

Guelph Politico

Candidate Questionnaire



School Board Trustee Questionnaire

1) In 100 words or less, what's your main reason to run for school trustee?

As a parent, community volunteer and a current school board Trustee, my focus has always been on our children and youth. We teach them, they grow and find their voices, and as the youth are heard our communities become better places for all of us. It sounds cliché but the children and youth are our future. With this in mind I want to put my energies toward building a system that ensures there are many opportunities for youth to be successful.

2) What is the role of school board trustee as you understand it?

I have had the privilege of being elected as a school board trustee for three terms, 12 years. Let me start by outlining that a trustee has several roles and accountabilities, to the constituents who elect them, to the local school board system of Wellington-Dufferin Counties, and to the province/ Ministry of Education.

At the community grass roots level a trustee engages and listen to parents and families, answers questions and supports and helps them navigate the education system. Trustees bring their knowledge and experience to the Board table. Working together the Board of Trustees reflect on school board plans, reports and the system as a whole, making recommendations to better meet the needs of children, youth and families

Finally, as with any Board, school board trustees are accountable for resources allocated, that they are used wisely and sustainably and are accountable to the communities and province.

3) How do you think the relationship currently stands between the Ontario government and your school board?

Fortunately the Upper Grand District School Board has a good relationship with the Ministry of Education and has always been in compliance and good standing.

Regardless of the government at the provincial or federal levels, the school board must follow and attest that we are in compliance with all legislation, regulations and provincial expectations.

4) The mental health of young people is a growing priority; how will you help insure that schools get the resources they need to address this important issue?

Student well-being is one of the intentional School Board Strategic Directions. The Program Department has the lead in Student Mental Health, it provides in-service teacher training, PD and follow up supports

and resources for teachers at the elementary and secondary levels. The Upper Grand District School Board employs a Mental Health Lead, Psychologists, Child and Youth Counsellors, Social Workers, Guidance, and Student Success teachers who have student well-being as a primary focus.

The UGDSB has created tiered systems of school-based intervention supports that bring resources as needed to students. High risk students, trans students and students with anxiety, depression, PTS, self-harm, addictions and suicide ideation have been supported with counselling, emotional regulation, behavioural therapy and referral to community agencies.

Through the school board budgeting process and the Director's annual objectives the board of trustees continue to make mental health, special education and the well-being of children and youth a priority. Mental Health continues to be a provincial government priority and through our membership in the Ontario Public School Board Association, trustees continue to support the cross Ministry Children & Youth Mental Health Summit.

5) Guelph will continue to grow in the next 20 years, where and when should the priority be for new school construction?

While the City of Guelph continues to grow the Upper Grand District School Board encompasses all of Wellington and Dufferin Counties and through the Long Term Accommodation Planning process collects board-wide data to determine the capital needs of our system

Each year the Ministry of Education requires school boards across the province to submit Capital Request Business proposals. While the UGDSB may have various enrolment pressures the province reviews all provincial submissions and approves Capital business cases on a regional and provincial basis.

A case in point is the City of Guelph's south-end high school which, after several years of request to the province, was approved. This will be the first new secondary school in 50 years.

6) While mayor and council candidates talk about city infrastructure, let's talk about the infrastructure of our schools. How do our school buildings fare? Are they accessible enough? Are there enough resources to address repairs? Et cetera.

Let me start with accessibility. In my submission on behalf of the UGDSB to the Minister of Finance, we identified a need for a dedicated Capital funding stream to make accessible improvements to our existing schools. This funding is especially needed for our historic buildings which are an important fabric of the history and character of our communities. We would definitely benefit from additional dedicated accessibility-improvement funding, this would allow us to meet AODA, our equity and inclusive goals and values.

The Upper Grand District School Board's schools are in excellent condition, from the sparkling cleanliness provided by our custodial staff to the maintenance, repairs and renovations provided during the summer and throughout the school year.

As the UGDSB Operations staff work in schools they add accessibility features [as identified in the Accessibility Audit], and also efficiency improvements for energy conservation and sustainability. The UGDSB has added automated energy indicators and solar panels in many schools, and linked data to classroom student learning in an effort to connect environmental values to every day practice.

7) What can the school board do to give teachers the resources to improve how students learn in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) courses?

I would like to first recognize the excellent programs currently being offered in all of our schools. Teaching staff receive training and support from the UGDSB Curriculum Consultants and many of our staff are also members of UGDSB Professional Learning Teams and professional associations, such as Science Teachers Association of Ontario.

I believe that teachers in their classrooms and schools are the best places to identify additional training interests, resource needs and also the best place to receive these supports.

8) What's an example of something that Guelph schools are doing well versus schools in other board jurisdictions?

