

**Vernon Teachers' Association  
2022 School Board Trustee Candidate Questionnaire  
Candidate Responses**

<b>Trustee Candidates:</b>  <b>Andy Collins</b> <b>Jenn Comazzetto</b> <b>Philipp Gruner</b> <b>Sylvia Herchen *</b> <b>Robert Lee</b> <b>Jewlie Milligan *</b> <b>Sheri Minard</b> <b>Vanessa Mitchell</b> <b>Mark Olsen</b> <b>Truman Spring</b> <b>Kelli Sullivan</b> <b>Nellie Villegas *</b> <b>Tom Williamson *</b>  <i>*Responses unavailable by deadline.</i>	<b>General Voting October 15th, 8AM-8PM</b>	
	<b>Vernon:</b> Recreation Centre 3310 37th Avenue	<b>Coldstream:</b> Coldstream Elementary School 10104 Kalamalka Road
	Fulton Secondary School 2301 Fulton Road	Lavington Elementary School 9715 School Road
	Vernon Secondary School 2100 15th Street	
	<b>Advance Voting October 5th, 8AM-8PM</b>	
<b>Vernon:</b> Schubert Centre 3505 30th Avenue	<b>Coldstream:</b> DOC Council Chambers 9901 Kalamalka Road	
<b>Advance Voting October 12th &amp; 13th, 8AM-8PM</b>		
<b>Vernon:</b> City Hall Council Chambers 3400 30th Street	<b>Coldstream:</b> DOC Council Chambers 9901 Kalamalka Road	

<https://www.vernon.ca/elections-assent-voting/general-election-2022>

<https://coldstream.ca/content/when-where-and-how-vote>

**QUESTION 1**

*Vernon was recognized as an area that could benefit from the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot. How would you help students and families who choose to settle here?*

<https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/immigrate-canada/rural-northern-immigration-pilot.html>

**Andy Collins**

Although this pilot is quite new I am excited as a member of the community that Vernon was chosen for the program. And although the city councilors and mayors of Vernon and surrounding areas have a huge role to play in welcoming new families. My goal if elected would be to work with the city to make sure any new families with school age children, and or employees of SD22 are as comfortable as possible settling into our area. The district has been welcoming international students for years now, this fall my daughter

as part of SWBA was part of a group that provided a welcome dinner to all the international students, I feel small gestures like this go a long way, along with our policies like I have mentioned above.

I would also love to see more information on the various sites about our schools, the wonderful staff and what our district has to offer.

### **Jenn Comazetto**

We are already benefiting from the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot. Our Inclusion Department has a team of English Language Learning teachers that work diligently to support our new students and families. As we also have a thriving International Homestay Program, newcomers are welcome and all are supported. Schools provide additional community connections that are readily accessible to students and families. The City of Vernon claims it has “become one of the most diversified communities in BC.” This shows up in our schools and all are welcome.

### **Philipp Gruner**

During my tenure as the Executive Director of Vernon & District Immigrant and Community Services Society (VDICSS) we established the Settlement Worker in Schools Program with School District 22. This is a first for Vernon and has been hugely successfully thus far. VDICSS provides a dedicated employee to the District to help newcomer families, whether in the RNIP program or otherwise, settle in Canada and navigate the Canadian school system.

As a DPAC rep, I have presented on a few occasions to the board of trustees, about the incoming influx of new Canadians and their families. The RNIP program has been a huge success and probably one of the best economic immigrant programs the Federal Government has introduced.

I believe the ELL program and number of teachers needs to be evaluated and a longer-term plan put in place to ensure the school District can keep up with the ELL demands as the RNIP program continues to attract new applicants to the Vernon area.

Additionally, I would propose that the Board of Education advocate to the Ministry of Education to extend the current 5-year cap on ELL services to newcomers.

### **Robert Lee**

I believe that new students feel more at home when there is an adult within the building that 'acknowledges and cares for them'. Fortunately, we already have excellent teachers and support staff in our schools who are excellent at making their new students feel at home. Absolutely we do benefit from the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot. As their families and children settle into the Greater Vernon Area, they will add their particular skills and culture which will only benefit our entire community. In addition to excellent school staff, I have already

mentioned some of the District supports that we have in place such as ELL and Resource Teachers to list a few.

### **Sheri Minard**

With this pilot program, our community will receive a range of funding and programs to assist the students and families. Our district will need to work side by side with our community agencies such as Vernon & District Immigrant & Community Services Society, to ensure the needs are being met for the families and the educational needs are being met for the students. Because we have a successful international department, the District could use that framework to assist students where English is not their first language.

