public schools because the public education system is egalitarian: it serves our community and it serves our democracy, and it is imperative to give every child the opportunity to succeed.

C Kruger: Meaningful consultation and transparency are critical for success, and a trusting productive relationship is not possible without it. Students are most likely to succeed when cooperation is working, and the circle gathers around the student. I am a firm believer in the adage "nothing about me without me". In this context that means the child or youth, the family, the Indigenous community where applicable, the educators and others ideally having a voice in the circle.

D Ollinger: The process of communicating information exchange should be subject to both effective speech transmission and reception, whether simple or complex accordingly to ensure accuracy and validity.

7. What are your thoughts on transparency and meaningful consultation with education partners, including teachers, support staff, Indigenous rights holder, parents, and students?

H Rampton: I believe transparency and meaningful consultation are important for building trust in our school district. Trustees should listen to teachers, support staff, Indigenous rights holders, parents, and students before making important decisions that affect them. Consultation should be genuine, with feedback considered rather than simply checking a box. I also believe the public deserves clear information about major decisions, priorities, and how taxpayer dollars are being used. While not every decision will satisfy everyone, people should understand how and why decisions are made. As a trustee, I would make an effort to listen, communicate clearly, and be accountable to the community I represent.

W Reichelt: I think transparency and meaningful consultation is essential. Having partners feel like they have no input or that their ideas are not valued is toxic to district culture. The Board should always be consulting with partners on major decisions. Sometimes tough decisions have to be made, and different partner groups may have opposing opinions, but everyone should be able to see how the Board arrived at its decision. Trustees also have to be prepared to potentially change course in response to feedback from partners.

M Reid: I think the District has been making a lot of positive changes in the way we work with all of our partners in learning. The most recent strat plan is an example of meaningful consultation in action. Another example is our work to establish governor-to-governor relationships with all local First Nations. I also feel positive about the changes to the partner group meetings (frequency and style,) and the public consultation process. Moving forward, I think we can learn from our successes and failures and that we will succeed if we consider these to be living processes that serve all involved (and not just ticky-box exercises and lip service.)

D Swankey: This connects directly to the importance of integrity and trust in the work of the board. Trust is essential to healthy relationships within the district, and transparency and meaningful consultation both rely upon and contribute to trust. Broad consultation cannot be initiated without care. It requires considerable time and resources, and creates the expectation of action within school communities. Before considering formal processes, it's important for the board to reflect upon those decisions where consultation is necessary, those decisions where consultation is of benefit, and those decisions where the board must act within its delegated authority. Where consultation is undertaken, committing to transparency requires understanding of what the decision was and why that decision was made. Often consultation is engaged in when there are differing perspectives on the best outcome; a transparent approach can help demonstrate that participation was genuine and different perspectives were considered. Meaningful consultation will look different for each group and may take very different forms, spanning less formal input in committee settings to delegations received through formal processes. As trustees, our responsibility is to listen, create space for meaningful dialogue, and to help inform better decisions with careful consideration to the input received.

B Van Garderen: I believe transparency is important when working with different partner groups in the Chilliwack school district. It is important to continue to hear from the different partners including community members. As we continue to support and educate students we also have to advocate and push for better supports from the government. The needs of the community and schools continually change and if we cannot keep with safe adequate support there has to be people willing to speak up to push for change.

8. How would you advocate for adequate provincial funding and improved classroom conditions for students and staff?

K Bartel: Advocating for better funding starts with being specific about what is actually happening in classrooms. I want to hear directly from teachers, support staff, students, and families about where the pressure points are, then connect those realities to Board advocacy. There are several ways Trustees can do that. I would bring issues forward through BCSTA resolutions and provincial and local committee work, support campaigns from partners like the CTA and CUPE when they align with district needs, and advocate directly to the Ministry. I also believe the Board should take clear public positions, particularly when we can speak alongside education partners with a stronger collective voice. At the same time, we cannot wait for every solution to come through increased education funding. The Board also needs to look creatively at how classroom conditions can be improved through partnerships with other ministries, community organizations, and service providers. Sometimes the barrier is not a lack of willingness, but systems working separately when students need them to work together. Advocacy is relational too. Strong relationships with government, unions, other Trustees, and community partners give us more opportunities to turn those ideas into practical solutions.

