

Delta School Trustee Candidate Responses

Name: Ammen Dhillon

1. Why do you want to be a school trustee? What do you understand the role of a trustee to be?

Growing up in a new immigrant family, public education opened doors for me and helped shape the life I have now. At this stage in my life, having my own children in the system, it means a great deal to be able to offer my skills and experience in support of public education. Service is a value I was raised with, and I see trustee work as an opportunity to use my education and experience to help our community and bring forward voices that are not always heard. My background as a PhD-level research scientist in the biotech industry and now a Registered Clinical Counsellor gives me a perspective that brings together evidence, mental health and an understanding of the skills young people will need in a changing world. Growing up between two cultures also makes me more attentive to what diverse families may be navigating and to ensuring they are treated fairly and with dignity. Having now served as a trustee, I see the role as both governance and advocacy. We set direction, steward public resources, revisit policy as needed, ask difficult questions when necessary, and make sure spending aligns with our strategic plan and vision. We also need to stay connected to our community and understand what students, families and staff are experiencing in real time, and adjust our strategic direction accordingly. Staff development and retention are part of that work. We also have to stay current. The world our students are entering is changing quickly, and schools need to prepare them with the skills and opportunities to be healthy, self-assured, and ready to thrive after graduation.

2. Delta staff are committed to including all children and families. How will you support Delta staff in creating inclusive school communities?

My experience on the Board has taught me that inclusion in practice comes down to staffing, resources and making sure staff feel supported when the work is difficult. I sit on the Inclusive Learning Advisory Committee, which gives me more regular opportunities to hear directly from DTA, CUPE and district staff about what is happening in schools. Staff believe in inclusion, but resource constraints can leave them managing increasingly complex needs without enough support. Our funding model has not kept pace. Our job is to be honest about that, look for practical solutions within Delta, and keep pressing the province for funding that better reflects the reality in our schools. I also believe strongly in preserving student-staff relationships wherever possible. Continuity builds trust and helps staff respond earlier. I also support mentorship and peer support wherever possible, recognizing their positive impact on confidence and retention.

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3. Delta staff are learning about decolonization and reconciliation. How will you support Delta staff in our supportive role?

My counselling training was grounded in narrative therapy, social justice and decolonizing approaches. In practice, that means I try to notice where power sits, whose voices are missing, and whether the people most affected by a decision have had a meaningful chance to shape it. As a trustee, I want to keep working toward a stronger staff voice in decisions, especially from those working closest to students, and to keep checking whose perspectives may still be missing. I appreciate the work already happening across our district through the implementation of the Justice and Equity Action Plan framework, Indigenous Education, and the commitment of our staff to carrying this work forward. Over this past term, I am grateful to have had the opportunity to attend Indigenous ceremonies, cultural events and graduations. It is an honour to be welcomed into those spaces and to keep learning. I plan to continue supporting the resources staff need for this work and to keep the Calls to Action present in district decisions, including policy, student outcomes and procurement.

4. Due to underfunding in the system, violence has become more prevalent. How will you commit to providing a safe and healthy working and learning environment for students and staff?

I see staff safety as a basic working condition. Underfunding adds to the problem when complex classrooms do not have enough supports to match needs. We may not prevent every incident, but we should be doing everything we can to reduce risk and respond properly when incidents happen. I prefer prevention wherever possible: simple reporting, consistent follow-up, paying attention to patterns, and ensuring enough support in the classroom when needs are high. Continuity matters too. Staff who know a student well are often better able to anticipate concerns and step in earlier. I also support peer support and mentorship, especially for newer staff. Moving forward, I would welcome more opportunities for trustees to hear from staff about health and safety concerns and emerging pressures. I also want to keep promoting preventive relational literacy work for both staff and students, including the provincial advocacy I have already initiated on this topic.

5. How would you propose to alleviate the current EA staffing shortage and improve recruitment and retention?

Career stability, enough hours, opportunities for growth and feeling respected all matter. As a trustee, I support budget and policy decisions that help create more

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sustainable positions where possible and keep recruitment and retention on the Board's agenda. The role has also become more complex, with many EAs carrying significant behavioural and support needs. That can contribute to burnout. I support paid training, continuity with students, mentorship and stronger inclusion of EAs in planning around the students they support. I would also like the district to keep building awareness of EA and other support roles as viable career paths for students. At the Board table, I can keep supporting career stability, development and the conditions that help good people stay and grow in the system.

6. Given that funding is limited, what are your budget priorities for the Delta School District?

I think first about where the pressure is greatest, how far-reaching the benefit will be to staff and students, and whether we can sustain it. With our limited budget, my priority is protecting strong staffing and the supports closest to students. I am focused on addressing declining literacy and numeracy rates, preparing students for a changing global economy, and supporting the mental wellness of both students and staff. I also place a strong emphasis on relational literacy and inclusion, understanding that our students' readiness to grow and learn depends on schools being safe and respectful places where bullying, racism and other forms of exclusion are actively addressed. I see schools as central to modelling the kind of communities we want our students to help build. Overall, I want our budget to support the areas that help students thrive, help staff feel proud to work in Delta, and have students leave Delta proud of the education they received here and confident that we prepared them well for what comes next.

7. Currently, in Delta, decisions are made by trustees prior to the public Board meeting. Do you feel an obligation to make your decision-making process more transparent to the public and what steps will you take to ensure this?

In principle, I am for more openness. Through my committee work and now as Vice-Chair, I see the value of the discussion that happens before an item reaches the public Board table, but I also understand how that can make the process feel less visible from the outside. I would welcome more opportunities to meet with stakeholder groups, including DTA and CUPE leadership, and to provide more public context around significant decisions, while preserving a governance process that is working well. Of course, some matters need to remain confidential.