### **Vanessa Mitchell**

- Ensure they are knowledgeable of what services are available to them, advocate for services to
- Accessible and communicated to incoming families
- Advocate for education and awareness to create safety
- I would ensure they know that this is the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the
- Syilx/Okanagan peoples as a part of their welcome package

### **Mark Olsen**

We do help and support students and families who choose to settle here. The directives we have determined in our Strategic Plan includes ensuring our schools are welcoming places to learn and work. Students moving from their home country to their new home country Canada, need to feel they are welcome and supported.

One of our core values from the Strategic Plan is to be inclusive. As it states; We cultivate and foster a curiosity for all peoples and cultures creating safe spaces for exploring personal truths and reconciling lived experiences, targeting discriminatory practices, prejudices, and beliefs.

Equity is another of our core values; removing barriers that limit student success. For our students who have immigrated this could mean a language barrier. Our Inclusion Department supports all students who are marginalized or have specific needs and our English Language Learning department (ELL) would be available for support.

### **Truman Spring**

It's great to hear that Vernon is part of the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot, and it's clear that SD22 is committed to helping people settle here.

The best way to help students and families who choose to settle here is to provide them with resources and opportunities that will encourage them to stay in Vernon. We need more programs that support newcomers and make them feel welcome, especially if they are being sponsored by a family member or friend who already lives in the city. Part of that solution is to forge strong partnerships with other community agencies and share resources such as health care, mental health access, and the Settlement Workers in School program (SWIS) that formally lay outside our prevue but would be an intricate part of making this pilot successful. We also need more ways for newcomers to connect with each other, for example, a mentorship program where newcomers can learn more about their new home from someone who has been here a while. It would be nice if newcomers could also get together with their peers from around the world at regular events or meetups hosted by some of our local organizations that could include representation from our district. This would allow them to forge new friendships and feel more comfortable and connected in their new environment.

As a former senior administrator in SD22 I know we have a very strong ELL department in our school district that could lend their expertise to this issue. As a trustee I would start by making sure that schools and other educational institutions are prepared for the influx of new students. Schools will need extra teachers, administrators and support staff, as well as materials such as textbooks and computers.

Finally, as a trustee I would like to see more government funding for schools, so that they can offer programs and services for every child in our community. This will also help teachers, counsellors, educational assistants, and other staff members to receive more training and professional development so they can feel prepared and confident in effectively teaching everyone in our school community.

All of these things will make sure that Vernon is ready for our new citizens when they get here!

### **Kelli Sullivan**

The Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot has helped to support almost 300 people from 40 different countries to find positions with local employers and make Vernon their home. We benefit from their skills, culture and perspectives and it is important that newcomer families and children feel welcomed by the community. SD22 can ensure that children and parents have access to services that help them as they settle in their new country. This would include the school's ESL programs, connections to programs offered by Vernon and District Immigrant Services Society, and concerted efforts to connect newcomers with school activities and events. From a broader perspective, the district should also continue to focus on initiatives that support equity, diversity, and inclusion within the classrooms and on school grounds, to ensure that schools are a safe and welcoming space for all children.

## QUESTION 2

*What mental health supports do you think SD22 students need in order to be successful?*

### **Andy Collins**

I was excited to learn that we are adapting the RTI model here in the district and although this is in the early stages of implementation I look forward to following the progress of this program. Awareness is key and continuing to educate student' staff and parents alike will serve our community greatly. Bring in more speakers, provide more easily accessible resources. We as a family have attended talks on anxiety, peer pressure and other topics before the pandemic. I believe as a district we could do a better job promoting these events. And more importantly make our students mental health a Priority.

I was recently enrolled in the Kelowna College of Professional Colleges and although I registered for the 12 month course for very personal reasons, it was an amazing learning opportunity for me to learn more about what kids need to be able to cope. The course has taught me a new level of empathy, how to be a better listener and communicate more effectively. I have been around school age children coaching, volunteering and parenting since living in Vernon. Mental Health is a huge area of concern personally, in our community and across the world really. We can see the strain first hand on today's youth, this would be an area I would love to work on and I would heavily be focused on the mental health of our students.

### **Jenn Comazzetto**

Many factors are required to support the mental health of our students. Most of our students have their basic needs met through their families and friends. Some of our students don't have this support.

We know that students have better success rates if they have three adults who care about them. There are counsellors and resource teachers at every school. Our students need to know that there is someone who cares about their wellbeing and can guide them to access school and community supports that are available.

### **Philipp Gruner**

Firstly, I believe all students should have the opportunity to experience a safe and welcoming environment to learn, play, and grow. To build on this further, I believe it is also important to support staff with their mental health needs in order for them to provide such a learning environment.

As teachers emerge out of the post-COVID pandemic, as an employer, the School District needs to make sure proper supports are available to help staff through potential mental health issues. This is a topic I would like to further explore with the VTA and/or CUPE to really understand where we could improve on those supports.

