

City of North Vancouver Trustee Candidates

Why are you running for North Vancouver Board of Education trustee?

Sean Ewing

I have 2 children in public school, 1 at Breamar, 1 at Handsworth. I was upset by the previous board's actions, not attending meetings and the bullying allegations. I felt that the trustees had their own interests and no one was speaking for the children.

Greg Zavediuk

Our community needs a voice into the governance of our student's education. A highly effective Board of Education assists the educators of SD44 to excel and I believe my educational experience and background will allow me would be a valuable asset on that board.

Jullian Kolstee

My father was a teacher with the NVT, and education in North Vancouver has always been a part of my life. Once I completed my K-12 at Westview & Carson Graham in 2009, I began running the Carson Graham Improv program and haven't stopped since. I've also spent the last decade in schools across the project teaching improvisational theatre at the elementary and secondary levels. Having been a student leader at Carson, I spent three years on the Capilano Students' Union board during my studies at Capilano University, advocating for students and better post-secondary education. I offer this experience and qualification to the board, but the reason I'm running is to bring new perspectives to the board table, among them: I am a 27 year old millennial, a dual designated student with a disability & gifted, a first generation Canadian, and a long serving volunteer.

Mary Tasi Baker

I am running for trustee so that all students feel valued, included and safe. I will also advocate for the stewardship of funds and the new BC curriculum. I will collaboratively create a positive tone and culture for board governance, and advocate for teachers, students, parents and stakeholders, I also support two new schools, and supported housing for teachers.

Christie Sacré

I have worked hard this term to bring our Board together, and I believe my record illustrates that I am objective and collaborative in the face of differing interests and perspectives and that I am willing to listen and learn from others. I am running for a third term in order to use what I have learned, work on improving Employee Engagement Survey results and continue to enhance learning and teaching conditions for students and staff.

Megan Higgins

I want to ensure that we have a fully functioning school board. Along with my own objectives, I hope to be a resource for the new trustees.

What processes should trustees establish to ensure all education partner groups have input into board decisions?

Sean Ewing

The town hall style meeting at the school board seem to be productive. I believe in a collaborative workplace with consultation with stakeholders when appropriate.

Greg Zavediuk

Educational partners groups need to have quality relationships with the board. Board transparency, accessibility and ongoing communication will benefit partners. The board must also reach out to all groups to ensure they recognize their voice matters.

Jullian Kolstee

Trustees should continue to make the school board more transparent through initiatives such as the recently introduced video recorded meetings. We should make as much of our process open and accessible to the public as possible, so that partners have the information and opportunity to engage with us. I'm interested to learn what processes previous boards have used to ensure partner groups are consulted, but we also have a responsibility to grow and maintain our relationships with partners as individual trustees. My policy will be to keep two way lines of communication open with representatives from partner groups throughout my term.

Mary Tasi Baker

I have experience in engagement and respectful collaboration. We have standing committees that encourage input like the Towards the Future of Schools, which I founded in my term as trustee in 2008 to 2011. I support proactive, co operative, and attentive, non-judgemental listening.

My suggestion would be a monthly meeting with the NVTa to discuss concerns/priorities.

Christie Sacré

Presently, school district committees have representatives from each partner group, as well, standing committee meetings and board meetings are open to all partner groups and the public. Also this term, we allocated more time to the beginning of our Public Board meetings for comment period, which has been used by staff, students and parents. I find it very useful to be invited to Staff meetings and lunch hour at my liaison schools where I can listen to what is happening at the school level and speak to individual teachers. I am open to listening and asking questions. Trustees are continually looking for better ways to ensure input and active engagement and suggestions are welcome.

Megan Higgins

We should have more transparency during our decision-making process. We have a motion on the table right now (will be on the agenda at the next public board meeting) to have information currently presented to trustees in private seminars instead presented at public subcommittee meetings. This will allow the partner groups to be more informed earlier on and provide earlier and more effective feedback to trustees. Also, we need to provide detailed information regarding budget proposals well in advance of the May or June public board meetings.

What can be done to enhance and improve our public education system?

Sean Ewing

Public school has declining enrolment because of competition from private school and neighboring districts. This reduces the available budget and resources. The best way for the system to do more with less is by technology and effective allocation of resources.

Greg Zavediuk

We must always find ways to respect diversity and provide great opportunities for all students to achieve their goals. Increasing funding for schools will always be a huge responsibility and challenge as it is important to provide more specialist teachers and resources which are needed in our current classrooms.

