

Lorraine Stewart's Response to Parkland Teachers' Local Questions

1. What are your top priorities for improving student achievement and well-being across the division, and how do you plan to address them?

I will preface this question, and the rest, with a comment about Board functioning and Board decision-making. As an individual trustee, it is my responsibility to ensure that I come to meetings prepared and knowledgeable about the issues that affect those in Ward 2, but also those across all Wards in Parkland School Division. It is my responsibility to be a participating member of the Board on topics and decisions.

Based on that preamble, any top priorities named would be ones that the full Board determines and decides. As one of the governors, my input into priorities and decisions would be based on the data that is provided in the Division's Annual Education Results Report for the 2024-2025 year; the Division's 2025-2026 Education Plan; the themes emerging from the Stakeholder Engagement opportunities that occurred in 2024-2025, but also the engagements that will happen in 2025-2026; and the liaison opportunities that emerge from the School Council meetings attended and the Council of School Council meetings.

As the ultimate goal for Parkland School Division signifies, student well-being and student achievement are interconnected and intertwined - we cannot have one without the other. Students coming to school need to feel safe; be emotionally and physically nurtured - well-fed; able to regulate and resolve conflicts; have the ability to communicate appropriately in social environments. These are some of the foundational aspects that must be attended to in order to give students a better chance at being ready to learn. Staff coming to school also need the same requirements.

These priorities will be addressed by the full Board engaging in dialogue; establishing necessary policies; reviewing existing policies to ensure they are appropriate; providing direction to the Board's one employee, the Superintendent; and advocating to the government and other appropriate associations to ensure they understand the local context of Parkland School Division as a composite of rural, town, and city each with complexities.

2. How will you ensure that financial decisions and budget allocations remain transparent and focused on supporting classrooms and student learning?

Monitoring and establishing the division budget is one of the key governance responsibilities of the Board. I will continue to ask the questions required for clarity in budget and financial presentations to the Board. I will continue to encourage all trustees to have a role on the Audit Committee to ensure financial learning and literacy is advanced. Foundational to budget discussions is the development of budget assumptions - and the risks associated with these need to be clearly understood.

It is necessary that students and staff are supported with resources. It is the role of the Board to have the discussion about advocating to the government for enhanced funding - especially the base instruction grant - to ensure it keeps pace with inflation and growing needs. It is also critical to advocate for funding from across ministries to support students because student needs span many ministries' mandates.

The *Funding Manual for School Authorities* provides guidelines and requirements, and governors are required to understand the various grants that comprise the funding that Boards receive from the government. The annual Audited Financial Statement is the document that highlights spending in the division and demonstrates the Board's accountability and transparency to the government and to our stakeholders.

I am, and will continue to be, fiscally prudent and responsible in spending my professional learning allotment - ensuring that the outcomes of the learning benefit my role as a governor.

3. What is your approach to engaging with parents, staff, and community members to ensure their voices are meaningfully included in board decisions?

Engagement opportunities are critical and fundamental to the role of the Board. Trustees, even former educators, can no longer assume that we understand what it's like in the classrooms, so we must hear from those who are in the classrooms or more closely connected to the classrooms. My window of understanding is based on my lived experiences and my perspectives, and I rely on others to help broaden that window of understanding for me.

I listen to learn. I try hard not to interrupt when others are speaking, but sometimes I just can't help myself!! I engage readily in any format that is requested or required - phone calls, emails, meetings, coffee conversations, cards, letters, or remote meetings. The student voice is an important one, and I hope to see how the Board can enhance opportunities for hearing that voice. As a Board, it is important to determine the best ways to hear from stakeholders and to hear what stakeholders want to discuss. School council meetings are a great opportunity to hear from parents and staff - however, this is often a small and select group of parents. Finding ways to expand that circle of interest is always a challenge - but it's a challenge that must continue. There are many issues stemming from recent legislation in Alberta Education and Childcare and Alberta Tourism and Sports (and others) and I think we should be asking our stakeholders what they know and understand about that legislation, the impact of that legislation, and how we express our concerns to government.

But, engagement goes beyond this first step. The follow up or implementation is as important as the listening. Therefore, it is what we do with what we hear that provides that next step. Is it advocacy to the government, telling the stories we heard? Is it looking at policies to determine if they are still relevant or require edits? Is it conversations with the Superintendent to provide a different perspective? Is it explaining to stakeholders why their option or suggestion was not able to be followed?

I am energized each and every time I make a connection through consultation or discussion.

4. Given the growing push for private and charter schools, how will you advocate for strong, well-funded public education that serves all students equitably?

The Board is a member of the Alberta School Boards Association and the Public School Boards' Association of Alberta. It is through these provincial associations that our Board is best represented to advocate to the government for our needs. I will advocate for our Board to continue to take leadership positions with these associations.

Although I agree there is a growing push, I feel that it is so important to lean in and build up our own public school education in Parkland School Division. We need to celebrate who we are and the programming options and choices we offer and ensure that the broader public sees us positively for what we do. We only have so much time and energy as a Board, we need to spend that time wisely and strategically, and I believe that happens when we build up and promote public school education.

Advocacy takes many forms: educating, story-telling, providing concrete examples, letter-writing, meetings - it is important for the Board to develop a strong advocacy plan that is based on purpose, principles, and actions. Actions range, I would think, from quiet diplomacy to more vocal strategies, as the situation warrants. But, always, advocacy is solution-focused and respectful. I do not see our Board as being the 'official opposition' to

government; rather, I see our Board as having the ability to be respectful, responsive and articulate in our discussions with the government and others.

5. In light of current challenges in education, what steps will you take to ensure public schools have high standards of learning, safety, and inclusivity?

We need to be strategic about how we move forward in light of current challenges and the current climate in education and in government. We do not shy away from the conversations or the actions; however, we are not best served if we respond with knee-jerk reactions. You've heard the adage, 'act don't react', and I believe that is so important. As a Board, I feel that we get to action best by understanding all sides and perspectives and determining the best way to move forward.

Our Board is required to comply with legislation and to have our Board Policies align with legislation and regulations. However, when we hear of impacts of legislation, it is necessary to ensure that the legislators understand the unintended consequences. Our Board Policy 18 is Learning and Working in a Welcoming, Caring, Respectful and Safe Environment and the preamble states that the Board is to endorse those environments that respect diversity and foster a sense of belonging. It is important to know when others don't feel safe and why. It is important to try to figure out together how we make changes so that they do feel safe. It is also so important to listen to all perspectives and try to understand all sides of the issue. That is why stakeholder engagement is so necessary.

As a governor on this Board, I will continue to engage, listen, gather all the facts, and help our division move forward positively and respectfully.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to express my thoughts in response to these questions. I am privileged and delighted to have the chance to continue in my role as trustee for the next four years. Each year is different; each situation is different; but the similarities in the outcomes of student success and well-being remains the focus point in keeping kids and families front and centre in all decisions. At each Board meeting, I am reminded of: who is at the table; who is not at the table; who is in my thoughts; who will the decision impact; what other information do I need to make an informed and educated decision. These are some of the aspects that are on my mind in my work as a trustee.

Warmly,

Lorraine Stewart, 780-886-2472

Acclaimed Trustee in Ward 2 (schools in Ward 2 are Muir Lake and Parkland Village School; however the responsibility of a trustee spans the full division and all Wards).