



**School Trustee Candidates' Questionnaire 2014**

*Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Response deadline: October 24, 2014.*

Please respond to the following questions by email to [martin@nvta.ca](mailto:martin@nvta.ca) or by fax to (604) 980-8092, or by mail to:

North Vancouver Teachers' Association  
#100-133 West 17th Street  
North Vancouver, B.C.  
V7M 1V5

**Candidate's Information**

City \_\_\_\_\_

District: Yes

•**Name:** Heather Skuse

•**Occupation :** Teacher Burnaby School District

•**Education:** Bachelors of History and Bachelors of Education from UBC

•**Related Public Service:** Served on PAC's, NVPAC, attended public consultations, board meetings, Professional Development Rep.

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

I am seeking election to the office of school board trustee because I believe I can make a difference. I believe I bring a level of experience both from my personal and professional life and an important perspective that will add to the ability of the board to make informed and thoughtful decisions. I am the mother of three children aged 16, 14, and 12. My daughter has significant physical and mental needs and while my sons don't face the same challenges physically and mentally I am very aware they also face challenges. I have been an elementary classroom teacher in Burnaby for close to 20 years and I have firsthand experience of the efforts by teachers to support students and public education and the difficulties faced within our classrooms and schools and by many of the families. I have spent countless hours volunteering. I have been part of the Parent Advisory councils in my children's schools, serving for many years as chair. I have fought to save their school from

closing, helped fund-raise for books, field trips, music and gym equipment and much more. I have attended board meetings and committee meetings to ask questions and advocate for the issues I felt needed to be voiced.

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

The most important principle of public education is every child is entitled to a quality education no matter its financial, academic, or physical abilities. Children are entitled to learn in a safe caring environment where their learning styles and needs are met. Inclusion of all students whatever their abilities or challenges is an important part of our schools. It is critical we have healthy public schools that will allow for our society to be filled with adults who can think and meet the challenges of the future. Our world is changing and public education has an important role to play in helping create a society where understanding, compassion and acceptance are the norm.

## **3. What is your view of the Griffin Ruling?**

The Griffin Ruling demonstrated there are members of the provincial government who lack respect for teachers, public education and the laws of Canada and British Columbia. The ruling stated the rights of teachers had been ignored and it found that the stripping of the contract in 2002 was unconstitutional. The provincial governments efforts to provoke a strike were also deemed unconstitutional at the very least.

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

I was already aware of the many issues facing public education caused by chronic underfunding. I did learn many people really had no idea the issues facing public education. Society in general did not recognize how public education was being undermined. There was also more widespread and vocal public support for teachers than I originally expected

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

One of the first things that can be done to enhance and improve our education system is to increase the funding. British Columbia has one of the finest public education systems in the world with many talented dedicated people who work towards creating excellent opportunities for our students. Beyond ensuring adequate funding, rebuilding trust and engaging in open honest communication with all partner groups can only be beneficial

**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?**

Advocating for increased funding should be one of the primary roles of a trustee. Adequate funding for our public system is a realistic and possible goal. Trustees need to actively work to change the provincial governments priorities.

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

There is no sound reason for the funding of public education in BC to be \$1000 below the national average. The lack of funding is based on a misguided notion that our highest priorities should be on something other than funding the social responsible aspects of our society. We are a "have" province and it is reasonable to expect tax dollars and funds to go to public education. Funding for public education (and Health Care) should be one of the highest priorities. An educated public is a benefit for society as a whole.

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

I believe we pay taxes to support public education and while I recognize there is a need for debate around how the resources are allocated, I would prefer we avoid the influence of corporations in our schools. While I know many people advocate the partnership of private and public interest I have concerns over how this can be achieved without undue influence being exerted. While I would not want to say there are no situations where I would agree to a public-private partnership, in general I believe the government is elected and has the responsibility to ensure our public institutions are supported and maintained

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

Establishing processes that allow all education partner groups input into board decisions is an ongoing issue. Establishing and maintaining open honest relationships with partner groups is critical if groups are to believe they have input. A plan of action made behind closed doors, followed by public consultation does not equal input. The existence of representatives from NVTAs and NVPACs on committees is a step in the right direction but the information and points of view provided by these groups is only useful if heard by the district staff and the trustees. Another simple way to create more input would be to have a set time at each public board meeting where representatives reported to the trustees about issues or responses to particular decisions or actions within the school district.

**10. Any other information you would like to add?**

Public education is one of the cornerstones of our society. It is both a right and a privilege that we Canadians enjoy. Our public schools are among the best in the world, and as school trustee I will work to sustain the excellence that already exists in our schools, advocate for full funding of all school costs, and work to build a public education system that is everyone's first choice for their children.

These are our children, our schools and our future. I will work to ensure that every child has access to high quality, inclusive education.