

Erica McLean Introduction:

Tell us about yourself and why you are running or what you hope to achieve.

My name is Erica McLean and I am an Indigenous woman from the Gitksan First Nation, mother of two, strength and conditioning coach, proud weightlifter, and former educator of School District No. 57 (SD57). A graduate of CNC and UNBC, I believe wholeheartedly in what the North has to offer. Before my recent resignation in June 2022, I spent many years as a community school coordinator in SD57 where my role was to connect our school community to our greater community in order to strengthen connection and identity for students, particularly vulnerable learners. I am well versed in the on-the-ground needs of educators in our schools.

Question 1 from CUPE Local 3742:

If you are elected as a trustee, what do you view as your responsibility in relation to senior management?

While trustees and the board are not involved in daily operations within our organization, we are indirectly responsible for the culture and wellbeing of staff/students within our schools. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the board to not only work within policies but practice with intention of building a culture of transparency and connection to our front-line operations. This begins with building and strengthening relationships and includes developing systems that will directly support all staff.

Question 2 from PGDTA:

School District 57 continues to face a six-year shortage of teachers in all of its communities. This has already resulted in over 20 thousand hours of lost support to students and District assessment data shows that vulnerable students are not reaching education achievement benchmarks in multiple areas.

What are your ideas for teacher recruitment and retention and how would you advocate at both local and provincial levels for a fully funded serious recruitment and retention plan?

Because of the state of our school district, specifically regarding the number of staff on sick/stress leave and job vacancies, I would advocate for a district audit/scan of current practice to examine precisely where we are today and how we got here. In order to move toward health and wellness for all, we need to make decisions that communicate to staff: we are here for you and the work you do truly matters. This would include a scan of current HR and hiring practices to better understand how we're recruiting teachers outside of our district.

In my response to the Canadian Parents for French-B.C. & Yukon branch questions, I included I would like to examine how we can expand relationships with B. Ed. Programs that are led in French such as those at the University of BC and Simon Fraser University in order to reach teacher candidates who may consider a career in Northern BC upon graduation. This practice appears to be working well at the UNBC B. Ed program and I'd like to explore how we can expand these relationship practices in such a way that can support our French programs. While I can't comment meaningfully on a fully-funded recruitment and retention plan, I am open to any conversation that would address the need that is the loss of critical support hours of recent years and the job vacancy rate we continue to face.

Question 3 from DPAC:

Parents value accountability - what does that mean to you, how can a trustee work to increase accountability in SD57?

A large part of my platform is rooted in my own values. A professor once told me, "You chose this role and you love it 24/7." This became a guiding torch that reminds me: I can control myself and how I respond.

If I know who I am and am holding myself accountable, it's easy to ask the same of others. And like I've alluded to in other answers, I am a strong believer in communication. If we can communicate precisely where we need to improve as well as we can communicate the good things happening, we support a culture of learning as opposed to a culture of fear in making mistakes.

In my academic career, I studied qualitative research a fair amount. One professor's teachings remain a guide for me today- it is my job to communicate precisely how I arrived to any conclusion or decision in order to increase the rigour of my position and learning. This is how we build trust in our work.

Question 4:

Please provide a value Statement on Indigenous Education in School District 57.

I have to first acknowledge one of my favourite authors. Malcolm Gladwell said the intention is never to change peoples' minds. Rather, to leave people with something to think about. I believe we've arrived to this place of having the conversation on Indigenous Education because we are looking for a way forward. I think this is through belonging. Disproportionately, Indigenous children experience challenges in their academic journey. Two large barriers to gaining a sense of belonging and ownership over one's own outcomes are trauma and poverty. With poverty and trauma, we carry a lot of shame, distrust and indifference. But schools are our one opportunity to change that narrative- to remind our students, every vulnerable student Indigenous and non, they belong here and the effort they put in during class, matters. A good example of this in practice are the after-school programs happening in many schools in SD 57. These programs are meant to eliminate barriers to participating in sport and art for students. They are inclusive to any student who wishes to participate. Another powerful illustration of this in practice is one high school athletic director who has completed their master's degree on the subject of increasing Indigenous student participation in school sport. What this looks like is, they have eliminated school sport fees for all grade 8 and (I'm not certain, but confident) grade 9 students. These programs communicate to students that regardless of who they are, they deserve access because they are a part of their community. I truly believe Indigenous Education is about creating belonging for generations of children who didn't feel like they belonged in education. We are getting there. And we still have meaningful work to do. I believe that work can be strengthened if we can amplify and expand innovative programs like these.