



SD 61 TRUSTEE CANDIDATE SURVEY 2011 Municipal Elections

CANDIDATE NAME:
Diane McNally

1. Do you support a fully funded budget that meets the needs of all students? (a 'needs' budget)

YES - I worked in School District 61 as a special education teacher for 20 years and saw the deterioration in funding for student support over those years. I've seen the anguish and frustration in colleagues and felt it personally, when I was that we as a collective group couldn't do all we could have done for every student.

2. Will you vote to submit only a fully funded 'needs' budget to the Minister of Education?

YES

3. How will you vote when the Superintendent's Report on Class Size and Composition is in violation of Bill 33?

REJECT - I believe pressure to "accept" from various places could get a bit intense, but I'm prepared, particularly if community members show support. I'm prepared in any case.

4. Some districts send the Superintendent back to use surplus funds to improve class size and composition. Will you vote to send the Superintendent back to produce a revised report that uses surplus funds to improve class size and composition?

YES - Surplus funds were carried over this year, and both CUPE local presidents spoke out specifically in favour of this. The Board voted to carry over. However, I do believe we are past the point at which this can be helpful. I believe (and I could be wrong) CUPE wanted the money held over to prevent CUPE layoffs. I appreciate that reasoning. But we have reached the point at which shreds of funding will not save public education, and I would have to risk some loss of support by voting not to carry over. Collegial discussion is essential.

5. What is your position on Foundational Skills Assessment (FSA) testing?

DON'T SUPPORT - I could live with myself if I took a compromise position on this and on a scale of 1 – 10 where 10 = “love the FSAs”, go for 5, which means randomized, no names, and no school data published. And not completed before curriculum content on the test is taught. Fundamentally, though, I don't think they are useful for teaching and learning, and the statistical base is flawed (too small to be significant class by class, school by school and cohorts don't stay the same for schools year by year – “trends” can't be gleaned from a base like this). FSAs encourage narrowing the lines of inquiry in the classroom. I believe they are actually used to promote private schools, much as the BCLiberals pretend to not like what the Fraser Institute has done with the data.

6. How will you engage and improve parental and citizen participation in public education issues?

I attended many Board and Committee meetings over the years as the GVTA Contract and Bargaining Chair and 1st Vice President. After a few meetings as the union rep at the table, I decided not to sit at the table any more – union reps don't have a vote., but to me, sitting at the table made me look as if I were complicit with decisions. One night I explained to members of the public who were present why I was going to move to the public seats, and sat with the public from that night. Citizens deserve

much more accountability and transparency from this Board.. Citizens should know who moved and seconded motions, and how each trustee voted on every motion. A printed rationale should be provided by the mover to the public on every agenda, and provided by verbatim record for motions from the floor, for every motion brought forward. Board and Committee meetings need to be on video for public access, Robert's Rules should actually be followed, minutes need to be published for public scrutiny within a week of the meeting, citizens need easier access to the Board, and deserve at least an interim on the spot substantive reply to their queries from a trustee of their choice. It seems apparent that a good deal of the business of School District 61 is conducted "in camera". Secret meetings should be an exceptional event, not part of the regular agenda. The current SD61 website seems like an exercise in stonewalling – it's not user friendly and needs a redesign. (A cost item so likely low on the list.) Trustees need to blog, hold coffee house meetings on a regular schedule, issue press releases, provide interviews for media. Trustees need a non sd61 email address for public questions and comment. A survey of parents on individual trustees' websites would give information as to what form of contact and involvement works best for parents, and what kind of access they would like to see in place..

7. Will you accept invitations to go visit a classroom regarding specific problems?

YES - However the teacher should also involve the union staff rep at the school level, and the union on a grievance level if the situation is grievable.

8. If you are an incumbent trustee have you ever been invited to visit a classroom regarding specific problems?

N/A; not incumbent

9. Do you think that special education is adequately funded?

NO - I recall the day I found out that targeted money for students with learning disabilities disappeared. I was told "the amount has been rolled over into the per pupil amount". Disappeared, in other words. I've watched the erosion of funding in real dollar terms and the effect of de-targeted funding over the last decade in particular. Schools are now

barely able to provide service to students with special needs. Students are doubled up with one assistant and some assistants are stretched in very hectic assignments. Some will say this provides independence for the student and prevents over-involvement by the adult, but it is at base an economic decision. Special education teachers are pressured to only put what is affordable in IEPs. Children and youth with behavior difficulties are funded for assistance for a few hours a week, and only after the school has made a case for months, and if parents agree to involve an outside agency. Many students with autism are not funded for a full day. Students designated “gifted” are funded for completely inadequate service and support – about an hour every two weeks. Targeted funding must be reinstated, and funding for every student with special needs has to increase.

