Elect Your Future - School Trustee Candidate Responses

November 7, 2011

Please note: 1) Incumbent candidates are shaded in gray
2) Responses received after the deadline are included for completeness but are indicated in green

Candidate's Name	Photo	Website	Q1: The facilities plan approved by the province and rejected by the school board is yet to be replaced. Please discuss the important aspects that you feel must be included in the next facility plan.	Q2: How do you see public education and private education coexisting into the future in Nanaimo?	Q3: Please discuss the important points in the current Nanaimo District Teachers' Association job action and your opinions on these points.	Q4: What do you see as our district's greatest strengths and toughest challenges?	Q5: Why are you passionate about bettering our public school program?	Q6: How do you measure the success of the School District and the current quality of education provided?
Donna Allen		www.electionsnanaimo.com	The old Facilities Plan has been replaced. Your information is incorrect. The District Facilities Plan School District #68 (Nanaimo-Ladysmith) was passed on October 25, 2010. The following Bylaw was passed on December 15, 2010. You may find both these finished products on the school district's website	The Public and Private education systems do not compete with each other. Parents have the right to choose what type of education is most suited to their needs. Parents of the highest levels of child poverty in BC in a province that has the highest child poverty level in Canada. It is obvious that because of the money necessary to attend private schools there are many children whose parents simply do not have that choice. Would these children then be left having a second-rate education and, therefore, be less employable as adults? Absolutely not! Fortunately, our schools have outstanding staff and strong programs. All children who attend our public education system have the opportunity to become well-educated and employable. What needs to happen is the development of a marketing strategy. The people in the Public Education system are busy doing what they are trained to do and that is education. I have noticed in the 2011 International Guides that some cities talk about their strong schools as a major attribute and one that professionals should consider when looking for places to live. It is time that we all start promoting our school system as one reason Nanaimo is the best place to live. How about A "Young Professionals"? This would be a great project for you!	The teachers' job actions is based upon the negotiations process of their collective agreement. This is a provincial matter. The Board's staff is working hard along with the NDTA to ensure that the interpretation of the job action is clear and that there are no additional problems because of misinterpretation.	Our district's greatest strengths are our staff. They are committed to our students and their success. Our district's greatest challenge is being asked to lead workshops in other parts of the country because they are the cutting edge of personalized learning for the 21st century. Our Education Assistants are considerable in the skill sets that they have acquired to help support children with special needs. Recently, a senior staff person and teachers developed an online expertise course for credit that now has students signed up from all over the province. The challenges we have are working to keep up with technology and the strategic necessary for the changing needs of the student in the 21st century.	Before retirement my professional career was in education. I was always involved in program development and I believe strongly in finding ways to "set all students up for success"	In my opinion, the success of the School District is measured by how well we provide educational programs to give all children the opportunity to successfully complete Grade 12. As the child travels through the school years it is important that he/she does so in a safe and caring environment and one which allows the child to grow in social responsibility.
Nelson Allen		www.electionsnanaimo.com	The question as posed is factually incorrect. The original plan was rejected overwhelmingly by the public in a series of public meetings held to gain feedback on the original proposed plan. The communities said they wanted their schools to remain open. The original plan, as written by senior staff and a consultant would have seen communities divided and elementary students attending bear much larger schools but with a huge number of students housed all day in a forest of portables. Many of these students would have spent their whole kindergarten to grade 7 experience in portables. Elementary schools would eventually be very large with 600 to 700 students. The community rejected that plan. The newly elected School Board decided to review the plan in early 2009 and then held a series of public meetings and completed a revised Facilities Plan, that after many months of consideration and canvassing all options in the district, was adopted on October 19th, 2010 - over a year ago. In addition, the Board passed a Facilities Planning Change Bylaw on December 15, 2010 which requires extensive public notice and public consultation before any substantial changes can be made to the plan. This is needed to protect the public interest. The Facilities Plan is contained in some 50 pages. The Executive Summary is found on the first five pages of the report which can be referenced on the School District website. The plan calls for the upgrading or replacement of some schools, including Nanaimo District Secondary Schools. In addition the School Board has finished a Portfolio Review of its facilities, to the Ministry of Education, for some 5-30 million dollars to wrence, upgrade Wellington Secondary School. It is now the responsibility of the government to fund this priority of our plan. We are waiting for the response from the government.	