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Occupation: Post-secondary instructor & mom

Education: PhD in Clinical Psychology

My Life in Lynn Valley

My husband, Martin Buhler and I, wanted to raise our children in Lynn Valley where he grew up. We moved here 6 years ago, and since then, I am increasingly grateful to live in such a beautiful place with a genuine sense of community. We have three young boys: Seth, age 7, Finnian, age 5, and Alden, age 2.

I am an active member of our community and helped to create the Lynn Valley Lions Community Garden; I am now one of its coordinators. I am a familiar face to many within a local network of mothers, helping families cope with life's transitions and challenges. The fact that people are always willing to help out a friend or neighbour is one of my favourite things about our community. I am also lucky to have neighbours like Gord and Lil Trousdell who won last year's Lynn Valley Life Good Neighbour Award.

I volunteered at Lynn Valley Parent Participation Preschool during the 4 years that my oldest boys attended. I served on the board of the British Columbia Council of Parent Participation Preschools as Treasurer. I currently am a member of the Ross Road PAC where my oldest two sons attend school. During the teacher/government labour conflict, I advocated for parents' voices to be heard and for adequate funding in our education system by creating the Facebook page *North Vancouver Parents Supporting Education*. Through this site I organized letter writing campaigns, rallies, and meetings with our MLA.

When I am not chasing my three boys around the neighborhood or driving them to soccer, we are hiking our beautiful trails or gardening in our back yard.

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

I have 3 children, 2 of whom are already in the public education system, and I want to advocate for their education. I have great concerns about the underfunding of our education system and the overburdening of our classrooms. I deeply value the role of education in our society, particularly that it is an extremely influential protective mechanism for at-risk youth. Given my professional background as a PhD in psychology, I have a unique capacity to understand the behavioural, cognitive, emotional, and language factors that complicate class composition. All of these combined, I concluded that I have the passion to advocate for our education system and the skill set to enhance decision-making and policy at the school board.

2. What do you believe to be the most important principles of public education?

Public school systems should be free and available to all children and provide the necessary supports to ensure all students have the potential for success. It is important to ensure that all children regardless of ability or economic background are provided with an equal chance to be successful, contributing members of our society. In our deeply inequitable society, public education is the greatest equalizer for all children to succeed and flourish.

3. What is your view of the Griffin Ruling?

Justice Griffin's ruling is an unmistakably scathing review of the BC government's behaviour under the BC Liberals in its bargaining with the BCTF. The ruling clearly states that the BC government did not bargain in good faith, acted in a way to intentionally provoke a strike in order to influence public opinion, and acted in a way that severely inhibited the BCTF's ability to bargain in the negotiations. Justice Griffin's review is a clear condemnation of the BC government's actions in bargaining with the BCTF and I wish there were greater public awareness of this document.

4. What did you learn about public education during the teacher job action this year?

I was very active during the teachers strike and learned a great many things. In sum, I gained further insight into the challenges faced in our schools and the erosion of our public education system. I also realized the extent to which the general public is unaware of the chronic underfunding of our schools. I witnessed first-hand the genuine concern that teachers had for our children's education and their willingness to make personal sacrifices to defend public education. I also learned, in my interactions with our MLA and in observing the BC governments' actions, that the BC government of the day appears to insufficiently value public education and are not willing to support this institution. Finally, I learned that most parents seem to share my concerns but that we need to speak out in support of our public education system. Further to this last point, I learned that when parents unite in their concerns for public education, they can exert great force on our government.

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

I'll focus on 3 main avenues of change for this answer: increasing funding, and engaging in respectful and collaborative relationships with teachers, and improving community involvement.

Our schools need adequate funding to purchase up-to-date materials; to decrease teacher-student ratios; to ensure appropriate supports for children with additional needs (e.g., giftedness, learning difficulties, behavioral challenges); to increase support staff hours so they may keep our schools clean; just to name a few areas of our public education system that are impacted by insufficient funds.

Although everyone agrees underfunding is a problem, increased funds are not forthcoming. Despite this, I believe we must not be dissuaded from advocating for this important goal. As Trustee, I will ceaselessly and vociferously continue to advocate for increased funding for our classrooms. I speak further to this in the following question #6 which addresses how, as Trustee, I would advocate for increased education spending.