As for the mental health of students, I would advocate to form a delegation of students to bring their concerns and wishes to the Board of Education, so we can provide the services and supports that will help them best.

### **Robert Lee**

I personally believe that successful students start with having a strong support system at home from their families and their friends. None of us were built to be better alone on our own. All of us need friends and family. However, not all of our students have those networks in place or their networks are fragile. Sometimes, those students will need additional support within our school system.

Fortunately, we have excellent, caring staff within our schools and they do care for our students who may need additional mental health support and can guide them if they're anxious to access our school counsellors and other staff within our schools who can help them find the mental support they require. Our counsellors and trained staff are able to connect students to community mental help resources as well.

### **Sheri Minard**

We have many great programs in our district for students who are marginalized but those programs do not always include ALL students who require mental health supports. All students need access to

- a. trusted adults, whether it's an administrator, teacher or support staff and especially counsellors.
- b. educational materials that they can access privately as a lot of students don't seek help because of shame.
- c. mentors – someone who knows what they are going through based on their own experience.
- d. Teachers and support staff who themselves have access to mental health supports.

All students need

- a. our district teachers and support staff to know the symptoms of and help for mental health problems and who to refer that student to for help whether that is within the school system or within the community.
- b. our teachers to teach and reinforce positive behaviors and decision-making.

### **Vanessa Mitchell**

- Continued education to increase awareness and understanding in order to prevent harm and to champion work that strives to eliminate the stigma of mental health supports
- Connect to appropriate services within the school and within the community to ensure continuum of care
- In my work in the realm of health, we know racism and discrimination occurs within health care systems. We need to acknowledge it can occur in school systems as well.

And a way to begin and continue to understand a student's lived/living experiences and ways to create a safe, caring and healthy environment is through training and education.

- implementation of the MoE mental health in schools strategy
- invest in education and awareness/understanding and provide tools and resources (i.e.:antiracism, sexual orientation and gender identity, substance use, student hunger, and immigrant and refugee experiences, cultural safety, trauma informed practice)

### **Mark Olsen**

Mental health support is crucial to the development and success of our students. Our Operational Framework lists 10 goals for student success including "Support student wellness and improve student voice and choice." And "Ensure our schools are welcoming places to learn and work."

If there is one thing we learned from the last few years, connection is an important part of maintaining good mental health. The social aspect of attending school with friends is crucial in the development of a student's character and well being. Students also need to feel welcome and comfortable when they are attending school, thereby developing confidence in their abilities and who they are as a person.

Supports from the district include a Mental Health school liaison promoting Mental Health and Substance Abuse Counsellors. They, along with our school-based Counsellors are able to connect students to outside resources as required. To enhance our supports our school communities including our teachers, Education Assistants, Administrators and school counselors who work directly with our students can make a personal connection and be someone they trust and confide in.

Listening and watching for indications of mental health issues will make a difference.

### **Truman Spring**

I think that the district is doing a good job in prioritizing supporting student's mental health needs as evidenced by SD22's strategic plan and its focus on the physical, mental, and social well-being of all students. Enhancing mental health wellness services needs to be a prioritized goal.

As a trustee my focus would be to make sure we have ample counsellors within our school buildings to help meet the needs of our students. We also need a greater emphasis on services that support the mental health of teachers and our school support staff. Being in an education system that has grappled with so much transition due to the pandemic has been an incredibly difficult and emotionally taxing experience for teachers, administrators, and support staff, therefore, mental health services need to be accessible from the district level to support everyone in our school communities.

Another priority for me as a trustee would involve ensuring all staff are supported to enhance their own professional development around the area of mental health so they feel comfortable

and confident in identifying and working with their students as well as knowing when to refer students for more specialized or individualized counselling supports. Universal programming is an important part of the equation because in order to destigmatize mental health, we need to be able to talk about it openly in classrooms. Programs like Mental Health Literacy, Mental Health First Aid, EASE and Preventure, to name just a few, can be delivered universally to students in class, by classroom teachers either with or without the support of school counsellors. These programs are also flexible enough that they can be used as targeted interventions with a small group of students or as an individual intervention for counsellors working 1:1 with students. I think the district would benefit from revisiting their use and design of these tools and implement them in a more purposeful way.

It is my opinion as a former Director of Student Services in SD22 and as a potential trustee, that by talking openly about issues like anxiety and depression and identifying individualized coping skills and supports, students learn lifelong skills to manage their mental well-being. I believe the district has done a reasonable job at this but current circumstances call for revisiting our approach to addressing mental health and well-being.

