

DSBIA Questions to School Board Candidates

Sonia Andhi **Surrey Students *NOW***

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

The three top issues in Surrey schools are:

1. **Safe and supportive environment:** Students in our schools need to feel physically and emotionally safe. They need to feel safe from bullying, gang violence and mental distress. They need to feel supported and accepted so they can grow and learn to the best of their abilities.
2. **Overcrowding and portables:** Almost all Surrey schools are over capacity and students are having to attend school in portables. This does not create a healthy learning environment. New school construction has not kept pace with housing development in Surrey and this has now created a shortage of classrooms for over 7000 students.
3. **Funding:** There is a shortage of funding for staff, resources and programs for our students. Over \$8 million is being spent annually to pay for portable maintenance. Surrey students are receiving approximately \$200 less than Vancouver students which amounts to \$14 million per year. These funds need to go back to our students' educational needs.

2. What are your priorities if elected and how will you implement your plans.

My priorities are to address the top three issues listed above, which are of safety, building new schools to remove portables and funding. I will implement my plan of addressing these issues by consulting and working with all stakeholders in our Surrey schools. Specifically, I will:

work with school staff to:

- expand community use of our school facilities for after school hours to provide safe spaces for our students to engage in healthy activities. This will deter illegal activities and gang recruitment. This will also encourage community members, especially parents to participate in their children's school activities more often.
- address mental health concerns of our students and staff by increasing staffing and supports in a timely manner.
- ensure that learning resources and teaching practices respect the diversity of our student population.

work with the Province and Minister of Education to:

- ensure that they keep their promise of getting rid of portables in Surrey.
- determine and correct why Vancouver students receive \$200 more funding than Surrey students.
- reduce the gap between the needs of our students and the mandatory balanced budget.

collaborate with the community and service providers to:

- create and support programs that will enhance the emotional, mental, physical and academic growth of our students
- support the cultural and diverse needs of our students

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

My plan to reduce the use of portables is by advocating for our school district with all levels of government and ensuring that:

- land and funding is set aside for new schools.
 - permits for schools are expedited.
 - School Board meets City Council regularly to ensure that district needs are being considered along with the development of the city.
 - city frontage and street improvements in front of schools are paid for by the City, not the District.
4. 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. Schools are the ideal hubs for community centres. School buildings are left largely unused after regular school hours and on weekends. Considering how schools are centrally located for most communities, their after school availability will be the best use of that space. This will be particularly helpful for families that do not drive or do not have easy access to transportation. Public libraries and recreation centres can be incorporated into new school buildings to create easy access. This will also reduce barriers for some families who see schools as intimidating institutions. Once they start using the facilities for recreational programs, they will be more open to participating in school activities with their children.