

QUESTIONS FOR ALL SCHOOL TRUSTEE CANDIDATES - COQUITLAM

The candidate marked with an asterisk () did not respond to the survey.*

1. Why are you running for the position of school trustee?

• **Jennifer Blatherwick:**

Having five kids in the system, I've had the opportunity to coach and volunteer at the elementary, middle and high school levels. As the wife and friend of many teachers, it's been a great opportunity get their perspective on issues and challenges. I believe small-scale efforts can create important opportunities for a child, but there are larger, organization-wide changes that could positively impact all families in Coquitlam. Our district needs to look at research-backed ways to improve our system, and I can effectively advocate for those changes at the board level.

• **Francis Bucher:**

I just retired from 34 years of teaching (most recently Burnaby SD 41). I am proud advocate of the public school system and I feel that I'm well informed of the educational issues both provincially and locally. I have a ton of energy to devote to this position and I'll do my best to listen. Basically, I hope to make a positive difference in the lives of all concerned in our schools.

• **Carol Cahoon:**

After 4 years of being a school trustee, I have learned so much. I want to continue strengthening SD43 by supporting teachers and students with consistent funding, putting resources back into the schools, and building on the many positive outcomes the district has experienced since 2014

• **Chuck Denison:**

To continue the momentum I helped build. We do not want to move sideways. Finances in SD43 have stabilized. Relationships with partner groups have strengthened. Student Mental Health is better supported. There will also be new challenges ahead. Experience on the School Board, and established relationships, will be needed to manage these challenges most effectively.

• **Barb Hobson:**

I have served on the Board of Education for SD #43 for the past 4 years. During that time we have made a real difference. Successes include:

- hiring more teachers and support staff than ever before (with declining enrollment);
- eliminating teacher lay-off/recall;
- being at the forefront provincially with compliance to MOA #17;
- developing excellent relationships with partner groups and meeting regularly;
- establishing a transparent Finance & Audit Committee;
- establishing a new budget process that is more authentic and inclusive;
- repaying \$13.4M in debt; completing seismic rebuilds at Centennial and Moody Middle with Banting construction soon to be completed;
- building Smiling Creek Elementary and funding the planning of two additional schools on Burke Mountain as well as securing land for five schools in the area in total.

However, there is more work to do. The document DIRECTIONS 2020, which lists the strategic goals and objectives of the District, is a roadmap for the future.

• **Shari O'Neill:**

I am running because there is always room for improvement. I am very concerned about the lack of support for teachers in the classroom for special needs and L.D., students. Another concern for me, is the wait lists for Psych Ed assessments.

• ***Hui Wang**

• **Craig Woods:**

- to continue with my community service after representing parents as the DPAC president for five years
- to build upon existing relationships with the CTA, CUPE, CPVPA, and the DLT in order to expand upon consultative processes and increase transparency at the school board level
- to continue to advocate for resources to remain in the classrooms, and to sustain healthy staffing levels

2. Have you ever been a candidate in a previous civic, provincial or federal election: Please provide details.

• **Jennifer Blatherwick:**

No.

• **Francis Bucher :**

No, this is my first 'foray' into political life.

• **Carol Cahoon:**

Yes, I campaigned and was elected as a school trustee in 2014

• **Chuck Denison:**

Just completing my first term as an SD43 Trustee.

- **Barb Hobson:**
Yes, I was an elected school trustee from 1996 to 2002.
- **Shari O'Neill:**
Yes, I ran in 2014 for School Trustee, I didn't really know how campaigning worked, and did not do a good job at it. I now know how to run a good campaign and am doing so. I have partnered up with City of Coquitlam Councillor, Bonita Zarrillo, for door knocking. We are very supportive of each other.
- ***Hui Wang**
- **Craig Woods:**
No, I have not. I have served as the President of the School District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC) for five years leading up to this civic election.