B Bouwsema-Cardinal: I recognize that getting additional provincial funding is a huge barrier, and I don't think it is realistic to assume that more funding will simply appear because we ask for it. I would still see advocating for adequate funding as an important part of the trustee role. I would start by making sure we understand where the needs are and can clearly show the impact that funding decisions have on students and staff. I would listen to what is happening in classrooms and use that information, along with evidence and educational expertise, to make a strong and practical case to the province. I would want to be realistic about what we can accomplish within the funding we have. That means being transparent about difficult choices, looking for ways to use existing resources effectively, and continuing to advocate for the conditions students and staff need to be successful. For me, the goal is to keep the focus on the people in our schools. Students and staff deserve safe, supportive, and workable classrooms, and I would continue to advocate for that even when the path to additional funding is difficult.

P Henderson: While not directly a role for trustees, I do believe advocacy on behalf of the district with the provincial government is important. Cultivating relationships with local MLAs is important, but with my 20 years in journalism in the Fraser Valley covering politics at all levels, I know a lot of people from members of the media to former and current elected officials with influence. Advocating more directly with members of the governing party does more than complaining to opposition MLAs. In journalism, we like to give specific examples, tell a story about an actual person, to illustrate a broader problem or circumstance. This can be translated into trustee advocacy by using (anonymized) specific examples of situations teachers face that need addressing. For example, instead of telling an elected official that, for example, the district needs more funding for EAs, we could say that "Teacher X was in her class of 28 when a vulnerable student had a disruptive outburst leaving her forced to temporarily abandon guiding the other 27 students because there was no EA available that day."

S Hesketh: One of the very first things I will do if elected is work with the board to push the government to pay back the \$6.5 million loan our district had to take out to buy the Promontory land. Right now, that loan forces us to throw away almost \$300,000 a year on interest. That is money being taken directly away from our classrooms. The sooner the province covers that debt, the sooner we can put that money back where it belongs—funding extra help and supports for our kids and staff. By repaying the loan and managing our local budget carefully, we can ensure every dollar goes straight to supporting the people on the front lines. I would also work with the board to push the provincial government to see the specific and desperate need that Chilliwack has with the current funding not meeting the basic needs of our community. Perhaps student registration has started to plateau in BC – but we need to catch up before it grows again.

L Kelley: Public education is crucial for the health of society and is currently underfunded and struggling. When systems aren't adequately funded, it is too frequently the most vulnerable who lose access to educational supports, but such shortfalls affect every learner. Schools are better places for all students when we have systems and resources in place that support adaptation, flexibility, innovation, and inclusion. As a Trustee, I will have the opportunity to play a role in expressing to the provincial government how critical it is to fully fund public education, and how this is intrinsically connected to addressing inequity and ensuring the success of all students.

C Kruger: I will listen to educators, students and parents/guardians when they inform me of their needs. I will then take opportunities to advocate to the relevant bodies when those opportunities present themselves, such as in meetings or in submission of reports. I will review budgets to determine if there are "out of the box" ways we can work with the funds we have. My years in government have prepared me well for the realities of government funding and what is realistic.

D Ollinger: To petition the government with a well thought out proposal with support demonstrating actual need.

8. How would you advocate for adequate provincial funding and improved classroom conditions for students and staff?

H Rampton: I would advocate for adequate provincial funding by clearly communicating the needs of Chilliwack schools to the provincial government and using evidence to show where additional resources are needed. I would listen to teachers, support staff, students, and parents about the challenges they are experiencing in classrooms. I would also work with the Board to identify priorities and make sure available funding is being used responsibly. My goal would be to advocate for the resources needed to support student learning, safe classrooms, and the staff who work in them every day. I believe strong advocacy starts with listening to our schools and making sure their needs are clearly communicated.

W Reichelt: Our board has sent several letters to the Ministry advocating for increased funding. As members of the BC School Trustees Association, we have also passed numerous funding motions and motions related to supports in classrooms. We have had modest success, particularly in the area of capital projects in our district, but we must continue our advocacy efforts.

