

# ***KATE COOKE***

**School District #57 Trustee Candidate**

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## **DPAC and PGDTA Questionnaire for the Nov. 9th, 2011 All Candidate Forum**

### DPAC Questions

#### **1) Why are you running for school trustee?**

Like others who were active participants, I was frustrated by the processes used to make decisions during the district's school closure meetings in 2010. I was an active participant, and helped ensure that parents' voices were heard. A year and a half later I still have a passion for seeing that our school district improves and that parents and others are heard. I value fairness, honesty, creativity, and transparency and look forward to working with district staff for positive results in the next three years. I've identified 10 key issues on my blog, and will bring tenacity and compassion to all the issues that come up on the school board.

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

Having a choice as a parent is great, but it has to be a real choice between equally rewarding options, including neighbourhood schools, and not a choice between schools with uneven levels of support from the district or government. We have a tough region in which to provide education, especially with many inner city schools where support for Aboriginal students is essential and rural schools that are small but vital for their communities' stability. Choice for many parents is a way to get programs and schools that are a good fit for their values or their location. I have chosen French Immersion for my children because I would like them to grow up bilingual. Growing up in a military family and shifting careers more than once, I've attended 12 different schools in 5 provinces and 3 countries, some of which were fantastic and some not. As a trustee, I want to make sure that all of our schools are valid choices with rewarding programs for parents and students. Schools can and should be different, and have unique strategies for supporting unique students, but we public education is about giving everyone the skills to succeed.

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

As a member of the team that put together the "More with Less Report" suggesting 45 positive ways the school district could save money, improve delivery of programs, and green up to reduce carbon taxes, I was encouraged by what could be done given a short time frame in 2010. Given three years, I think it is possible for trustees to reform the board office's consultation process and willingness to interact (not just listen politely) with its partners. The board meetings, planning process (district and school accountability contracts), district website, and relationship between administration and parents, teachers, others, needs to change in order for the relationship to improve.

## PGDTA Questions

### **1) What specific actions would you take to ensure better classroom composition for the students of SD57?**

It is not always realistic to provide smaller class sizes across the board to allow more attention for struggling learners, but perhaps each elementary schools can use smaller class sizes strategically. For example, a rotating smaller class could be used to ensure that struggling students have a chance at least two or three times in elementary school to get extra support in a smaller class, preferably close to the time they are assessed for learning difficulties. I was certainly a student who thrived in smaller classes and had a harder time in larger settings. Of course, restoring funding for non-enrolling teachers would help, and recognizing that special needs funding is inadequate. Funding generated by special needs students is commonly diverted to cover the funding shortfalls in support time for non-designated students. Both are needed, but are not adequately funded. I'll be a trustee that draws attention to this and looks for creative solutions until such time as the funding situation improves.

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

I have no problem critiquing and challenging the “official” plans, from the government or the board office. The latest government initiative has many vague statements and buzzwords. I'll work with what I get, but we need more specifics from the government. There is a lot of talk about 21<sup>st</sup> Century Education - the parts about communication, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, etc. sound great, but are not necessarily new. There seems to be deeper agenda, though, for the replacement of teachers, schools, and support services with private and corporate services, distance learning, or phones with a data plan. I think education is about relationships, the most important of which is a caring, trained teacher working in person with children, be it in the class, library, or learning assistance room. If we give up on the human interaction, we are giving up on public education.

### **3) How will you ensure teachers have input in the implementation of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning initiatives?**

Over the last few years the district has lost many of the bridges that used to connect teachers and create common understanding between schools and the board office. This is most true when it comes to technology, a key part of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning initiative. The district-level committees and teams that used to collaborate on technology have all been cut, and 7 different “21<sup>st</sup> century” project proposals from schools were blocked or turned down by the board office last year. The most basic solution is to say yes to teachers and students when they are passionate about pursuing innovative learning projects, technology-related or otherwise. Almost every successful program or project starts with engaged teachers who have a vision for what can be done for students. There must be cost limits and tech support to consider, but technology must be given a chance to be tested and flourish in classrooms before teachers give up. It will also be a big help for the board office to send consistent messages to teachers. Pretty much every innovative use of technology in the past got its start in the district either through teacher initiative or by a partnership between teachers and a supportive board office. Part of this is the teachers and students with ideas for how to use existing technology. The other part is the teachers and district staff sitting down together to figure out how to support it. We need to end the shutout and return to some level of teacher involvement in decisions, training, leadership, and coordination.