**Kelli Sullivan**

Health and education are interconnected and research indicates that the best approach to supporting mental health in schools is to offer a trauma-informed, strengths-based, systems approach whereby programming is aligned across a continuum of services (for example, the Mental Health in Schools Strategy). A systems approach would include both community-based partnerships (partnering with CMHA on a new Youth Services Integration Hub, Child and Youth Advocacy Centre) and school-based strategies like mental health curriculum and sufficient/responsive student supports (school-based counsellors, mental health clinicians). The latter is key as teachers and Education Assistants are not mental health professionals.

**QUESTION 3**

*How do you think the current budget adequately addresses the needs of all students and staff across the District in order for them to be effective members of the SD22 community, and aligns with the SD22 Strategic Plan?*

**Andy Collins**

No I don't.

**Jenn Comazetto**

The current budget is 100% aligned with the Framework for Enhancing Student Learning, and our new multi-year Strategic Plan. Our new Mission statement is "we inspire and nurture students to thrive in their learning, relationships, and community."

**Philipp Gruner**

This is a difficult question to answer because the School District currently subsidizes



operations to the tune of \$1 million per year. This subsidy is funded by a surplus/savings fund that is nearing depletion.

At the September Board of Education meeting, the administration provided a financial update that shows by the school year 2023/2024 reserves are fully depleted and the district would have to find over \$300,000 in savings to continue to operate as it does today. By 2024//2025, the District would actually operate in a deficit of \$1.8M. The time is now to start planning for these worse case scenarios, and this will be the most challenging task for the incoming Trustees, one I would be confident in spearheading.

My priority would be to look at cuts that do not affect student learning and success, while minimizing the financial burden to families.

### **Robert Lee**

No district has ever enough of a budget to 'adequately' address the needs of all our students and staff all the time. But let's also be clear. Our budget is aligned and committed to helping our students achieve. You will note that our Strategic Plan states that we want to provide many pathways for all students to pursue and achieve their desired outcomes. We offer that already in different forms of schooling available: alternate learning programs, VLearn, French Immersion, Academies, 'Community School' ...to name only a few. One of the goals in our Strategy Plan is to improve our academics. The Board has stated that, our management staff is aware of that. Together, we can achieve this improvement. In comparison to the Provincial average, our budget reflects that we spend more than the provincial average on teachers. We recognize the importance of school staff and that is reflected in our budget. That is why when I was Board Chair, I recognized the need for a mechanism that could generate extra revenue for our district aside from the money that is allocated from the Ministry. That is why the Revenue Generation Committee exists. Unfortunately, with the advent of covid, this committee has not been able to meet but I believe the potential is there. In order for us as a district to find extra money to spend on our children, we have to achieve that on our own initiative. We cannot depend upon Victoria as any money from the Ministry always has strings tied to it. For example, our International Program has generated as much as \$500,000 for our district. This is our program so the district can use the money as it sees fit. Now imagine if our International Program was to grow another 2%, 3%. This would provide a potential additional \$500,000 for a total of \$1,000,000. That is a huge potential for helping our children. I do hope when the Revenue Generation Committee reconvenes, there will be more opportunities to provide additional independent funding for our children.

### **Sheri Minard**

There is never enough money to create the education system we all want for our students and staff. However, we all know that budgets require a balance between maximizing resources and fiscal responsibility. In addition to the academic students, our district has created some a variety of programs and courses for students on on an academic path. Dual credit courses for both academic and vocational students, academies such as SWABA, Earth Quest, or Forestry and our Alternative Learning

programs. These programs provide community connection, foster trust and respect, personal growth and individual student success.

### **Vanessa Mitchell**

- My understanding is that the school district is lower than the provincial average on almost every line item and that is so they can invest more into the students.
- Currently there is an operational surplus.
- The work continues and the district must continue to address current and future gaps that exist in their decision-making processes in alignment with the strategic plan.

### **Mark Olsen**

Our current budget was developed to align with our Strategic Plan. As it was being developed and approved it did take into consideration how it addresses our staff and students' needs.

The budget was developed with input from our partner groups and many of the suggestions from all sources pointed to more support at the school and in the classroom. Our Board agreed and added 8 Education Assistants, 2 SBRT positions, a psychologist and increased time for PVPs to provide this support.

As we come out of the pandemic, mental health for staff and students is a top priority and our Strategic Plan identifies the need to support student wellness and to cultivate positive staff experiences, supporting growth and wellness.

### **Truman Spring**

I have had the opportunity to be part of our District budgeting process as part of the Senior District Team in School District 22, it is my opinion that the current budget adequately addresses the needs of all students and staff across the District in order for them to be effective members of the SD22 community, and aligns with the SD22 Strategic Plan.