M Reid: Advocacy has so many layers at so many levels. I think one of our most powerful tools as a Trustee is our professional association (BCSTA) because it gives us collective influence, but it also lets us problem solve and compare notes across the province to advocate more accurately and effectively. I am currently the President of the Fraser Valley Branch of the BCSTA and it has been an excellent tool for working towards better local outcomes. Boards must also foster strong relationships with local leaders at all levels of government. As we know this can be a challenge but I think that it is something we are committed to doing and if elected I think my skills would be a positive addition to that process.

D Swankey: As a trustee, I support board advocacy to the provincial government and our provincial representatives. This includes relationships with local MLAs and communicating directly to the province, recognizing our the co-governance relationship with the Ministry of Education and Child Care. I also believe it is important to utilize the collective voice of the BC School Trustees Association (BCSTA) to amplify advocacy whenever possible. I am in my second year serving on the BCSTA Board of Directors and have been in a position to advocate directly to government on behalf of all 60 boards of education. One key message we continue to highlight is the position of public education as a priority in the provincial budget, captured well in the point: "In the 2001-2002 budget, public school districts received 15.49% of the provincial budget. In the 2023-24 budget, this had dropped to 7.97%." This has informed our message to government; to prioritize education funding and increase the percentage of the Provincial Budget received by the Ministry of Education and Child Care. Good advocacy also requires good stewardship. Being responsible stewards of every dollar entrusted to the district helps to strengthen the case that investment will have positive impact.

B Van Garderen: This question hits home for me being a teacher in the public school system. We do the best with what we have but more and more we are seeing the needs grow and the support, funding and conditions stay the same or in some cases, get worse. As a trustee I am obligated to follow the mandates of the ministry of education but this does not mean we do not advocate and push for reform and increased funding for our kids. Education is expensive, but it is critical for creating a healthy, critical thinking and informed community. Right now we are seeing undiagnosed and unfunded needs that require support but additional funding does not exist to support the schools and teams. We have a system that relies on medical diagnosis where wait times are sometimes in the years. The question becomes how do we create more equity where kindergarten students have the supplementary funding available for students who need it. That is what I would advocate and push for!

9. What do you see as the biggest challenges currently facing public education in our district and what role should trustees play in addressing them?

K Bartel: I think the easy answer is provincial funding, and it is absolutely part of the problem. District funding has not even kept pace with inflation, while the cost and complexity of supporting students continue to grow. But I think the bigger challenge is what we do with the funding we have. Budgets show what we value. When over 80 percent of the district operating budget goes to staffing, the remaining funds have to be used very intentionally. We cannot afford to look at each challenge in isolation or keep adding short term fixes that do not improve what is happening in classrooms long term. Trustees need to take a wider view. Where are students and staff getting stuck? Which investments improve conditions across more than one area? What can we stop doing, do differently, or build with community partners? For me, the Trustee role is to help create a clear plan that connects budget decisions to classroom realities, measure whether those decisions are actually working, and keep advocating provincially for the resources the district needs. Limited funding makes those choices harder, but it also makes strong governance even more important.

B Bouwsema-Cardinal: I think some of the biggest challenges facing our district right now are overcrowding, rapid enrollment growth, classroom safety, and budget transparency. Rapid enrollment growth can put pressure on everything from classroom space and staffing to the ability of schools to provide the supports students need. Overcrowding also affects the day-to-day experience of students and staff, so I think we need to be looking ahead rather than always trying to catch up with growth. Classroom safety is another major concern. Students and staff need to feel safe and supported in order to learn and work effectively. I believe trustees need to listen to what is actually happening in schools and make sure those experiences are part of the decisions being made. I also think budget transparency is important. When resources are limited, the community deserves to understand how decisions are being made and where the money is going. Trustees have a responsibility to ask questions, listen to the community, and communicate clearly about difficult choices. I don't think trustees can solve all of these issues on their own, especially when some decisions and funding are outside the district's control. But I do think trustees have a responsibility to listen, ask questions, advocate for students and staff, and be honest with the community about both the challenges and what is being done to address them.