3. Describe an action, initiated by you, that resulted in a positive change for your community.

- **Jennifer Blatherwick:**
When the city of Coquitlam was planning to develop their park property next to Maillard Middle School, the design called for the replacement of Rochester Pool with a toddler playground. In conjunction with another resident, I presented the neighbourhood petition to City Hall to renew the pool. City Hall did not agree, and initially decided to remain with their plan to replace the pool with an inadequate park structure. After determined and persistent follow-up through emails, phone calls, and organizing local residents to come out to in-person consultation, the city revolutionized the plan, dramatically increasing the budget, and redesigning the park for middle school students, including a climbing wall, large slide and challenging, age-appropriate climbing structures.
- **Francis Bucher:**
While teaching in Smithers, I organized a giant 'garage sale' where unused items were collected, sorted and sold to the locals. After raising over \$3,000.00 all the money was sent to MSF for the earthquake relief in Haiti. I have also coached youth soccer, played piano, sung, and directed community choirs and bands.
- **Carol Cahoon:**
When I was the Chairperson of the Coquitlam Montessori Society, I lead a complete inventory of the Montessori equipment throughout the district so that there was increased accountability related to the funds donated by families. The outcome was a reallocation of existing equipment so that every classroom was equally resourced. Teachers and parents greatly appreciated the results of this 18 month task.
- **Chuck Denison:**
I developed and presented leadership training to Student Leadership executive students and their staff advisors in SD36, about 12 elementary schools.
- **Barb Hobson:**
Co-founded the Creative Problem Solving Society in support of the Odyssey of the Mind program. Started a breakfast program at a local elementary. Founding member of the Coquitlam Montessori Society.
- **Shari O'Neill:**
This action wasn't initiated by me, but I have helped every year for going on 5 years now, with the Enchantment Project fundraising committee. Each year we raise money so that students that are graduating, that can't afford gowns, tuxes, grad tickets, as the money raised goes towards helping these Grads. It's very fulfilling. I was also DPAC Parent Ed Coordinator and organized parent info nights on an array of different subjects such as Social Media, Mental Health
- ***Hui Wang**
- **Craig Woods:**
As DPAC President I have worked towards increasing parent awareness and creating more proactive engagement. I did this by striking a PAC outreach campaign and having myself and fellow DPAC execs attend over 20 PAC meetings in a year, with PACs that typically were not coming to DPAC meetings. The efforts increased our average attendance from 33% of PACs to 50% - an outstanding turnout compared to other school districts in the Province
- Another example of increasing proactive parent engagement was working with the Board and DLT, in collaboration with the CTA, to allow for being a part of the budget planning process much earlier in the year. This allowed for parent feedback and consultation to be brought to the board while the draft budget was being formed, not after the budget was presented publicly.

4. What specific action(s) have you taken in the past to show your support for Coquitlam teachers?

- **Jennifer Blatherwick:**
During the last strike in 2014, I came out to walk the picket line with teachers at Rochester Elementary, bringing snacks and making signs. In the classroom, where there was a situation where an unsupported student was being physically violent on a continuous basis with a teacher, I advocated for more support at the school administration level, and when none was forthcoming, took the complaint to the schoolboard, following it until the student was given a half-time EA, and more consistent classroom support from administration.
- **Francis Bucher:**
Nothing specific for the CTA but I have served as a staff rep. and a Pro-D chair while in Smithers (SD 54).

- **Carol Cahoon:**

During the last strike, I visited teachers on the picket lines to show support, and I listened to their concerns so that I could better understand the issues that they face.

As a school trustee, I worked with Human Resources to help reduce the common practice of school teachers receiving “pink slips” on a yearly basis. This practice was frustrating to parents, students, and teachers as it created uncertainty for everyone. Being a Trustee, I have become better educated about the annual lay-off and recall process, and I am extremely proud that we have not had any lay-offs for the past two years.

I also show my support by attending almost every event and Pro D days at my liaison schools and throughout the district, and I meet and talk to as many teachers and support staff as possible so that I can better understand their challenges and be a better advocate on their behalf.