This being said, there is always room for improvement. I feel the District needs to ensure more mental health support programs and professional development for all SD22 employees giving them access to personal learning opportunities to enhance professional excellence and physical, mental, and social well-being. This is also true for our students, by providing schools and District personnel with funding to help students gain access to personalized learning opportunities that align with their abilities and develop their strengths as we prepare them for life after secondary school. In addition, I believe addressing this in the budget improves the physical, mental and social well-being of all students, supports the development of all SD22 employees, enhances communication and engagement among all members of the learning community, pursues best practices in governance, management, and service delivery throughout the organization.

All students deserve great educational opportunities, we need to invest in our teachers, our classrooms and our technology if we want to provide the greatest learning experience for our students.

**Kelli Sullivan**

With a chronically underfunded system, it is not clear to me how the current budget would be able to adequately address the needs of students and staff across the district. I feel this is an area of opportunity for the newly elected Board both in terms of advocacy at the provincial level and gathering good data at the district level in order to make the best decisions possible with a limited budget. I would like to see a conscientious, respectful, and measured engagement plan with our learning partners so we have a clear understanding of what the needs are of students and staff. This type of approach will give us reliable and valid data so that we can create measurable goals based on those identified needs and then budget accordingly. This work should ultimately support the goals identified in the strategic plan.

**QUESTION 4**

*What is one thing you would change in order to improve graduation rates across the District?*

**Andy Collins**

We need to do a better job of promoting our career programs, these are GREAT programs that I feel people know little to nothing about. The district spends large amounts of money running these programs. The teacher that teach them are terrific we just need to do a better job

1. Promoting them
2. Identifying students that would benefit from them

Is one thing, but we also need to do much better working with our marginalized and idegenous students. To be honest this is something that needs to be addressed ASAP. We rank on the lower end for the province in graduation rates.

**Jenn Comazetto**

We are improving graduation rates across the District. Our new strategic plan was built with the student at the centre of everything. We are all focused on strategies and ways to meet the needs of our most vulnerable learners. We have many counsellors and specialized staff that are working in collaboration to support our students. In that way, we will improve graduation rates.

**Philipp Gruner**

Referring back to the 2022 Enhanced School District Report, specifically regarding Completion Rates, a surprising statistic to me is that less than 25% of SD22 graduating students are not satisfied that school has prepared them for a job in the future.

I believe we need to connect with the business community and foster opportunities for guest speakers to come into our secondary schools and talk about different careers and options for students. Other initiatives could include job exploration fairs for grades 11 and 12.

It is our responsibility to expand the minds and options for graduating students to incentivize them that a graduating certificate will open more career opportunities.

### **Robert Lee**

You will note in our Strategic Plan that we have stated that we want to improve our graduation rates and our academic rates. We begin by acknowledging that we can do better and that it is 'all our problem', not just someone else's or some other school. We improve by being honest and asking ourselves what can we do to improve - by improving ourselves. We know that we can and we must improve our indigenous grad rates. We have started with a District Pro-D day focussing on Indigenous Education. We do this for two reasons: one because it is the right and proper thing to do. You cannot have a specific group of your students underachieving and not do something about it. This has been stated several times in our Strategic Plan. And two, because we know that as we improve our indigenous grad rate, it will have a positive spin off effect and improve all our grad rate.

### **Sheri Minard**

Improving graduation rates is a multi-prong approach but one area I believe will help all students is to foster a welcoming, safe, inclusive, and supported environment with many different supports available for mental health.

### **Vanessa Mitchell**

- Implementation of hands-on learning. Learning is holistic and not just in a classroom and not separate from a student's well-being.

### **Mark Olsen**

I believe we are already working to improve graduation rates across the District. We are focused on closing the gaps in success rates including graduation and transitioning to post secondary education. Our inclusion approach and goal of ensuring our schools are welcoming places to learn and work also should contribute to graduation rates. Another focus is to ensure all students have a three-year graduation plan.

Further to that, studies have shown that the earlier we address learning difficulties in students the better off they do in the higher grades. We are focusing on early intervention for literacy and numeracy.

We are already making the change!

### **Truman Spring**

Thank you for your question! I would love to see graduation rates improve across our district.

Currently, we use a system that grades students on a curve and still rewards them for less than adequate behavior and performance. This doesn't make sense to me when the top five factors

influencing high school graduation rates are: economic factors, demographic factors, the ninth-grade factor, attendance and student engagement, and course failure.

One way we could increase engagement and graduation rates would be by using technology to motivate students. Another way we could use technology is by endorsing as a District a tool that allows parents and teachers to communicate with each other in real time, which could help us build stronger relationships with families, this approach could magnify the power of the family, school, and community by giving a clear unified message. However, in order to accomplish this goal as a trustee, I would have to work with my colleagues to examine the current budget and make recommendations with this mandate in mind. Ultimately, all parents, teachers, and school districts want their students to succeed in life.