P Henderson: It is my understanding that – unsurprisingly since it's nothing new – the main challenge is money. Classes are overcrowded, teachers are pushed to the limit, EAs are overwhelmed, parents of vulnerable kids with disabilities are feeling forgotten. These are all problems that could be solved with an infinite supply of dollars, which isn't coming. What can be done at the trustee level is to be curious and inventive. Talk to parents and teachers to find out exactly what the biggest needs are, communicate with other districts via the BC School Trustees Association, and try to implement best practices from elsewhere to best triage the dollars we do receive.

S Hesketh: Growth is the single biggest challenge. Growth without funding that matches the need. Chilliwack is growing and the schools just can't keep up. Trustees need to come up with a long-term facility plan so we can catch up. This is something I believe needs to happen this year. The longer we go without a long-term facility plan, the worse the overcrowding will get for our kids and staff. We need to create a clear 10-year space plan so we can build permanent school spaces, manage local growth properly, and put students first.

L Kelley: I understand that Chilliwack is the fastest growing school district in British Columbia, and I recognize and value the important work already underway in SD33 to address the pressure of rapid growth and overcrowding. School Trustees have the opportunity and responsibility to collectively advocate for the needs of their community and as a trustee, I hope to build on that work by advocating for the staffing, resources, and school space, our students need. I believe that we need Trustees who will advocate for public education as it is currently at risk, and it is foundational to supporting our democracy. Building upon the positive work that is happening in Chilliwack schools is imperative, as is ensuring that public education is available and accessible for all students. We need Trustees who understand what is happening in our schools, classrooms and in our communities, as well as understanding the threat to public education posed by beliefs that do not align with human rights and the school act.

C Kruger: I see the biggest challenges as the role of AI and technology in the classroom, distracted learners, willingness to have parents/guardians involved, lack of funding, educator burnout, shortage of teachers, complexity in the classroom due to learning needs and diagnosis, violence in the classroom, overcrowding in schools, and student absenteeism. I am not naive enough to think trustees can solve these complex issues, but I am willing to be a solid partner, listen to the creative solutions of educators and do everything possible to serve, and influence policy to make improvements in my role as a member of the school board.

9. What do you see as the biggest challenges currently facing public education in our district and what role should trustees play in addressing them?

D Ollinger: The biggest challenge I can see is the effective grouping of students by ability to deliver education to them that is based on their ability. Second, I the mental health and well being of students under pressure from peers and social medial.

H Rampton: I believe some of the biggest challenges facing our district are classroom disruption, supporting students with complex needs, staff workload, and making sure resources are being used effectively. Trustees should listen to educators, students, and parents to understand these challenges and use evidence to identify practical solutions. Trustees should also provide strong oversight of the district's budget and advocate to the provincial government when more resources are needed. My focus would be on creating classrooms where students can learn, teachers can teach, and everyone is treated with respect. Trustees should provide leadership, ask difficult questions when necessary, and keep student success at the centre of their decisions.

W Reichelt: The biggest challenge facing education right now (across the province, not just in Chilliwack) is the increased complexity in the classroom. Teachers and support staff are tasked with supporting students with a vast range of aptitudes and needs, and some students require much more support than is available. This is leading to staff burnout. I strongly support inclusive education. However, I feel that we have been treating students in isolation, reacting to issues instead of being proactive. I believe that we need to do a systemic review of all support services. We must find a way to get the right people in the right places at the right time to support each other.

M Reid: I think the biggest challenge facing public education is meaningful inclusion. Trustees must learn more about the many facets of the system and how they work together so they can create more effective policy, ask questions about how policy plays out on the ground, hold admin accountable to outcomes, and listen to staff and students when they tell us about the impact on their lives. There are no easy answers and anyone offering one up does not understand the full picture- it will take everyone on every level working with focus to innovate and create new systems that are proactive instead of reactive, restorative instead of punitive, and supportive of all learners. I want to see a system that sets staff and students up for success at the base level and has a clear pathway to follow when things escalate.