Public education and private education do currently co-exist in our district and in the province. Private schools must follow the government curricula. Private education existed long before the public education system was established in our province. It is a matter of choice for parents if they wish their children to attend a public school or a private school. Currently in the public education system there are a number of choices that parents and students can choose. These are: French Immersion, Sports Academies, Music Academies and Fine Arts schools. It is important to note that BC and Canadian public schools score in the top 3 to 1. in the world on core competencies.	Currently the BC Teachers Federation is involved provincially with a job action after their members voted over 90% in favor of improving the current collective agreement. The current agreement expired at the end of June and negotiations started on March 1st between the BCTF and the Provincial Government. This set of negotiations is particularly difficult because both parties have yet to agree on a mediator which should be negotiated locally or provincially. As with all negotiations there always will be some resolution to most issues and currently we are fortunate not to be in a full strike/lockout where schools would be closed.	Our district's greatest strengths are our outstanding staff! Great innovations are taking place in this district that have been recognized internationally. Our greatest challenge is to have the resources and find ways to improve our overall graduation rates and school completion rates for all of our students.	5. I am passionate about bettering public education because all facets of society must change and adapt to the rapid change of pace we have in the world today. Public education is the only venue where young people can learn the critical skills needed to protect our democratic way of life. Skills like critical thinking and how to adapt in a changing world have always come from the public school sector. We need to continue to provide opportunities for all our children to receive a world class education that will include the values of a democratic society.	6. We have some great innovations and programmes that help to look after a large number of students with special needs. As we have the highest number of children living in poverty in BC and the second highest in Canada, we are addressing those issues. However we also are producing some of the best graduates from our secondary schools in Canada who are ready to make significant contributions to BC, Skills like critical thinking and how to adapt in a changing world have always come from the public school sector. We need to continue to provide opportunities for all our children to receive a world class education that will include the values of a democratic society. We have some serious challenges and the Board has been addressing those with strategies that will result in a higher overall graduation rate and the inclusion of all students within our public system to provide them with the necessary skills sets to be productive citizens.
Bill Bard		http://bardsie2011.wordpress.com/	It is so difficult to begin here. All aspects of a new facilities plan are important. We must start from scratch, but taking the best from all previous proposals that have been proposed citizens from every corner of the district must be sought out and considered. Finally, we need a board that has the political will to do whatever it takes to ensure safety in 2016, this means allowing input from every trustee and stakeholder, especially parents.	I think if the province and the Fraser Institute had their way there would be no coexistence, only private. If that were to happen, only the lowest functioning students would be remedial public.	I am very frustrated by BCPSEA and their apparent unwillingness to negotiate anything beyond "rents" because it seems like valuable professionals that deserve respect and I do not see any respect coming from BCPSEA. My partner is a teacher and has been working longer than I have since the strike action began. With that cause teachers really do care enough to ensure parents are informed about how their child(ren) are doing. Phone calls, emails and yes, report cards, just not on gad. Issues forums.	Our district's greatest strengths are our children. They are our future. Their success or failure is our bands and we must not fail them! I rather like Bill Robinson's motto of "bringing out the best everyone". It really is a great statement!	I am a father and grandfather who has witnessed the best and worst of public education and I want to offer to I believe that public education is a right that must be protected and nourished. I feel strongly enough about this to try to influence some social and fiscal responsibility and will continue to do that whether elected or not.	I look at growing graduation rates, participation in sports, I learned in business that a happy staff is an effective and efficient staff, and I believe a better product to ensure a return customer. Staff morale in the district has to be improved to make the entire operation efficient and effective. The "better product" would reflect successful students, and the repeat customer could be compared to people staying or moving in to Nanaimo because of what it has to offer over other districts.