Jullian Kolstee

I will answer this question as it relates to my role as trustee, rather than offering an uneducated opinion on pedagogy or curriculum. The supreme court decision in favour of teachers and new BC education curriculum should enhance and improve our system, if supported with appropriate funding and resources, including essential technology in the classroom. Government should always be working to reform education to meet the changing needs of our students. The impact of technology on our society cannot be understated, and the world our system was designed for has come and gone in less than a generation. Schools need to prepare students to be creative, empathetic, critical thinkers in this increasingly automated, artificially intelligent world. Not only are these skills practical economically, but they are essential to facing the existential threats and crises of our time. Trustees need to work with partners and our community to provide the best resources, services, and environment for public education. We should be receptive and responsive to information and issues as we work collaboratively to best serve students.

Mary Tasi Baker

Excellent, progressive and well functioning school boards that bring the teacher, student, parent, stakeholder and community concerns in a positive and collaborative way to the board. Positive advocacy to the Province to ensure teacher resources, student supports, and school upgrades are adequately funded. Advocacy for new schools when enrollment is increasing.

Christie Sacré

To enhance and improve our public education system, we need to focus on education. I realize that negotiating a new collective agreement is a key issue for the new board, but improving student outcomes and all that this entails should be what we are discussing. Strengthening relationships between partner groups and promoting more authentic dialogue and input on district and school based initiatives is fundamental to our District. Lastly, trustees need to continue to advocate for fair and equitable funding in the event of the upcoming funding formula change as this could have a big impact on our education system, for better or for worse.

Megan Higgins

First we need an increase in the budget for education from the Province. We are the second lowest in per student funding by province in Canada. Second lowest! We can and must do better than that. In North Vancouver, we can do much to enhance and improve our system, starting with keeping our focus on what occurs in the classroom. School and district administration (and the Board) should focus on how their efforts improve learning in the classroom.

The final report of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission contained numerous Calls to Action related to education, language and culture, and child welfare. How will you respond to these Calls to Action?

Sean Ewing

I believe that the beyond 94 is a start. The damage that has been done to these families is multigenerational. Research has shown that trauma can change DNA. The outdoor school is the best way to expose students to the first nations, specifically the naming ceremony that give kids their first nations name!

Greg Zavediuk

It is crucial that we continue to improve educational levels and success rates. By creating and building upon relationships, the board can better develop community understandings as to how parents and families can be welcomed and enabled to fully participate in the education of their children.

Jullian Kolstee

I will inquire and review how the district has responded to the TRC Calls to Action, and determine whether we are in compliance with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. I will consult and work with my friends in the Squamish and Tseil-Waututh nations, as well as District Administrator Brad Baker to ensure that our district is in accord with the TRC and UNDRIP.

Mary Tasi Baker

I am part of the Squamish Nation community through marriage. I am very supportive of including indigenous ways of knowing into the new curriculum. My FN partner and I have written about reconciliation and First Nation's cultural story narratives. As a former Trustee, 2008 to 2011, I was instrumental in increasing the aboriginal graduation rate by 100%. I am supportive of developing culturally appropriate curriculum, which includes the rich visual and oral traditions of the First Nation's people. I also support parents feeling welcomed to participate in the education of their children, and funding for teacher training in these areas.

Christie Sacré

I will respond to these Calls to Action by ensuring that all levels of government are held accountable for doing their part. I will continue learning beside everyone else in our school district, listening to the stories, acknowledging the truth and working with our local nations in order to build relationships and identify gaps in the coordinated care and education of our indigenous students. It is important to be aware that while our school district may be better prepared to teach and learn from the indigenous students in our schools, those parents who have survived residential schools or who were raised by survivors, don't have the same trust or parenting skills/supports and may be struggling. More meetings between chief and council and the Board and the signing of our Protocol Agreement will help to create trust between the nations and the school district.

Megan Higgins

I have and will continue to advocate for the repeal of section 43 of the Criminal Code. I support the teaching of Squamish language in our schools. I support the efforts to critique and reduce the number of indigenous students graduating with Evergreen certificates, and to ensure that as many students as possible are graduating with Dogwoods. We need to have a strategy for increasing the graduation rates of all indigenous students in our district, both members of our local Nations and non-members. It should not be lower than the rate for non-indigenous students. I think we need to do more for students who are in foster care. We have an additional responsibility to these students because we are an arm of the provincial government and as such have a role akin to a parent. We should be monitoring their success and supporting them wherever needed. I support the efforts to have welcome poles and other indigenous symbols and art at each of our schools. I would like to see more efforts to recruit indigenous teachers and other staff.

Do you believe that teachers have the professional right and responsibility to determine what types of instruction they provide to students to meet the curriculum? Explain how you would ensure this if elected.

Sean Ewing

The curriculum is the minimum, I encourage all teachers to teach as much as possible and give student as much knowledge as possible. Communication is the best way for teachers to find out what other teachers are doing to enrich the system.

Greg Zavediuk

Education is a field that is constantly evolving as our societal standards change. Teachers are at the forefront of new ideas when change occurs and need to have the opportunity to have freedom to be educators. As a trustee, I would be an advocate for new and creative instruction to meet the curriculum and provide greater educational opportunities for our students.