D Swankey: Many of the challenges facing public education in BC and in Chilliwack raise a larger question of whether public education is treated as the priority it should be. Public education is one of the few shared democratic experiences we participate in. It is foundational to a healthy community, helping young people learn, build relationships, foster belonging, and participate in society. When public education is not adequately supported, the pressures felt in our schools become harder to address. Chilliwack is working within a challenging fiscal climate, and a funding model that does not reflect the diversity and complexity in the student body. Staff recruitment and retention continue to be an area of focus, while the need for increased funding for inclusive learningsupports continues. We also need continued capital investment, starting with funding for the Promontory school-site acquisition. Our role is to understand the local context, set clear strategic priorities, make responsible decisions with the resources available, and advocate for the support our students and staff need. That means being specific about where the pressures are, listening to those experiencing them, and working collectively through organizations such as the BCSTA to bring a strong voice to government.

B Van Garderen: As we are very divided with different political beliefs and values it can be a challenge to make the best informed decisions for a school district. As a trustee in a public education system it is important to understand it is open and safe for all people, honoring every unique history, identity, and perspective.

*The purpose of education is to make the choices clear to people,
not to make the choices for people. Peter McWilliams*

10. What kind of public education system do you want future generations to inherit, and how will your leadership contribute to that vision?

K Bartel: I want future generations to inherit a public education system that does more than deliver curriculum. I want schools that teach students how to think critically, ask questions, solve problems, create, and stay curious. Strong academics matter, but education should also leave students excited to keep learning. I have seen how differently students can thrive depending on the environment around them. That is why I want a system with strong neighbourhood schools, but also different programs, spaces, and approaches that recognize students do not all learn, connect, or find success in the same way. Inclusion and academic excellence are not competing ideas. Done well, they strengthen each other. My platform of safe schools, strong supports, and real partnerships comes from that belief. I have already helped turn that kind of thinking into action by advocating for Chilliwack to fund EAs for extracurricular participation, removing a barrier to social inclusion that had been accepted for too long. We are the first in the province to do this. As Trustee, I would keep looking for those gaps, listening to the people closest to them, and bringing partners together to build practical solutions that make the whole system better.

B Bouwsema-Cardinal: I want future generations to inherit a public education system where people feel safe, supported, and able to work together. I would like to see a collaborative environment where students, staff, families, and the wider community feel that their voices matter. I also want a system that supports adaptive education plans and recognizes that not every student learns, grows, or succeeds in the same way. We need to be willing to adjust how we approach education as our students and communities change. Most importantly, I want a district that helps its members become resilient and strong while still allowing them to remain human. Strength does not mean having to do everything on your own. It means having the support, relationships, and tools to face challenges while knowing that it is okay to ask for help, learn, and grow. As a trustee, I would contribute to that vision by listening, staying curious, leading by example, and encouraging collaboration. I want to help create a system where we can learn from one another and make decisions that keep people at the centre of public education.

P Henderson: Helping give teachers what they need in a positive work environment to properly do their job educating our children will create more positive connections, lasting memories as they grow into adults. This, in turn, will foster more stories of success and mentorship and inspiration putting the job of public school teacher into more of a positive light. If we can do this, making the career aspirational, we can bring some of our best and brightest young people into the profession in the future. The most important resource we have is the people. To that end, I would love to see – maybe help create? – some sort of a publication online or a podcast series interviewing people out in the community from various professions (e.g. lawyers, nurses, firefighters, accountants, small-business owners) talking about a teacher that changed their life or influenced them in big or small ways. That may not be the role of a school trustee, but if elected (or even if not), maybe I can do my part as an experienced writer/editor/journalist/podcaster to tell some positive stories and keep our education system strong and well-respected in the community and prioritized by the provincial government.

S Hesketh: I want our kids and grandkids to inherit a school system that is safe, welcoming, and has enough space for everyone to learn. Future generations shouldn't have to deal with crammed classrooms, endless portables, or underfunded programs. I will listen closely to our teachers, support staff, and families to understand the real daily struggles in our schools. I will work hard with the board to pass a clear, 10-year facility plan this year, so our buildings finally catch up to Chilliwack's growth. I will also push the province to cover outstanding land loans so we can stop throwing away thousands in interest and put that money straight back into the classroom. By managing our budgets clearly and working as a unified team, I will put my best efforts in to make sure we leave our schools in a better place than they are now.

L Kelley: I want future generations to inherit a robust and responsive public education system that is both strong and well-funded that welcomes all students and ensures their success. The Chilliwack School District's Strategic Plan, guided by Tómiyeqwa, a Coast Salish philosophy asks us to consider our responsibilities to seven generations past and seven generations. This reflects the kind of thinking and commitment that public education needs.