In addition to that, I think we should differentiate our instruction so that students are able to learn at their own pace and in ways that appeal to their individual learning styles and starting where they are at so they can be confident and successful. We should also make better use of standards-based assessments as benchmarks so that we know what students are capable of achieving and can tailor our lessons accordingly. We need to personalize student learning by making sure that every student has access to the same high-quality resources and opportunities throughout their school careers; this will ensure all students have equal opportunity for success both inside and outside of school walls!

Finally, we should consider and endorse the greater use of virtual options such as online courses or even virtual tutoring sessions to allow our students scheduling flexibility and an option to learn parallel life skills they might not receive in traditional class settings.

### **Kelli Sullivan**

I would like to see manageable caseload limits for our Adult Education and Distributed Learning Teachers. This would allow them to more effectively support those students who are not graduating as per a regular timeline.

### **QUESTION 5**

*SD22 is a key economic driver and significant employer in the community. What is your experience in providing guidance, direction, and oversight of a budget of this magnitude?*

### **Andy Collins**

I have never worked with a budget of this magnitude. I have worked in the private sector and as an entrepreneur my entire adult life. The monetary value of the budget is large, but it is not overly complex, most of the incoming money comes from the BC government who dictates where and how it is spent. The role of Trustee is to provide our district with the most for what we have, find holes that can be filled, find ways we can generate more incoming. ( The last point is really important) We should be lobbying constantly for more funding, teachers should be paid fairly when compared to other

provinces and we should find a way to provide programs for students that are needed in our community. We need to find alternate revenue sources. I plan to use my connections in the North Okanagan to do this. One of my main goals right away will be retooling the rental of our facilities so we can be in line with other districts province-wide and generate more income for our budget which should mean hiring more staff, better supporting current staff, and increasing quality programs for our district.

### **Jenn Comazzetto**

We are one of the top employers in the region. The budget is \$116 million dollars. Each year, the Board is audited and submits the budget to the Ministry of Education. As a Board, we provide direction to staff on how to allocate the ~10% of the budget that is not allocated to employees. The Board seeks and receives input from several key groups regarding the allocation of these funds.

### **Philipp Gruner**

In my career I was fortunate enough to work at a multinational Canadian-based company where I had a budgetary responsibility of over \$300 million. I've excelled at navigating the financial intricacies of large and small organizations to provide effective financial governance, budget implementations, and ongoing financial monitoring.

I don't think there are many people who can say they are passionate about combing through a budget, but I am confident, this is an area of expertise I can bring to the Board of Education.

Also during this time, I was responsible for over 1300 employees (both unionized and non-unionized). On multiple occasions I was the lead negotiator for collective bargaining agreements with some of Canada's biggest unions. One of my personal success highlights is the fact that we have always settled on an agreement without ever having to revert to a strike or lockout.

I am a firm believer of win-win solutions and situations.

### **Robert Lee**

At this time, I am the senior trustee for SD22 in terms of service. I have been involved in eight separate budget preparations for our Board in terms of guidance, direction and oversight. During that time, we have prepared and submitted a balanced budget annually for the Ministry. Our budget is independently audited every year. Every year, the Board has gone through a consulting, discussing and refining process with the intent of putting as much money as we can into helping our students achieve. As a trustee, I initiated a separate additional consulting process for just our VTA, CUPE, DPAC reps. Opportunities are also available for all our stakeholders. Since I became a trustee, our budget has grown annually. It is now approximately 16% larger than when I first started as this year's budget is around \$116 million dollars.

We are one of the largest employers in the North Okanagan and as our overall population grows, so will our budget. I believe that I have demonstrated my experience in providing guidance, direction and oversight as a trustee. As a Board, we provide more than the provincial average towards our teaching staff; we also spend less than the provincial average in terms of our maintenance cost - this allows us to put more of our overall budget directly in helping our children.

On a personal level, I have had my own business for 13+ years. We owned 'Appletree' which was our childcare business that we started from scratch with one child and \$400,000 in debt! From that beginning, we expanded to over 100 childcare spaces in six different facilities. We operated our own bus transportation. All this was funded as our business grew organically. Appletree is still a local childcare business but it is no longer owned by me. Two things to note: the one child we started with...he is now working as a heavy duty mechanic in Northern BC and there is no debt owing.

I believe what I have written here indicates my ability and background in guiding and directing our school district's annual budget.