Another action I've taken is joining the Children of the Street Society (COS). Learning about the history of the COS, and how it was started by parents whose children were drawn into the sex trade, made me realize the importance of the work being done by them. As the current acting Chair of the Board, I think the resources COS gives to teachers by providing workshops, school wide presentations and providing educational materials is crucial in supporting teachers' efforts to educate and empower students to recognize dangerous situations and avoid being lured into the sex trade.

- **Chuck Denison:**

While DPAC43 President in 2014, I voiced strong support for adequate funding for Public Education, often quoted in the Tri-City News.

- **Barb Hobson:**

Pushed for the elimination of lay-off/recall. Advocated for the new budget process which provides the CTA, and all partner groups, with an authentic method of having input into the annual school district budget process. Supported moving forward as quickly as possible to provide more teachers and classrooms to comply with MOA #17.

- **Shari O'Neill:**

During the last strike I supported my school's teachers by taking them Tim Bits and pizza. Heidi Cook, a teacher at the school was kind enough to send me a thank you card, that meant as much to me as the Tim Bits and pizza meant to them I'm sure. I also participated in rallies for the teachers, one at Hillcrest Middle and one at Suter Brook in Port Moody that was led by a parent. My family and I have also donated to our kids' class rooms over the years by supplying DVD machines, CD players, area carpets, and a custom built crafts table for kindergarten classes. I have also volunteered in the class room whenever possible.

- ***Hui Wang**

- **Craig Woods:**

- directed parents towards engaging with their child's teacher, and not choosing to go to social media
- advocated to the board to restore and sustain healthy staffing levels in schools
- profiled teachers and their various educational initiatives to parents via DPAC meetings and parent ed events
- worked directly with teachers to bring a mental health and well being initiative in to classrooms
- Provided teachers with PAC funding for classroom activities, to be used at the teacher's discretion

5. Explain the importance of class size & composition from your perspective.

- **Jennifer Blatherwick:**

Studies say that smaller class sizes help less-advantaged students, while larger class sizes disadvantage those students even more. Larger classes mean less one-on-one time with each student, and increase the likelihood that students will fall through the cracks. If the composition is too challenging, we have the same difficulty – vulnerable students struggle more. Ignoring the physical and time limitations that teachers face in the classroom costs us so much more later, when students who would have benefited from a more supportive learning environment continue to struggle through the later grades.

- **Francis Bucher:**

I can give you an example of why. My daughter is a new teacher in Victoria. She has her hands full with the max. of 20 students. If it weren't for our vigilance and insistence, she would have a much larger class and never be able to understand and reach each of her students and their individual educational needs. Smaller class sizes benefit both the student and the teacher.

- **Carol Cahoon:**

After being a parent volunteer, and a school trustee visiting countless classrooms, I have gained a better understanding of why class size and composition is so important. When there are students with various needs, then the allocation of resources is vital. It is paramount that teachers do not feel overburdened in order to perform their role effectively, and in turn students benefit from increased time with each teacher.

- **Chuck Denison:**

- CS&C need to be openly recognized as negotiable, as working conditions for teachers.
- CS&C is an essential component of a healthy classroom.

- **Barb Hobson:**

Decreasing the number of students in a classroom benefits both students and teachers. With less students to support, a teacher has more time to provide a more productive learning environment. However, it goes hand-in-hand with class composition, which limits the number of identified special needs students in a classroom and allows the teacher to focus on fewer students who require extra support, with less distractions.

- **Shari O'Neill:**

This is very important. Without the proper size and composition, the students are not getting the support and help that they need. If the class is too big, the teacher is spread too thin and can't give the help that some of their students may need. A smaller class size makes it more reasonable for one on one help for the typical learners. Classrooms that have special needs students in them need proper support in the way of EAs. When the teacher's time and attention is spent on special needs students, because there is no EA in the classroom to help, this takes away from the typical learners or the 'gray area' students.