Jamie Brennan			The Board has commissioned an "Asset Management Plan" which will serve as a guiding document for thinking about facilities in Nanaimo and planning and renewal. Hopefully, a new Board will abandon an ideological approach to planning and consider all options, including closing some schools, selling some District properties and building new, safe school buildings. This approach has worked in the North Vancouver district, where the motto is "Fewer, Newer Schools". It is important that we quicken the winnow, upgrading to all seismically-challenge school buildings. Student and staff safety cannot be ignored in the process of renewing our physical plants. Newer schools will accomodate the newest technology and be LEAD gold facilities, this reducing our carbon footprint overall. We need to work closely with the Ministry of Education to ensure that our District receives its share of capital funding.	Public and private education are, essentially, two solitudes existing for the same purpose, providing quality education for young people. The BC School Trustees' Association is opposed to the use of public funds for private education. This is particularly resonant when we have, year after year, significant cuts to programs and services in the public education system. In this budget year, 45 out of sixty school districts receive what the Ministry calls "funding protection". With these funds, Nanaimo-Ladysmith had cuts of $1.5 million instead of over $6 million. The funding protection is a temporary measure that does not provide for long-term funding stability to the public system. Until government fixes the funding system for the public education system, there should be no increases to funding the private system.	The NDTA job action is part of a provincial campaign to put pressure on the employer's association to increase its offer to the BCTF. Local Boards have little say in provincial bargaining. The mandate of the employers is determined by government, and this year it is a zero net increase mandate. The BCTF has said this is unacceptable and have used the job action as the beginning of the process leading towards a general strike. As education is deemed and "essential service" by government, it is likely that the province would intervene in the face of a general strike. Local districts have little recourse in the face of job action. The withdrawal of such services as recess supervision has placed considerable pressure on excluded staff, who have been providing supervision at the expense of their regular duties. It is costing the district between $3000 and $4000 per month in mileage as these staff travel to and from schools. For these reasons, senior staff are moving recess to the end of the school day, freeing them up to get on with their work in the afternoon. The other wrinkle in the dispute is the negotiation between the Province and the BCTF over compensation for the Supreme Court ruling on the unconstitutionality of Bill 28. The legislation contained provisions that engage governance and compensation from all teacher collective agreements. Many of these provisions were struck down. Teachers have stated that they have not negotiated in good faith and that the teachers are given supports where and when needed to ensure that the environment is safe and inclusive. We need to take steps to ensure a positive learning environment for all. Funding is another issue which I believe needs more review, and an appeal to hear that the government has committed to looking into this, but I believe we need to keep the pressure on government to complete this review soon. This financial uncertainty used for funding the education system has been in place for a number of years. And like many others I believe it is flawed as it does not consider inflation rates, teachers raises, benefits, transportation costs, and the ever increasing utility bills to name a few and many others. I believe that the Ministry of Education should be responsible for providing the funding and not the individual school districts. Finance issues and an whole, this is not conducive to best outcomes for our students or a strong public education system.	Our District's strengths are its people. Education is a people centre enterprise, and our District has been very successful in the past in attracting and retaining the best and brightest to work in our district. Local Boards have little say in provincial bargaining. The mandate of the employers is determined by government, and this year it is a zero net increase mandate. The BCTF has said this is unacceptable and have used the job action as the beginning of the process leading towards a general strike. 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Finance issues and an whole, this is not conducive to best outcomes for our students or a strong public education system.	Our District's strengths are its people. Education is a people centre enterprise, and our District has been very successful in the past in attracting and retaining the best and brightest to work in our district. Our teachers are very advanced in their practice and they are working hard to provide the best education they can. The challenges are significant. First, we keep some very small schools open, which does not enable the District to achieve economies of scale in the delivery of important support services, such as teacher libraries, counselors and special education support services. A recently completed BC assessment of technology needs is very promising, but without funding it will be only that – a promise. Our technology upgrades are important to maintain some competitive advantage for our district and our students. The labour relations environment remains problematic. The numbers of grievances is still too high, and we have been criticized for our use of "bargaining" language in our dispute with our teachers, which has created a hostile environment. We need to work on improving our labour relations environment. Our District has been ordered to arbitration, who ruled the matter was not a collective agreement issue for arbitration. Now, it is going back to court. This has taken over $50,000 out of the classroom and into lawyers' pockets. This litigious, combatorious approach to dispute resolution is expensive and exhausting. It needs to change. A major problem in our district is the high level of families living in poverty. This means that many children who arrive at school are tired, simply put, hungry. While we have established a number of food programs at some schools, hunger and general deprivation and want keep many children from achieving what they might have otherwise accomplished had they had ample food, clothing and shelter. We also need to respond more effectively to the needs of aboriginal learners. We have a strong team of teachers, administrators and support staff working to respond to these needs and we need to continue to focus on this matter.	I believe strongly that an excellent public education system, one that serves every person's child, is the means to maintaining a fair, inclusive, and prosperous society. I benefitted from my experience in public education, as did my children and are my grandchildren. It is the foundation of a sound democracy, with nobody clamoring from outside the game of our communities.	There are a number of means of determining both the success of the system and of students. While they continue to be contrived, the Foundation Skills Assessment provide a snapshot of performance for students in Grades 4 and 7. We can see how well we have done in the years between those grades. Graduation rates are another way of seeing if our students are completing their education to a timely manner. We can also examine satisfaction surveys of students and parents to hear their views of their experience with public education. In classrooms, teachers continually assess the performance of their students. These formative assessments serve to inform teachers of how useful and successful their methods are. Teachers are then able to refine their approach to serve the needs of each student.