### **Sheri Minard**

The magnitude of a budget is relative As the office manager of a law firm that has over 15 employees and 3 locations – Vernon, Salmon Arm, and Lumby – am responsible for the budget for the entire law firm. My duties include overseeing salaries and benefits, handling the budget, managing our financial resources, billing and collections; maintain efficiency within the office by establishing the best practices, standards, and procedures; strategic planning and business development, collaborating with lawyers and staff to establish what priorities need to be, sometimes requiring creativity in achieving as many of those priorities as possible, managing staff and facilities, recruiting staff including lawyers, ensuring we legal ethics at apart of all decisions. We are a law firm that deals with primarily real estate transactions, we manage clients' money (not just our own) while ensuring that all trust laws as set out by the Law Society of BC are met.

### **Vanessa Mitchell**

- In transparency, I do not have direct experience in a budget of this magnitude. However, I have not been irresponsible in budgets that I have had oversight on.
- I worked very closely with those with the financial expertise to increase my understanding and
- knowledge so that I could make fully informed decisions that I am held accountable for and I am not afraid to ask questions when I do not understand.

### **Mark Olsen**

For the last 4 years one of my main duties as a Trustee was to guide, direct, scrutinize and approve our budget. With almost 90% of our \$116 million budget being wages, we are a major employer in our community and our decisions affect many in the community either

directly or indirectly.

We are required to submit a balanced budget every year to the Ministry of Education. The process allows for input from our partners in education including DPAC, OKIB, the VTA

and CUPE support staff. Previous to my term as Trustee I initiated budget proposals for many years on behalf of our support staff.

Communication is a key part of the process and I take seriously the views submitted by our partner groups, because they mostly have merit. Cost to provide an initiative is always a concern but the main deciding factor is; Does it help students?

### **Truman Spring**

I have been in the K-12 school system for over 40 years, with 20 of those in senior management positions. I was the District Principal of Student Support Services in Prince George and oversaw a district budget of over \$27 million dollars. I was the Director of Student Services in Vernon, where I had a budget of \$8 million dollars. In both districts I was part of the budgeting process, with the district school administrators and in the inner sanctum with senior management. The budgeting process in districts is an interesting and complex process, one which I am very familiar with. Not only was I part of the budgeting process, but was also tasked with governing the use and allocation of the funds for my department and reporting to the Superintendent and the trustees. I personally witnessed that this process works best when it is collaborative and includes a needs assessment and the participation and input of stakeholders.

### **Kelli Sullivan**

While the SD22 budget will be the biggest budget I will have the opportunity to inform, I do have experience with budget and program oversight. For example, as a Knowledge Translation & Exchange Manager at UBC, I managed a large research budget for a pan-Canadian implementation and evaluation project. As the former Board Chair of the Mental Illness Family Support Centre, the board was responsible for contract management and related deliverables. Additionally, in my current leadership role at a local non-profit, I oversee five community-based programs – all of which involve government and non-government contracts and related program budgets totalling over 1 million dollars.

### **QUESTION 6**

*How would you use the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA) as a lens when developing Board policy?*

### **Andy Collins**

I look forward to working alongside representatives from our Indigenous communities when helping form policies that align with (DRIPA). Admittedly this is an area I have very little experience with. But I am completely on board with the Act and look forward to not only educating myself more and more but learning from others.



### **Jenn Comazetto**

Three of the four goals in the Community Connections section on page 6 of the Strategic Plan address this question:

1. Commit to the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action. In particular, ...
  - a. Call to Action #62 – our educators are already implementing the new mandatory first Nations course for graduation.
  - b. Call to Action #63 – we are, and will continue to, invest in our whole staff and their needs to continue to indigenize the curriculum and their intercultural understanding, empathy, and mutual respect for all First Nations, Inuit, and Metis people.
2. Fulfill our public responsibility to Indigenous communities: First Nation, Metis, Inuit.
3. Commit to the BC Human Rights Code – an environment free of racism, biases, and all forms of discrimination.

### **Philipp Gruner**

The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act establishes the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as the Province's framework for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action. To be more specific, there are four specific Calls to Action in terms of education.

62. We call upon the federal, provincial, and territorial governments, in consultation and collaboration with Survivors, Aboriginal peoples, and educators, to:

- i. Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students.
- ii. Provide the necessary funding to post-secondary institutions to educate teachers on how to integrate Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods into Classrooms.
- iii. Provide the necessary funding to Aboriginal schools to utilize Indigenous knowledge and teaching methods in classrooms.
- iv. Establish senior-level positions in government at the assistant deputy minister level or higher dedicated to Aboriginal content in education

A trustee would have the most amount of influence on 62. ii - ensuring there is funding available. As a rule, any policy or decision making should always be cross referenced with the TRCC to ensure we progress towards reconciliation within our School District.

I would also suggest that the incoming board of trustees seek more collaboration with Okanagan Indian Band (OKIB) to make sure our Indigenous program includes local Indigenous knowledge, guidance and leadership.