- ***Hui Wang**

- **Craig Woods:**

Today's pedagogy and the broad range of diverse learner needs requires extra time to be committed towards classroom management and working with a range of behaviours and learner abilities. It also requires more time for teaching the competencies required to be taught. Therefore class size, composition, and resources for support become a necessity while we continue to strive for and achieve inclusion of all learners in classrooms.

6. If elected, what are your top three priorities?

- **Jennifer Blatherwick:**

- 1) Pushing for early assessment and appropriate intervention as the best, most cost-effective key to helping all struggling students. Delaying assessment and support is a false economy –avoiding doing the job properly from the beginning doesn't prevent the bill from coming due, it just makes it larger when it finally arrives.
- 2) We need to build up our substitute list for both teachers and EAs, so that we aren't pulling resource or valuable prep time from teachers or students.
- 3) Putting more daycare space onto school grounds maximizes our resources – right now, the province and the municipalities are ready to work with school boards to get daycare projects done. The province is looking at ways to provide grant funds and municipalities are considering sharing their outdoor play spaces so schools are not overburdened. We need to take that opportunity as seriously as possible – lack of daycare space is the second most important livability issue for young Coquitlam families.

- **Francis Bucher:**

- 1) Be open minded and listen.
- 2) Communicate. The members of CTA should know who I am, hear from me, and know how to reach me.
- 3) Work collaboratively to improve the lives of all concerned in our schools

- **Carol Cahoon:**

My top 3 priorities will be, creating stable, balanced budgets with a multi-year financial strategy, providing fair and equal representation, making sure all stakeholders are valued and listened to and, ensuring student safety, inclusion and achievement.

- **Chuck Denison:**

- 1) Student Mental Health
- 2) Alternate Education
- 3) Teaching resources to assist with Social Emotional Learning.

- **Barb Hobson:**

- 1) Continue to monitor finances and make sound financial decisions.
- 2) Lobby the provincial government for increased operating and capital funds.
- 3) Provide more supports to students with mental health challenges and vulnerable students.

- **Shari O'Neill:**

- 1) Wait lists for assessments.
- 2) Capital funding.
- 3) Support in the classroom.

- ***Hui Wang**

- **Craig Woods:**

- Broader stakeholder consultation and representation
- Keeping resources in the classroom/ sustaining healthy staffing levels
- School Board accountability and transparency

7. What specific action would you undertake to advocate for increased funding for School District #43?

- **Jennifer Blatherwick:**

This is a time to reach out to parents to join with the school board in pressuring their MLA and the Minister of Education, to adjust the funding formula and assign more resources to K -12 education. We need to have a public meeting to educate parents about the real funding shortfalls in the system – students who are required to have a full time EA, but a province who only provides half of the funding for the position; the absence of funding for learning challenges like dyslexia; music programs that are extracurricular activities, but need to be regular classes - and the fact that there isn't enough money in the system for school boards to meet all their contractual obligations. Exhausted and tired, parents and teachers end up struggling with each other over the results when the system is underfunded – we need to unite and look at the province to restore funding levels.

- **Francis Bucher:**

Support any initiative that would increase funding for SD 43. Work towards finding all possible funding that would be available.

- **Carol Cahoon:**

I will continually advocate directly to the Ministry of Education (MOE) through letter campaigns and visiting Victoria if necessary. I will use every face to face opportunity that arises to educate the MOE about SD43's need. I will emphasize that increased funding will strengthen the public education system in SD43, and I will highlight the fact that we are the third largest school district in British Columbia, and yet one of the lowest funded school districts per student.

- **Chuck Denison:**

- Continue with Board correspondence with the Ministry to ensure full value that was promised under the MOA #17.
- Continue my participation with the Metro Branch of the School Trustees Association.
- Continue to make the Ministry aware of the relatively low funding for SD43, at every opportunity

- **Barb Hobson:**

Meet with the four MLAs elected in our region, Minister Mike Farnworth, Minister Selina Robinson, MLA Rick Glumac and MLA Joan Isaac as well as the Minister of Education Rob Fleming (who is also a member of the Treasury Board Committee) after the election and continue to remind them that SD #43 is one of the lowest funded districts in the province and our students deserve to be, at a minimum, on par with other Lower Mainland districts.