I also believe that engaging in respectful relationships with teachers will enhance our public education system in NVSD44. Teachers know teaching and their classrooms; they are the experts. An integral part of being an effective leader is knowing how and when to engage the strengths and skills of your team. Through meaningful consultation with teachers, we can improve education programing and enhance decision-making at the board.

Finally, I think that our schools should be at the centre of our community and a hub for community activity. Many parents currently play an active role in their children's schools. I would like to enhance this activity by increasing communication from the school board to parents and by providing more opportunities for parents to be involved in their neighbourhood schools. I would also like to see our schools hosting community functions

when schools are not in session in order to increase community connection to the schools. For example, the school board could arrange adult-oriented educational or education-related talks to the public for a fee (e.g., “How parents can best help their children learn”, “Understanding Autism Spectrum Disorders”, “How to Talk to your Kids about Bullying”). These fees could then help school districts deal with funding challenges.

6. 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?

I believe Trustees have a responsibility to advocate for appropriate and sufficient funding for our public education system. To do so, Trustees can work through established groups like the BCSTA to communicate with the government about the funding challenges faced by our districts. Perhaps more importantly, I think Trustees must communicate with the public about the realities of their budgeting challenges. Although school boards do not control the funds they are given by the province, they can clearly explain to the public the amount of funds received, how those funds are allocated, and where cuts are made or where underfunding exists. By informing the public of the realities of underfunding, I intend to increase awareness of the state of public education and hope that this awareness will influence voting during municipal, provincial, and federal elections.

7. The current level of funding in BC is \$1000 less than the national average. What are your thoughts about this?

I recognize that this number has been challenged by the Ministry of Education but when you look at a variety of funding indicators, including the Ministry’s own definition, it is clear that students in BC receive less funding than the majority of other students across the country. From my perspective this is inexcusable and short-sighted. Funding our public education system facilitates many goals and from the long-term perspective it is a cost effective mechanism of addressing multiple social issues. Our education system does more than teach the 3 R’s, it also serves as a front-line mental health screening mechanism, it teaches our children appropriate social skills, it educates an informed and voting citizenry, it provides basic skills for our work force, and it serves as a protective factor ameliorating that challenges faced by at-risk youth, thereby potentially diverting them from involvement with the criminal justice system. No other single mechanism meets our social, economic, and citizenship needs as effectively as our public education system. So, by funding our classrooms at a lower rate, we are not only underfunding our children’s education but we are also undercutting our citizenry and our potential as a province.

8. What are your thoughts about the role of the private sector in funding public education?

As members of a community, I believe corporations and businesses can and should donate to our public school system. Indeed, this is how many PACs fund raise. However, I do not believe donations entitle the donor to advertisement or acknowledgement rights. Of course, it is courteous to thank a donor, but a donation should not entitle any entity to a right.

In evaluating private sector funding, we must consider the potential impact of the funds/materials in the educational environment and on the children. I am concerned about programs that may influence

children's opinions on a market, good or service. Younger children are less cognitively able to evaluate the intent of marketing and may be more susceptible to the influence of brand recognition. Some psychological research suggests that advertising may contribute to childhood maladjustment, including obesity and poor self-image (e.g., Linn, 2004). But I also recognize that our schools are underfunded and can benefit from these types of arrangements. So, each situation must individually and carefully evaluated with greater restrictions imposed for classrooms with younger students.

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

The challenge in answering this question is that processes and policy can be subject to interpretation and thus do not guarantee valued input. The school board could create a process that requests partner groups' feedback on decisions and that obligates the inclusion of this feedback in meeting minutes when the issue is discussed. However, it seems that a culture of respect and meaningful consultation is required for any changes to be effective. Currently, some partner groups feel that there is a lack of genuine consultation in which their opinions are valued. To the extent that this concern is true, any process changes need a corresponding adjustment in the culture of the NVSD to be effective. To counter this challenge, the school board must approach relationships with partner groups in a respectful, collaborative, and responsive manner and thereby influence the culture of NVSD44.