When I think of our schools I think of a micro-community, a mix of families, school admin, staff, teachers and the neighbourhood all working together. In keeping with that vision I think that every school has initiatives that are specific and responsive to the interests and needs of that community, it is truly wonderful to see the uniqueness in our schools.

As a whole the UGDSB is proud that 100% of our schools are ECO certified, that our board offers the largest number of High Skills Major program opportunities for secondary students in any school board in Ontario, and that our teaching and admin staff are encouraged to innovate and bring ideas to the Learning Choices Committee.

9) FRENCH IMMERSION: If you're running in the Upper Grand District School Board, how do you think the board has handled the pressure of demand for French Immersion? If you're running in the Wellington Catholic District School Board, should the board be looking at developing its own French Immersion programs to help relieve the pressure?

As a current UGDSB Trustee and a French Immersion parent I believe that we have handled the demand for French Immersion in the only way we could. The demand has exceeded our ability to deliver French Immersion programming. This has been due to a lack of space and the lack of qualified French teachers, not only in our board but also provincially.

In addition there is a continuous need to look at regular track programming in dual track schools and our Wellington-Dufferin board as a whole. The objective is a sustainable education system for children and youth, urban and rural, FI and regular track.

Capping access to the French Immersion program was a difficult process and decision. This being said I believe that we built in an annual review and overall feedback process allowing the French as a Second Language Advisory Committee, which includes parent representatives, to directly inform and provide recommendations to the Board.

10) There's a political question about dissolving the Catholic and separate school board system and creating one school board, what's your opinion on the issue?

I am a strong supporter of publicly funded education.

There has been some attention given to the one-school system campaign during the recent provincial election and this past summer in the media.

I do not see any financial benefit in amalgamating school boards. My opinion is based on academic papers from York University looking at the cost-benefit of municipal amalgamation, and the post-amalgamation [1998] impact at the UGDSB, after the Wellington and Dufferin Boards were required to amalgamate by the provincial government.

If you think about it like a triangle, at the base you will have the same number of students to educate, with the same number of teachers, and students are geo-located in different communities [rural and urban] with the same number of classrooms, and the same number of Superintendents to oversee school operations. Given that the inputs are the same the costs will remain relatively constant. While there would be savings in central administration [at the top] these would be minimal to the overall instructional and operational budget.

This past summer an article written by two professors from Western Universities cited overwhelming cost savings through school board amalgamation. What I found lacking in their analysis was the real-experience of amalgamation, that through the process of harmonizing collective agreements and benefits, the overall amalgamated workplace is raised to the highest of all levels, resulting in a higher cost to sustain the amalgamated organization.

So, in my opinion if you are asking for significant cost savings in amalgamation, I do not see any in this suggestion.

If your question is about revisiting constitutional rights then that is another much larger conversation.

11) Is there an issue concerning education or public schools you feel needs more attention? What is it, and why?

Thank you for this opportunity, I have already mentioned Accessibility and capital funding, I think that this is a strategic need, especially for us to be able to respectfully address accessibility in our historic schools.

Rural education is also a concern. In our smaller communities we need to continue to offer choices for students that meet their pathway goals. I would advocate for an enhanced rural and small schools provincial funding amount that is used to enhance learning opportunities.

Finally I would also like to advocate for Adult Education. The current funding for day-school adult high school credit instruction is about one-third the amount the same credit taught in a high school. In addition there is no capital funding for adult education. So, if there is an underutilized school in a community that could be renovated for adult learning and perhaps skills training there is no funding to facilitate this use through the current Capital funding priority process. As a province who has expressed support for skill development, employment and overall provincial economic productivity and prosperity, there is a need to invest in the adult education system.

12) For someone that doesn't have kids in school, why should they care about who's running for school board?

Education is not just about kids in schools, there is a direct link between education and a democratic society and our economic possibilities as a community.

Let me start with the Economics. Yes, you should care about education because it leads to better jobs, higher incomes and a vibrant local economy. Research also shows that individuals who are better educated live longer, have healthier lives and that their children are more likely to thrive. All of these are visible economic benefits of education.

School Boards are the oldest form of local democracy. The tangible Economic benefits of education are much easier to point out and value, but for me Education is not a commodity rather it's a public good that benefits everyone. I believe that you should become engaged and care about Public Education as the Trustees and School Boards carry forward the values that will determine priorities and influence the values of students who will one day fix the social, economic and environmental problems of our communities.

13) Where can people learn more about you, or your campaign, and how can they get in touch with you?

Voters may

- *visit my website www.lindabusuttill.info*
- *explore links on my website and surveys that I have completed to date*
- *email me with questions lbusuttill@sympatico.ca*
- *call me 519 837 9592*
- *follow me around on Twitter @LBusuttill*
- *Facebook, not that great with this, hard to find time! www.facebook.com/LLBusuttill*

Thank you for providing this opportunity!