- **Shari O'Neill:**

Open and ongoing communication with the Provincial Gov't. Provide information on why we need more funds, to support our ask.

- ***Hui Wang**

- **Craig Woods:**

- CONTINUE with collaborative efforts with the CTA and other partner groups to advocate for changes to the funding formula.
- Review funding protection model for school districts

8. What consultation processes would you participate in as we head into bargaining?

- **Jennifer Blatherwick:**

The first thing I did when I decided to run for school trustee was to talk to the union rep at my child's school – because that is where information on the granular, practical issues that affect education was concentrated. Those talks are where I got the most complete information on the push for teachers to take money as remedy for overages in class size and composition – a solution that teachers don't want, and doesn't help classroom environments. As a school trustee, I would be talking to the principal, but also to the union rep and the staff, to get a broader perspective on concerns within the schools.

- **Francis Bucher:**

I'd really like to hear from the CTA and its members. I also want to understand the budget process better and to know the revenue and expenditures.

- **Carol Cahoon:**

I am always willing to hear from all stakeholders on all issues so I may further support teachers and public education.

- **Chuck Denison:**

- I would support every opportunity to consult with our CTA, to be sure all issues specific to SD43 are taken into account. All our partner groups share responsibility for the well-being of SD43.
- Continue to meet with partner groups, particularly the CTA prior to annual budgeting, to most fully meet their priorities.

- **Barb Hobson:**

I'm available at any time to participate in consultation processes both at the local and provincial levels. I am currently the Board representative to the BC School Trustees' Association and our Board also has a representative to BCPSEA who consults with the Board and represents our views to BCPSEA.

- **Shari O'Neill:**

I would ask to meet with the CTA President to ask questions on matters that I don't understand. I would want to be informed and able to make proper decisions when and if required.

- ***Hui Wang**
 - **Craig Woods:**
CONTINUE with consultations and strong relations with the CTA, increasing transparency and communications wherever possible.
- 9. How do you feel about the SOGI curriculum?**
- **Jennifer Blatherwick:**
SOGI education in schools decreases bullying and reduces suicides - across all student populations. Students today are already aware of these issues from media – SOGI 123 provides factual information about the variety of Canadians they will encounter, and how to treat those differences with respect.
 - **Francis Bucher:**
I am in favour of this initiative. I understand how this is something that will help to foster better understanding for sexual differences. SOGI can also help students as far as resources are concerned.
 - **Carol Cahoon:**
I feel that all students are entitled to a safe, secure environment in schools built on empathy. I support SOGI 123 as a resource to assist teachers and parents to educate students in an age appropriate manner, so that all students are treated equal, feel safe and respected.
 - **Chuck Denison:**
SOGI is incorporated into the curriculum, rather than being a curriculum on its own. The intended outcomes are difficult to dispute. They include respecting all people and the diversity of our society. As with any changes, circumspection going forward will help ensure that outcomes are what was intended.
 - **Barb Hobson:**
I support the Ministry of Education's intent to ensure that the diversity that exists in communities is reflected in existing classroom lessons. SOGI is not a new or separate course or curriculum. SOGI is about treating all people with dignity, respecting the diversity of our society and making learning environments safer for all students.
 - **Shari O'Neill:**
I'm in favor of it, as long as it is age appropriate and whomever is teaching it has proper knowledge in how to teach it. Children need to feel safe and be free of discrimination directed towards them personally or towards their family.
 - ***Hui Wang**
 - **Craig Woods:**
As a supporter of diversity and inclusion I support SOGI. I support using SOGI 123 age appropriate resources in the curriculum. I also support parents being aware of what is happening in classrooms in advance and would want the district, schools, and teachers to communicate proactively with parents prior to SOGI curriculum being introduced.

VOTE ON OCTOBER 20TH!!!