Nancy Curley			The facilities plan can only finalized once the review of existing facilities is complete. Empty and unused buildings are not only expensive (in upkeep and vandalism) but a potential source of revenue to the District. I would like to pursue the possibility of making existing facilities available for "not for profit" daycares. To help address the child poverty situation that sets up additional challenges to the children but also our overall economy. The worse upgrades, overcrowding of some and under-utilized of other schools must be reviewed and consultation of stakeholders must guide the discussion and ultimate decision.	Private education is a reality here in the District — as Trustees we must ensure that it is not at a cost to the Public system – on going dialogue around revision of funding formulas must keep that focus.	The job action that is currently taking place is really about a lack of funding for education. In a review of the BCTF position paper Better Schools for BC - they have offered reasonable solutions to the issues of class size and composition, professional development, and a fair compensation package for teachers. This process currently used for funding the education system has been in place for a number of years. And like many others I believe it is flawed as it does not consider inflation rates, teachers raises, benefits, transportation costs, and the ever increasing utility bills to name a few and many others. I believe that the Ministry of Education should be responsible for providing the funding and not the individual school districts. Finance issues and an whole, this is not conducive to best outcomes for our students or a strong public education system.	Our greatest strength is our Teachers and Staff within the District – without our front line employees always "making more with less" we would not have survived the last 10 years of funding cuts. Our greatest challenge is the effects of insufficient funding on our students. The Board needs to make a priority of addressing those effects. These include but not limited to, and in no particular order: the political divisions that exist with the current Board; high poverty rates in our district, aging unsafe facilities, lack of support for students with special needs.	I believe that we all have an obligation to society to "give back" in some form or other - I have always been active in our children's education - they have now graduated and I am nearing the end of my working career - I know that the skills and lessons I learned throughout that career can have a positive influence on our school system. I believe that I can make the difference to our District. I know I have the time necessary to put to use my advocacy, mediation and problem solving skills. My experience as a Pension Trustee, a Union Trustee, and a Trustee on other Board work will offer a strong voice to the Board and a positive difference in the District. I know I can make a difference in my community.	I would measure success in the District a number of ways - Are graduation rates rising (I hear "valued" dis our employees feel? - a good indicator is the number of grievances being filed indicates levels of frustration - Will the levels of child poverty in our District lower? These types of measurements indicate the success of the Trustees to monitor our educational issues.
Kim Howland		www.howlandtrustee.weebly	Facilities planning for the district is an important issue as we need to ensure that our schools are safe environments for our students and staff. This encompasses such things as renovating old buildings, to building new schools where needed (ie: Ladysmith Elementary), to seismic upgrades. I understand that there is a new plan for the district which has gone through a full consultation process and has been approved by the board of the day, I believe in April 2010. http://www.sd68.bc.ca/sites/assets/SD68News/publications_facilityplans-21comm.htm This is a starting place for the new board to begin moving forward with. The newly elected board needs to work together with district staff to make some tough decisions based on facts, research and collaboration with the individuals affected by these decisions. Those decisions must be made in the best interest of students and the community as a whole. I also believe that there is a lot more to the facilities plan than just the school buildings. I believe that the board needs to work closely with the District Parent Advisory Council and our Superintendent is already tasked and working on a plan that will have input from all the stakeholders and is to be completed by Spring 2012. I also believe that when we look at developing a full facilities plan that we must ensure that it aligns with our goals as a district. • Sustain programs that support students to become successful learners – class composition, choice programs, trades, academies, catteryway, support rooms etc. • Sustain and enhance our Public Education System in our school district communities – Ladysmith, Nanaimo, Lantzville, Protection and Gabriola Island – engaging community, partnerships with First Nations and Local Governments • Sustain and enhance district and school operations by seeking and implementing additional Organizational Efficiencies – ie: possible changes in school catchments, partnerships or joint –use opportunities to help support students learning There are tough decisions to be made and I'm sure that the board will be faced with many difficult decisions in the future. 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Those decisions must be made in the best interest of students and the community as a whole. I also believe that there is a lot more to the facilities plan than just the school buildings. I believe that the board needs to work closely with District Parent Advisory Council and our Superintendent is already tasked and working on a plan that will have input from all the stakeholders and is to be completed by Spring 2012. I also believe that when we look at developing a full facilities plan that we must ensure that it aligns with our goals as a district. I look forward to the opportunity to be part of the team advocating for Ministry to recognize the needs of our district upon completion of a full facilities and educational plan.	Public Education is core to a healthy society and is intended for all regardless of their economic background. Private education is a choice which individuals can make, and usually pay for, and is sometimes based on religious reasons and/or the belief that their child will receive a superior education and opportunities. Both of these programs exist in our community and have for some time and I don't see that changing, we live in a world that we include and should include choice. However, I believe that we need to strengthen our public education system. We need to find ways of ensuring that we are giving families and student's the choice without having to go to private education