If “NO”, what should change?

Please see above.

10. What should be done with the current District Strategic Facilities Plan? (Stantec Report)

SCRAP THE REPORT - I’m shocked that no one asked some very hard questions very early on in this process. Rob Wipond’s report in Focus aligns with my thinking. I did my own research on the interrelationships amongst boards and executives of companies that could potentially benefit from tearing down schools. The investigation yielded interesting results.

11. How many hours per month will you commit to the role of Trustee including meetings?

31+ hours per month. Approximately \$20,000 per 10 months = \$2,000 per month, divided by 20 working days per month = \$100 per day, at approximately \$40 per hour - = about 2 hours of work per day, x 20 days per month = 31+ hours per month.

12. What are your thoughts and comments on user fees that parents pay for, such as academies, sports equipment, math workbooks, technical equipment, planners?

Public education should be a no fee experience, and provincial funding needs to be restructured to recognize and support that. No one should have to go into a school and say "I can't afford public education for my child." This government is encouraging creation of mini private schools through establishing retail branding of schools as niche products that compete for customers in a "marketing" model, and is slowly getting citizens used to paying for a public good as part of the privatization agenda. My campaign literature clearly indicates that I do not support academies, and will not support further branding of public schools.

13. What is your experience in parliamentary procedure and committee work?

I chaired a thirteen person Executive Committee for years in my work for the GVTA. Knowledge of Robert's Rules was essential for democratic functioning and transparent and fair process. I've participated in meetings of over 300 where Robert's Rules were essential. I've been part of many committees both as chair and as participant.

14. Do you live in the SD 61 boundaries?

YES

15. If you have children, what type of schools do they or have they attended?

PUBLIC

16. What methods would you use to provide accountability & transparency?

See #6. I'm open to other suggestions.

17. Would vote for a motion to have all votes recorded and published annually?

YES

18. How else would you inform the public about your positions and actions on issues?

Please see #6.

19. Do you support Kindergarten/Grade 1 split classes?

NO - Kindergarten students generally have very different learning needs than do students in Grade One.

20. What are your thoughts on the involvement of private corporations in the public education system?

The interests of corporations and public education aren't congruent. Private corporations have no place in public education. Cash strapped schools might be invited to sell naming rights to corporations. But "Exxon Elementary School" just doesn't sound right to me. The future of our democracy and the future of our children must not be controlled by corporate agendas. Public education must never be run as a P3.

21. Please tell us anything else you think may be important or relevant to your candidacy for School Trustee in SD 61.

I've worked in public education as a teacher on call, classroom teacher, special education teacher and Reading Recovery teacher for about 40 years in Alberta and BC. I value public education as a major foundation of our society, and I value a society that cooperates to provide public service. I do not believe "the marketplace" holds the answers for public good or for our children's futures. I don't think more computer technology is necessarily the answer to improving the education experience for children and youth, and I'm not sure it has any effect on graduation rates. Following the money reveals that, unsurprisingly, the big winners in the tech implementation race are big tech companies who drive this agenda. I believe personalized learning means learning with a teacher who knows and understands the student's learning needs and learning style,

with guidance and assistance from a real person who cares. Children need more of that, not more time in front of computer screens. There are important dimensions to education that can't be stored in any "data warehouse". I believe the research we have on wireless technology is equivocal enough for us to practice the precautionary principle and keep wireless out of our elementary schools. Citizens for Safe Technology have endorsed my candidacy. More information is on my website and blog at <http://lined-paper.com/blog/> ; on Twitter, I'm DianeMcN.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

I was pleased to attend the rally that addressed student debt this spring. The level of political engagement from student leaders was tremendously encouraging. Post-secondary school needs to be funded much better than it is; the student debt problem is of major concern, and business and corporate interests are increasingly driving and narrowing curriculum and research. School trustees can't do anything about that, but as citizens, we all have a vote and access to local politicians.