

Submitted by Elona Arnett- November 1, 2011.

DPAC Questions:

1) Why are you running for school trustee?

Over the last decade I have observed increasing aggravation between the provincial government and BC school districts, including parents, teachers and trustees. During this time I was working for a remote First Nation community, and experienced firsthand the frustrations of underfunding and government policies that were implemented without prior discussion with the parties concerned. I would now like to put the experience gained in working with ministry and political officials towards reconciling the breach of trust that has occurred at so many levels between teachers, school trustees and the provincial government.

I am committed both locally and provincially to improving public education, in addition to working to ensure children are well grounded in literacy and numeracy. I believe it is important that students be encouraged to develop their sense of social responsibility and citizenship, and am looking forward to working with teachers to provide the best quality education in the province.

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

Parents want stimulated learning environments for their children, and having Choice schools in the district gives them more control over their child's education. The effectiveness of children attending choice schools needs to be monitored though, to ensure that the goals of the school are being met, and that additional costs are not being incurred by the school district.

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

As School Trustees elected by citizens of the District, we have a duty to consult with and wherever possible, accommodate our constituents. Using today's technology, we must improve the communication and collaboration with all stakeholders in education. The decline in trust that the school closures episode created needs to be re-established, and action must be seen to be taken on proposals that came out of that time.

PGDTA Questions:

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

Some of the actions that I would implement upon becoming trustee would be 1) place limits on the number of students with special needs in any one classroom (this may involve splitting access to class time, with one student attending in the morning, and another in the

afternoon, for example); 2) providing more training and technology opportunities for students using IT labs; and 3) improving access to supports, including special education assistants and teacher training.

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

Lack of consultation is one of the reasons why I have put forward my name for school trustee. In 2005 I helped form a Funding Agreement Management Committee with the Department of Indian Affairs (BC Region). This technical committee was formed when it was found that issues arising out of policies implemented by the department could have been minimized if prior consultation with stakeholders took place during the development stage.

As school trustees, we need to advocate for teachers and students when the government unilaterally implements proposals such as the “Class Organizing Fund” without prior consultation with school districts and the parties involved. Using language such as “non-negotiable” implies an adversarial relationship which in the long run hurts students most of all.

Another government initiative that I was quite active in opposing was last year’s HST legislation. As a professional accountant, HST makes sense to me. However, the way in which it was implemented by the government left me with the same kind of reaction that the teachers must have felt in 2002 when the government imposed a teachers’ contract and stripped all earlier provisions protecting class sizes and services to students with special needs.

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

The implications of the BC Education Plan are wide reaching and impact on every aspect of the education sector. What concerns me most in reading the literature produced so far, is how little consultation appears to have taken place with the teachers themselves. Planning has commenced and timelines published, yet the Plan seems to have only vague references to “flexibility” and “support” for teachers.

By publishing its own document on education in the 21st century “Better Schools For BC,” the BCTF has demonstrated that it has given a great deal of time and thought to what teachers believe is necessary to meet the “accelerating pace of change”¹ happening in today’s world.

There seems to be a disconnect here between the two sides. Just imagine what could happen if this rift were healed, and the parties started working together. That would be worth working for during the next three years.

¹ Better Schools for BC, A Plan for Quality Public Education, 2011