

Delta School Trustee Candidate Responses

Name: Masako Gooch

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

I am running to be elected as a Trustee as I care about students, the staff, educational outcomes, and the role public education has in our community and society. I have three children of my own, all of whom are in elementary school currently. I see firsthand the importance and impacts our decisions. Over the last four years, I have learned a vast amount of information about being a school trustee and our role as a board. Trustees work democratically, together as a board, to uphold community priorities, oversee strategic direction, set policy, oversee financial stewardship of provincial funding, and are advocates for staff and students. Understanding this information better, I am prepared to use this knowledge to increase collaboration and advocacy efforts. I have seen a provincial funding model that is unable to fund basic education, a government that consistently adds more with even less funding, and a steady rise in employee illness. The latter due to unsafe working conditions, complex classrooms, staffing shortages, and increasing demands. As a nurse in a busy emergency department, I see the effects mental health can take and understand the toll of working in an unsafe and unpredictable environment. I want to make things better. Better for staff, better for students, better for our community. Educational outcomes are a result of the whole system working together, and every child deserves to leave the K-12 system feeling supported, with purpose, achievement, and pride, regardless of ability or background.

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

Our educators are a key part of school communities, having strong ties to students and families. I strongly believe that inclusive education plays a pivotal role in enhancing student outcomes, and that every child deserves to feel safe, respected, and nurtured in their learning environment. Collaboration on inclusion initiatives and advocacy on sustainable, increased funding for inclusive classrooms is desperately needed. Classrooms are more complex than ever and if true inclusion is to take place, we need more support directly in the classrooms. I am also a strong advocate for removing barriers to inclusion, ensuring students have the access they need, and making the invisible, visible.

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

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Growing up, I was blessed to have multiple Indigenous women in my class, whose families shared with us some of the rich culture of the Haida and Coast Salish people over several years. I was able to go on a multi day Canoe trip, where we were invited to stay in a Longhouse, and shared traditional food. I also had the privilege of being exposed to First Nations art, in specific, totem pole carving, at a young age. I didn't understand at the time how these early teachings would shape and influence my continued learning, decolonization, and advocacy efforts. I have taken part in Truth and Reconciliation events and learning opportunities, as a school trustee as well as in my nursing career, and will continue to do so. I have also purchased and read several books by Indigenous authors to further my knowledge on decolonization, Truth and Reconciliation. As a trustee, I have been vocal about advocating for greater online post secondary learning opportunities in communities that are remote. These communities are often mostly Indigenous, and with unfair post secondary learning access, it perpetuates disparity through colonial systems. In our board policy updates, I have highlighted the importance of Indigenous Education by clarifying with stronger wording and having Indigenous Education prioritized. In the future I will continue to be an ally and an advocate. I will continue to unlearn, re-learn, and forward my own journey towards Truth and Reconciliation so that I may better support educational staff through my role as a trustee.

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?

Safety and violence both resonate deeply with my work as a nurse. No student or staff member should feel unsafe or threatened, in their learning environment or place of work. Increasingly complex classrooms with a lack of adequate funding have created gaps, in which difficult and dangerous situations can occur. We need funding to increase direct classroom supports, so we can take preventative and prompt interventional measures to mitigate and prevent unsafe situations. Increased communication with DTA and CUPE to collaborate on advocacy pieces around increased funding for behaviour supports and the classroom support the provincial government promised and has yet to deliver on is desperately needed.

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

This is a multi-faceted issue where education, recruitment, and retention all need greater work and advocacy efforts. When it comes to education, EA training, upgrading

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programs, and mentorship need increased funding and accessibility. For recruitment, we need to collaborate with the city to advertise how Delta and the school district is a vibrant, inclusive, friendly city, with a strong working relationship with CUPE, that is worth putting roots down in. Retention is probably the most complex, but important piece. I feel that workload, pay, scheduling, job stability, and continuity in classrooms all play important pieces that need to be addressed. As a trustee, I would like to see data on vacancies and turnover on a district and school level. I am strongly advocating for a committee where we can collaborate on these issues and to improve communication and transparency. Advocacy with CUPE and DTA to put pressure on Victoria for greater sustainable funding is paramount. Part of the provincial government campaign platform was to put an EA in every K-3 classroom. So far their only answer is to download this promise onto local school boards, knowing that the funding model cannot sustain basic education. It's time to change this. I will work with CUPE, DTA, the city and DPAC to collectively and strategically advocate for the government to fund their campaign promise.

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

Protecting services closest to students remains a priority. Simply cutting positions is not a viable long term funding fix. Strategic restructuring for creating efficiencies and eliminating task duplication, as well as deliberate and calculated use of reserve funding, are ways we have minimized classroom impact. I do believe an area of improvement could be staff morale, recruitment, and retention. As a school trustee, I commit to greater advocacy for a fully funded education system. To create a liaison committee with education partners would assist with collaborative efforts for advocacy. I believe our voices are stronger together. If city councils, educational boards, and education partners, strongly and strategically advocate for predictable, sustainable funding covering all associated costs, I believe we could make headway. The current model is inadequate and eroding an already fragile system at the expense of teachers, EA's, staff and the students we strive to protect.

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?

I am an advocate for increased transparency in the education system, as increased transparency is the foundation of trust and positive collaboration. I believe there are many ways we can achieve greater transparency that I have been vocal about. Sitting

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on more committees, especially with union learning partners, is of great importance so we can increase collaborative efforts. An example of this is budget consultation with education partners, so that the annual consultation can occur earlier, as well as throughout the year, as the budget evolves with time and external factors. During public meetings, instead of bringing up motions, voting, and passing them, I would like to have more explanation as to where these motions came from, why they are being moved, and some discussion, as I believe it is currently robotic and doesn't provide the valuable insight that others may find useful. I have also openly asked if we can make our public meetings more accessible via online streaming, such as how city council does. I believe this will increase the visibility and educate members of the public on the work of trustees, as well as highlight the collaborative efforts between education partners and the board. Increased accessibility to meetings, giving greater insight into how decision making occurs, and ensuring our education partners and community have greater chances to give input and feel heard, are important to a more hands on, democratic, and transparent system.