Jullian Kolstee

Yes, and I believe they are obligated to particularly with regard to inclusive education and when faced with inadequate resources. I would advocate for teachers, but am unable to ensure this in the capacity of trustee.

Mary Tasi Baker

Teachers should be allowed to choose their own materials, and resources that best meet the needs of their students. This supports the new curriculum of critical and creative thinking and personalized learning. If controversial, I support teachers being allowed the leadership to bring in parents and students to discuss the material so that all students feel valued, included and safe. I am open to listening to teacher's concerns and am open to meeting informally once elected.

Christie Sacré

I believe that our teachers will use their professional autonomy to personalize the new curriculum, to make sure that students are inspired to learn and taught the core competencies. It is their right and responsibility to look at how their lessons are created. In my experience, teachers have been appreciative of professional development opportunities and not being left on their own to create new lesson plans for the new curriculum. With personalized learning, teachers can have the flexibility to teach in a variety of ways to meet the needs of their students and ideally, teacher collaboration time with colleagues is a good way for teachers to build their own cache of teaching techniques in which to draw from. Teachers know how to teach and adjust their practice to reflect the needs of their students. As a Trustee, I am confident that their autonomy as professionals will help them strive for best practice.

Megan Higgins

Yes, and I am pleased that the new curriculum allows for this. I would work to ensure that the district provides exceptional materials and in-service training for teachers, along with opportunities for collaborative exchanges of ideas and mentorships. The culture of the district also needs to be supportive of flexibility and new ideas from teachers. Inspired and passionate teachers have a very positive benefit on student learning and should be our goal.

What do you believe is the role of a trustee in advocating for increased education spending by the provincial government? If you are currently a trustee, what role have you played in advocating for increased education spending by the provincial government?

Sean Ewing

A trustee is required to pass a balanced budget and has very limited ability to influence the allocation of funds.

Greg Zavediuk

I am running for school trustee because I see the value in education. Money spent on our children will come back multiplied in the benefit provided to our community. Advocating for increased educational spending is a key part of the role of a trustee, but so will effective and proactive use of funds to best provide for student's needs.

Jullian Kolstee

I believe the trustee's role in advocacy is to amplify the voice of their community, and make sure their concerns are heard by the ministry. I've lobbied for increased education spending as a student leader in secondary and post-secondary school, and maintain relationships with MLA's and ministers in the provincial government.

Mary Tasi Baker

We are stewards of the budget, absolutely. As a former trustee (2008-2011) I was part of a very progressive board that advocated for funding for three new schools. Within 6 months of being elected, we received 180 million dollars for Queen Mary, Ridgeway, and Carson Graham.

I also supported a needs budget, and was part of the formation of the 10 year strategic plan 2011 to 2021. Many other initiatives including the 2009 District Literacy Plan. If elected, I would also advocate for increasing the budget for Teacher Training and more Learning Support Workers.

Christie Sacré

As an incumbent trustee, our Board has brought forward the need for Education funding through letter writing, bringing forward motions to the BCSTA AGMs, forging partnerships with different ministries, municipalities and community groups and through meetings and conversations with the Minister of Education, BCPSEA, and the MLA's presiding over North Vancouver. We have advocated for full funding for capital projects, full funding for salary and benefit increases, funding for equipment and technology and funding for mental health initiatives, to name a few.

Megan Higgins

I advocated for the development of a “needs-based” budget, and we sent an advocacy letter with it to the Ministry together with our partner groups, including NVTAs. I also have supported the many other letters we have sent to the ministry regarding funding issues. I have advocated at the BCSTA for the inclusion of the topic of increased funding in the recent funding formula review process, and have supported the other BCSTA efforts on this topic. Recently, I have posted on social media the link to the budget survey the provincial government has sent out, and requested that people complete it and request an increase in education spending.

How can our district better implement the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada restoring class-size and composition guarantees to our collective agreement?

Sean Ewing

The district can do a better job providing documentation, and resources to teachers, specifically for students that are transferring from other districts

Greg Zavediuk

Listening and acting upon the needs of our stakeholders with the focus on kids first. It is important to understand how all aspects of how the system works and to seize any advantage we can glean for our district.

Jullian Kolstee

This is a good question, and one I intend to pose to our senior administration when elected.

Mary Tasi Baker

I was very pleased to see the local contract language restored by the Supreme Court decision. My understanding is that the contract limits the number of special needs students to three, and only one may be that with severe behavioural problems. I support "active listening" and new conflict resolution techniques. I am ready and prepared to listen and collaborate with teachers who are the best to suggest improvements for their classroom size and composition as they are in the rooms every day.

