

RE-ELECT

**CHRIS GORMAN**  
FOR SCHOOL TRUSTEE



**VOTE**  
NOVEMBER 15, 2014

**Responses to the Central Okanagan Teachers' Association  
Questionnaire to School Trustee Candidates**

**1. What do you believe are the critical issues facing our school district today, and how would you address them?**

In my opinion, there are three important priorities for School Trustees in our School District.

**1. Sustained and predictable provincial government funding**

As the school system moves toward a 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environment and as we continually work to achieve greater student success, there will be even more pressure on our limited financial resources that will be required to fund increased infrastructure and delivery costs.

Our students will benefit the most from an education system that is adequately funded. The provincial government must commit the resources to support school districts as they are challenged with meeting these opportunities.

It is essential that the Central Okanagan Board of Education continue to identify and articulate the needs of our School District and engage with government, teachers, students, parents and administrators to continue to advocate for a fully-funded education system in BC.

**2. Rebuild relationship with COTA and teachers**

It is not uncommon to have tensions that outlast labour disputes. We need to find a way to restore relationships across the education system to strengthen collaborative processes and deliberation to support student learning.

**3. Create inspiring places to learn**

As a growing School District, there are some significant facility challenges that we need to address. Through our long-term facility plan, approved in 2012, the School District is committed to transitioning to a consistent grade configuration (K-5, 6-8, 9-12) throughout the District, which has implications for our facilities.

The School District needs to implement its long-term facilities plan to meet the facilities challenge in Kelowna, namely the rebuilding of Rutland Middle School, building a new middle school in the Mission, and replacing Glenmore Elementary.

I am committed to continue my advocacy with our local MLAs to seek approval and funding to create new centres of learning for our students. It is my hope that some, if not all, of these priority projects will be approved in the next four years.

***"Committed to quality public education - today and tomorrow."***

**2. What processes could trustees put in place to ensure that money is kept as close to classrooms and children as possible?**

It is important to state that all funding that the School District receives is allocated to our classrooms either directly or indirectly.

Each year, we engage in a transparent budget development process and School Trustees are guided by four long-standing principles. The first principle is, and always will remain, that “students come first.” These principles guide School Trustee deliberations about allocations between schools and administration. The Central Okanagan Board of Education has one of the lowest administrative costs in the province on a per FTE basis. This has been done intentionally to maximize funding that is allocated to our classrooms.

If there are areas that members of the public or if COTA can suggest where we can better ensure that monies are kept closer to our classrooms, it would be helpful to receive them for consideration by the Board of Education.

**3. Historically, trustees have written letters to the Ministry of Education to request additional funding for our district with little success. What are some other ways to advocate for more funding that would be more effective?**

Writing letters to the Ministry of Education is an important component of an advocacy program – and if executed consistently across the province - can have an important impact.

The Board of Education can also work effectively with the BC School Trustees Association to coordinate efforts, build skills and capacity of School Trustees and learn from experiences and perspectives in other jurisdictions.

It is also important to maintain effective working relationships with local elected officials to ensure that they are well informed of local issues and have opportunities to interact with students, teachers, administrators and School Trustees.

The current Board of Education meets with local MLAs, as well as the leadership of the Westbank First Nation and municipalities within the School District’s jurisdiction, annually. These meetings and relationships are invaluable where School Trustees can be informed about policy, funding and other government priorities – and seek counsel about optimal approaches to engage the Ministry and government to advance the needs and interests of the Central Okanagan School District.

**4. How would you establish meaningful communication systems and relationships with all partner groups? There already exists multiple meaningful communication systems and relationships with partner groups.**

In the coming months and years, it will be a shared responsibility to contribute constructively through these existing channels and remain open to the introduction of new communication opportunities as they emerge. The Board of Education currently meets with each partner group annually, and is willing to meet when needed or requested.

In our School District, there are formal and informal mechanisms to engage teachers and School Trustees, and I believe that they have worked relatively well. COTA representatives are active members on the School District's Standing Committees and are able to contribute their experience and counsel to policy development and deliberations at any time when issues are being debated at Board of Education meetings. This model of teacher engagement is unique to our School District.

School Trustees are also assigned liaison schools to interact with teachers, students and administrators. As I have done, it is important that School Trustees embrace these opportunities and actively engage with these schools to better understand the realities facing teachers in the classroom, to share the excitement of students and the opportunities for innovation, to strengthen relationships and understanding about respective roles and to engage those affected by decisions to create shared understanding.

- 5. At one of the school board meetings during the recent job action, a couple of trustees made the following comments: "trustees do not have influence on what's happening", "what difference would we make", as well as claiming that it was not the role of elected trustees "to tell the government they're doing something wrong". Do you agree with these statements? Please explain why or why not.**

I do not agree with these comments.

All stakeholders in our public education system have important and defined roles to create a robust and resilient learning environment for our students. In British Columbia, we have a co-governance model that assigns certain responsibilities to local Boards of Education.

The role of School Trustees is set out in legislation to provide local governance, which includes managing resources effectively in light of community needs and interests, developing policies to achieve strategic goals and developing an understanding and advocating for public education.

Boards of Education can and must provide feedback to government about the needs, interests and ambitions of their School Districts. In the process, they can provide advice and counsel about the impact of government decisions and actions. The message, especially when it is delivered with a collective voice in concert with other Boards of Education, can make a difference.

It is important that Boards continue to consider issues in a public forum and not behind closed doors, that they create opportunities for partner groups to inform deliberations, and that they engage in discussions and articulate their positions in a clear and public manner.