

DSBIA Questions to School Board Candidates

Niovi Patsicakis

What do you think are the three top issues affecting Surrey Schools today?

1) There is a shortage of classroom teachers, specialist teachers and educational assistants – both because there was insufficient planning and slow movement on the part of human resources to find and hire after the Supreme Court decision and in addition, there was a reluctance of the part of the board to meet the specialist ratios that existed under the old delivery model. They laid off 66 learning support teachers last year only to reinstate them when the matter went to arbitration. End of year numbers show they needed to hire 250 plus teachers and again Trustees sent the matter to arbitration. In addition, a number of EAs needed to be hired under the resource room model that existed and that was not done either. Surrey Board needs to take responsibility as vulnerable students have gone for 17 years and are still going without much needed support. Limited EA hours are creating difficulties for special needs students to be in school even though it is their right to do so.

2) There aren't enough schools being built to keep up with rapid development and a generation of children has been educated in portables and have gone without programs and activities, learning in often unhealthy environments.

3) We need to address the mental health of all students and teachers in our schools. Staffing shortages mentioned above create huge behavior and self-esteem issues in students, stress and exhaustion in teachers. We also lack programs and counsellors to address the social emotional development and well-being of students.

1. What are your priorities if elected and how will you implement your plans.
 - a. Hire special education/learning support staffing according to the contractual obligations, rather than send the matter to arbitration. Meet with the Minister if funding is lacking on this issue. Use incentives and seek to find trained staff presently lacking.
 - b. Review the delivery model of Learning Support and ensure students with severe learning disabilities are identified early and provided with one on one support. Ensure students with English language issues receive appropriate instruction as well as Gifted students and those seeking to learn our second official language, French.
 - c. Ensure Inclusion of Special needs students by supporting an increase in EA hours to 35 per week and involving parents as partners in their children's education through better use of Individual Education Plans and timely consultation.
 - d. Address the needs of students, with behaviour issues, social emotional difficulties, drugs and gang involvement. Provide increased services at the school and use outside non-profit organizations especially those offering to assist in student and family counselling. Seek the goals and results of present programs such as the WRAP.
 - e. Schools should be welcoming communities where there are social services such as daycare and recreational activities for all and everyone works together to graduate healthy, responsible and employable citizens. We need to build schools with extra space and work with the city to bring

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extra programs free of charge during and after school. Our youth needs guidance through various leadership programs and also by bringing a “Foundry” centre to Surrey which addresses addiction, depression and other mental health issues in a safe caring environment as well as housing and employment needs.

- f. In addition involving parents and the community in our schools, Trustees need to be transparent and accountable. I will work with others to provide direct answers during question period, unless requiring further investigation at which point all questions and answers will be posted on the website. I will work for an increase two more trustees, one being a student trustee as in Victoria to ensure student priorities and needs are represented at the board level. I will publish a **record of every motion**, carried or defeated with highlights of debate and links to important background information. I will establish the **recording of Trustee votes** at Board and Standing committee meetings in minutes so voters can determine if Trustee votes align with their stated values and with those of voters.

2. Surrey has too many portables. What is your plan to reduce the use of portables within SD36?

Keep consulting with all levels of government to plan consistently and meet the demands of a growing district and ensure there is funding for new schools. Immediately ask ministry to cover all costs for portables which are eating up millions of dollars that could be going to staffing program needs and training and resources for the new curriculum.

3. Children need activities and programs after school. Often recreation centres are too far from residential neighbourhoods and difficult to access. Do you support the use of school facilities after hours for recreational programs and would you advocate for this if elected? Yes, indeed and in addition, there is no reason why programs in art, music, science and culture can't be brought into the school by the city, the community, and any other non-profit institutions. We need to give our students choices during school hours to make school a place where all aspects of learning occur and which fosters the talents unique to each student.

Thank you for giving us this opportunity.

Niovi Patsicakis, McGill B.Ed., M.Ed.

Trustee Candidate