**Robert Lee**

Our sd22 Strategic Plan has three written goals that indicates we are aware of DRIPA when we develop policy.

There is a commitment to Truth and Reconciliation. A fulfillment of our public responsibility to our Indigenous communities and a commitment to the BC Human Rights Code, which is an environment that is free of racism, and all forms of discrimination.

I believe our Board has made progress in this direction. To be honest, our relationship with OKIB this Spring wasn't satisfactory. As a Board, we realized that we had to make changes. Since then, we have come from a position where we did not have an Educational Agreement in place with OKIB to where that agreement is now in place. I believe as a further sign of progress, OKIB has asked the Board to modify our transportation route to pick up some of their students who were formerly attending SD73. They are now attending our school district. I believe that action speaks for itself and shows that we are moving in the right direction.

**Sheri Minard**

In order to develop Board policy using the lens of the DRIPA, I would ensure that I was up to date on the Provincial DRIPA Action Plan – 2022-2027 the Province's implementation of same, specifically for the action items 62 to 65 relating to education. Knowing this information will be beneficial to ensure that any policy I am part of creating is delivered in culturally intelligent ways that help further Indigenous students. I would engage with our Indigenous community leaders and stakeholders to confirm that I was interpreting the Act how it was intended.

I would also make sure that when policies are being developed that the district adheres to its responsibility to ensure that our policies meet the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada calls to action or at least doesn't contravene them.

**Vanessa Mitchell**

- I will pull from the relevant calls to action that aligns with the policy being developed and outline how it is relevant
- As an Indigenous person the DRIP Act and UNDRIP are integral documents that show districts a map of what to do, as does the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action, the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls Calls to Justice.

**Mark Olsen**

In the Truth and Reconciliation Commissions Calls to Action #43 it calls upon all levels of government to adopt and implement United Nations Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) as a framework for reconciliation. The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA) is our provincial governments response to the UNDRIP.

We already do use the principles of DRIPA as a lens when developing policy. Our Strategic Plan identifies Community Connections goals including:

- Committing to the TRC calls to action
- Fulfilling our public responsibility to Indigenous Communities
- Committing to the BC Human Rights Code so we provide an environment free of
- exclusionary actions like racism and discrimination.
- Increasing collaboration.

We have worked with OKIB on the Local Education Agreement, the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement, and a Tripartite Transportation agreement. This is a strong indication that we are nurturing a good working relationship with the OKIB and look forward to any other negotiations we enter into.

Respect, trust and collaboration are crucial for us to continue on the path of reconciliation.

### **Truman Spring**

I would use the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA) as a lens when developing Board policy to ensure that we are following the lead of the indigenous community and indigenous partners, while working alongside as colleagues towards a mutual goal.

I think that it is crucial to remember that this policy is about the needs of our students and their families. As a school district we have an obligation to support indigenous students and families in every way possible. This means that we need to be open-minded and willing to work with others who have different opinions and experiences than we do. The DRIPA can help us do this by giving us guidance on how to treat our students' cultures with respect and dignity, which will show them that we care about them as human beings first and foremost. Indigenous student's need to see their culture and history represented in our curriculum, hallways, and school identity; as a trustee I will work tirelessly to ensure this is a priority.

It is also important for the community to learn from each other's experiences with racism and discrimination so that we can better understand how it affects everyone involved. We won't always agree on everything or necessarily even understand the impact that racism or discrimination had, however if we create a mutually collaborative and trusting environment where we actively listen and hear each other, then we can work together and address any issues that arise.

As a trustee there are two important things to keep in mind when developing Board policy: one is that we are working alongside indigenous communities as partners, not just doing things for the indigenous community without their input. The second is that we need to remember that we don't have all the answers, so we should try our best to listen to our indigenous partners and collaboratively make decisions and develop policies.

**Kelli Sullivan**

I feel strongly that we should be considering truth and reconciliation in all policy work moving forward and other districts have already begun to do this important work. In relation to DRIPA, of particular relevance to our education system is THEME 3 - Ending Indigenous-specific Racism and Discrimination THEME 4 - Social, Cultural and Economic Well-being. Considering DRIPA is a 5-year plan (2022-2027), if we as a Board are committed to honouring the truth and reconciling for the future, then this work must start immediately. The goal should be to embed the actions found in DRIPA in all relevant Board policies as they are being updated and/or created. An important first step to Indigenizing SD22 with policies, procedures, and practice would be to create a policy relating to Anti-Racism and Cultural Safety that directly supports the values and objectives contained in DRIPA (as well as the Canada's Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the BC Human Rights Code and the Canadian Human Rights Act, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and the BC Multiculturalism Act).