Christie Sacré

There are different perspectives on how implementation has occurred so far, but I think the teachers and admin teams in our schools are often the best people to make the composition decisions. I am pleased with the smaller class sizes of the restored language, but the “rules” of composition have sometimes ignored the needs of individual students and impeded how school staff can plan classrooms. I am hoping that through bargaining next year that there can be more clarity in regard to the issues of class size and composition, along with the funding to support these needs/requirements.

Megan Higgins

One issue that has concerned me is the increase in the number of split classes. I wonder if the addition of a division (particularly in the larger schools) might give a huge benefit in this regard. The reductions or threatened reductions in non-enrolling staff is a serious concern. Implementation of the decision should not result in a reduction of any services to students, it is meant to add services and staff.

Do you support free collective bargaining for teachers, including the right to strike? How would you help to foster respectful and productive negotiations in the upcoming round of local bargaining?

Sean Ewing

The last teachers strike had a profound impact on the schools and the school spirit but I do support free collective bargaining and the right to strike.

Greg Zavediuk

Labour law is a very complex issue, my understanding of the all the machinations of the history and procedures of collective bargaining for teachers is a learning process. The teachers are the front lines of education and a professional productive negotiations is what they have earned and deserve. I will work as a member of the board to ensure dialog and assistance is provided in all processes of negotiation and bargaining.

Jullian Kolste

Yes, I support free collective bargaining for teachers, including the right to strike. My life has been directly impacted and benefited by the work teachers have done at the bargaining table, as my family survived on my father's teacher benefits from the time I was 8 years old. I would open communication between the board and teachers, not just in the upcoming round of bargaining, but throughout my term. Perhaps unlike other candidates, many of my own teachers are still working for the NVT. Teachers are my friends and colleagues, and I have no history of or interest in antagonizing them. We are all working toward providing the best public education for our students.

Mary Tasi Baker

I believe in respectful, professional and inclusive conversations, policies and procedures. I always advocated for resolution. My approach is to listen to concerns, no matter how uncomfortable it may be, bring concerns to the board, and solve the issues as quickly as possible. It was my idea to create the Towards the Future of Schools Standing Policy committee so that teachers had a forum to bring forward new ideas, concerns, and issues, informally. One meeting a year with the Board is not enough, and I suggest more frequent monthly meetings.

Christie Sacré

I respect free collective bargaining for teachers and while I respect the right to strike, my hope is that through respectful bargaining, a strike is not necessary. The collective agreement decides income and working conditions for teachers and we need to make sure that teachers are paid fairly for the work they do in a safe and supportive environment. I can foster respectful and productive local negotiations by respecting the work of those who are doing the negotiating, spreading correct information, listening to teachers and advocating for student and teacher needs through my BCPSEA representative and the BCSTA.

Megan Higgins

Yes, I do. I would help to foster respectful and productive negotiations in local bargaining by ensuring that the focus remains on what is best for the students, and not get sidetracked by political posturing or other distractions. What does the evidence say about best practices? The goal of the district is enhancing student learning. Employee morale and a positive work environment in the schools is very important for student learning and should be a goal of the district as well as the union.

What is your position on the implementation of the SOGI 123 principles in public schools? Why?

Sean Ewing

I am a supporter of SOGI. We live in a pride community and children are exposed to very adult information on Netflix, etc, making it more important to teach this subject in schools.

Greg Zavediuk

I support the implementation of SOGI 123 principles. My choice of a Master of Education in Counselling was because of students not having support in their growth and development though their school years. The stigma of being perceived as different is a challenge for all youth and we must continue to find ways for each individuals identity to be supported and embraced.

Jullian Kolstee

From my older brother to so many of my students, I've witnessed the impact of discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. As a society, we have an obligation to uphold the human rights and freedoms of everyone, and protect the most vulnerable among us most of all. SOGI 123 helps to make our schools and society safer by being inclusive of our LGBTQIA++ community. It is a critical policy.

Mary Tasi Baker

I support SOGI 123 as it focuses on Policies/Procedures to create inclusive environments and the curriculum resources for support. No one should be bullied due to race or gender.

Teachers also need training and resources for this important new curriculum which also discusses social justice, racial equality and gender identity.

Christie Sacré

I am proud of the work that was done with partner groups in our school district in order to create our SOGI 123 policy. The SOGI 123 principles help teachers create an awareness of differences in our society: cultures, family structures, gender, etc. SOGI 123 principles are simply resources that teachers can access to help them create an acceptance of diversity within their classroom. Promoting acceptance and tolerance helps students and staff feel safe in the learning community.

Megan Higgins

As a former discrimination lawyer, I fully support teaching students at an early age, and throughout their schooling, about human rights, discrimination, bodily integrity, personal agency, consent, etc. It makes for a just and equitable society. Thankfully, this issue appears to be not controversial in North Vancouver.