C Kruger: I envision a public school system that the citizens of BC, students and educators can be proud of. A system in which educators want to work and have the tools to do their jobs. There are so many amazing teachers in every school who care and are trying to provide the best service to students. I have seen firsthand the amazing difference educators make in supporting, working diligently, creatively and with the utmost care and cooperation for student success. I will strive for a system in which children and youth are prepared for the world, that they know and care about themselves and others in their communities. I will work for a system in which children and youth respect diversity, honour the First Nations, Inuit and Metis people and are prepared for the world as a young adult. I want to see youth graduate with a head start into young adulthood as appropriate to their interests, skills, development, and abilities. My leadership will contribute to that vision by modeling the maturity, respect and care I hope to see in others. I will advocate for programs in schools that contribute to a "well rounded" education one that supports the emotional, physical, cultural and academic needs of children and youth.

10. What kind of public education system do you want future generations to inherit, and how will your leadership contribute to that vision?

D Ollinger: I would like to see the legacy of a system that addresses the needs of students challenged, enriched or in general that should guarantee survival after leaving home. I would effectively offer advocacy and intervention to get the help to students who need it most.

H Rampton: I want future generations to inherit a public education system that prepares students for success in school, work, and life. Students should have strong academic foundations, supportive teachers, and safe and respectful classrooms where they can focus on learning. I want parents to have a meaningful voice in their children's education and educators to feel supported and respected in their work. I also want the district to be responsible and transparent with the resources it receives. As a trustee, I would contribute by listening to our community, asking questions, supporting educators, and making decisions based on evidence and the best interests of students. My goal would be to help build a school system that our community can be proud of.

W Reichelt: I want future generations to inherit a public education system where every person who enters our schools is free to be their authentic self. I want every student to have the support they need to thrive, and I want students to leave school with the knowledge and skills to pursue a variety of career paths. I will contribute to that vision by continuing to be a strong defender of human rights, kindness and inclusion. I will also continue to focus on making sure that students have a strong foundation in basic skills (numeracy, literacy) while also supporting access to innovative electives and exciting hands-on learning opportunities.

M Reid: I want future generations to have a system that considers the needs of all learners and helps them get the supports they need to be successful. I want that system to be rooted in Reconciliation and to be a meaningful and positive contributor to the community at large. Although we have many challenges ahead of us, I know that we are working towards that future. I am so proud of what is already being done- I have not toured a single site that did not have so many wonderful things to share with me. My leadership will contribute by highlighting and applauding what is already happening while listening intently to what can be improved. I will keep an open mind and not presume to know the single "right" way forward. I will work with those who are different from me to find common ground, and make hard decisions with care and empathy. I commit to fostering an environment on the Board and in the community that makes people feel safe, respected, and valued.

D Swankey: I would hope to see public education recognized as a priority in a healthy community and funded as such. A healthy community would be inclusive, responsive, and flexible, creating the conditions for human flourishing. I would also hope to see a community where kindness is not seen as separate from achievement or excellence. It would rest at the heart of school communities as places of belonging in which people can be authentic, connected, and equipped to learn. Finally, I would hope to see a public education system deeply connected to place. This means both respecting the land upon which the district is situated and upholding the responsibility of Tómiyeq̓w. My contribution as a trustee is to help build that future by contributing to good stewardship by the board, and pursuing our strategic plan with Tómiyeq̓w at the very centre. Tómiyeq̓w itself asks us to look seven generations forward and seven generations back, and it requires us to reflect upon the impact of any action or inaction we take. The commitment helps us to look outside the structures of budget cycles, reporting orders, planning cycles, and guiding documents, to consider real impact beyond our stewardship as trustees.

B Van Garderen: Public education exists to create well-rounded individuals who are informed, critical thinkers and emotionally healthy. These things are done through advocacy for marginalized communities, appropriate funding and representation for all individuals who attend. These are achieved through clear policies and governance by a school trustee.

*An education isn't how much you have committed to memory, or even how much you know.
It's being able to differentiate between what you do know and what you don't. Anatole*