

Submitted by Brenda Hooker on November 2, 2011.

DPAC Questions:

1) Why are you running for school trustee?

I am running for Trustee because I really do believe that a quality education matters and feel I can contribute in the position. Before letting my name stand, I educated myself. I researched the duties, met with several sitting Trustees, researched issues in our District, consulted with my son, friends and family and looked at education trends. I have a passion for youth and education and an interest in public service. I have a diverse work history including banking, logging, administration and am currently a tax auditor. I previously served a term as Councillor for the Village of McBride from 96-99. Since then, I have obtained my CGA accounting designation. My municipal experience enhanced my leadership and negotiating skills, I learned to present my ideas in ways that gained collaboration. So, a Trustee position seemed a natural way to combine my life-long passion for education with my skills and a desire for increased community involvement. I understand the issues faced by our schools as I graduated from a rural school, have a sister in Administration in the District and am a parent with a son in high school. I have the time to commit and would work hard; being accountable to the electorate and listening to concerns and bringing them forward. I am sincere, open-minded and a team player. I care about others and want to help them be successful; I am active in my union and other employee committees. Overall, to summarize, I am nice, a people-person but also intelligent and decisive, a person of action. I would have three main goals in the Trustee position: 1) enhancing fiscal discipline in the District mindful that we have to balance the needs of the few with the needs of the many when our resources are so limited 2) increasing consultation and interaction between the Board and its stakeholders and 3) being a voice for rural schools at the Trustee table. For more information, check out my FB page: Elect Brenda Hooker.

2) What is your position on choice of school and programming in School District 57?

My son was enrolled in a choice school and having choices both with schools and programming empowers parents with education options for their children. They can pick the best school or program that fits their child's specific needs and goals. More education choices can only create better education success for children. Every child is unique, developing at different rates with different skills and interests. Imagine an education system that could be personalized to enhance and support that uniqueness rather than spending 13 years getting them to conform. It is exciting that these concepts are on the threshold of being implemented in our District. As far as choice programming, we can't just rest on the status quo, however offering a wide variety of choices can be difficult financially and can be onerous for educators. We have to be strategic with our funding placements and ensure that we are delivering the choice options that will be valued the most. This is why I would like to see public consultation initiated by the Board regarding our choice programs, personalized learning plans and 21st Century learning.

3) How will you ensure that parents and other education partners are involved in decision-making?

As mentioned, I strongly feel that the Board needs to increase consultations opportunities with parents and all learning partners. There should be opportunities to provide input into decisions through both formal and informal processes. I would like to see the implementation of regular "town hall" type meetings where the Board presents ideas and options and

the public has the opportunity to ask questions and brainstorm ideas. I would also like to see other forms of meaningful consultation whether it is through focus groups, participation in regular committee meetings or regular visits by the Board to PAC's and schools. Consultation is particularly important when preparing our annual budget for the allocation of our scarce resources. Decisions made in a bubble are not effective for anyone.

PGDTA Questions:

1) What specific actions would you take to ensure better classroom composition for the students of School District 57?

First and foremost, we have to insist that Superintendent Pepper provide both class size and composition details in his reporting to the Board. Then we have to take immediate action to address the classes where composition is outside of the limits set by the Ministry and our own policies. We can no longer let educators and students flounder in classes that far exceed these guidelines. One of the first priorities of the Board has got to be finding fiscal efficiencies in our resources to be able to provide more funding back into classrooms. In addition, we need to demand appropriate funding from the Ministry to adequately support special needs.

2) How do you plan to advocate for District 57 students even if it means opposing government initiatives?

The Board has to be a strong advocate for our students in every way possible through its mandated channels. But as I understand it, if the Board gets too far out of line, it can simply be replaced. I see the Board's role as "if you can't beat them, join them" to effect change but within the "Board" boundaries. We can voice opposition, but the Board has to walk a tightrope between advocating for our children to the Ministry and also maintaining a cooperative relationship with the Ministry to gain every possible opportunity for additional funding when such crumbs are thrown out. As much as I hate the idea, I think the Board has to be strategically political with government initiatives whose main role will be to demand changes to the funding formula whose financial limitations place us in opposition so often. I personally follow the Twitter @bcedplan and advocate for a province-wide public review process of education.

3) How will you ensure teachers have input in the implementation of 21st century learning initiatives?

The Board must develop an extensive public consultation process around these initiatives and reactivate dormant educator consultation committees in the District. The possibilities of what we are on the threshold of are amazing but the changes will only work if all education partners are consulted and included in the process. Parents must have buy-in, students need to be engaged and educators must have a voice to ensure that the program we develop really will meet the needs of our students in the future. I see huge potential but also the potential for huge problems. Personalized plans for every student would be onerous for educators. I am also concerned when the Ministry makes statements like "this will redefine the roles of school, teacher, student and family". Are they thinking that soon we will only provide education virtually and have no need for live teachers? If so, then we need to be extremely vocal in our opposition. To implement these initiatives, we need strong leadership with a clear focus and dream of where we want to take education in this District. But it will not work if the Board and District do not include educators, parents and students in developing our 21st Century vision. Please see my YouTube clip on 21st Century Learning for more of my thoughts on this.