

Trustee candidate answers from David Johnson

- 1. It is acknowledged that poverty has a serious impact on student learning outcomes. As a Trustee, please list some of the ways in which you would advocate for the Division to support students in need on this issue?**

I strongly agree that poverty has a negative impact on student learning outcomes. Even though Pembina Trails is a relatively affluent Division, we have identifiable pockets of poverty. As a Trustee, I have supported initiatives to help students affected by poverty. In terms of funding schools, we have determined a School Need Factor, which takes into account factors such as family income, transiency and unemployment, and we provide more support to schools with higher levels of poverty.

Recognizing the connection between eating a healthy breakfast and academic performance, we have 15 breakfast programs in the Division. In addition to Divisional support, I have supported community initiatives to help raise additional funds to support these programs, such as the Linden Woods Fall Run. I will continue to support breakfast programs.

Ultimately, the federal and provincial governments have to play a leading role in helping to reduce child poverty. I strongly campaigned for the federal Canada Child Benefit, which since 2016 has lifted nearly 435,000 children out of poverty. I will continue to push the federal and provincial governments to do more to fight poverty.

- 2. In previous years, the Division has experienced a shortage of Substitute Teachers and as a result, positions have gone unfilled during a teacher absence. Which ideas do you have to address this problem?**

There is no question that we struggled to find Substitute Teachers during the pandemic – I understand that was a problem that all Divisions faced. This year we have re-activated over 500 Substitutes plus added an additional 60 new ones. I have been assured by our Administration that as of now we are doing well.

I believe that the Division needs to continue to work with the PTTA to encourage teachers, including retired teachers to apply to be on the Pembina Trails substitute list. Working together to provide information on the benefits and the importance of substituting is essential.

- 3. What are some practical ways in which you as a Trustee will foster and build relationships between the Division and the Teaching Staff?**

Teachers are our largest and most important employee group in Pembina Trails and it is crucial that we have a good working relationship. When I served as Chair of the Board, I appreciated the opportunity to meet with the PTTA leadership at BACE meetings to work on resolving issues of concern. We need to maintain our collaborative working relationship. Effective communication is essential.

Our teachers recognize the importance of public education and have been important allies in fighting government legislation detrimental to our education system, most notably Bill 64. If re-elected, I look forward to continuing to work with our teachers to support public education.

4. The Manitoba government has released its Education review which raised issues around Division amalgamation, public education funding and improving learning outcomes. What are your concerns with the Education review? What is your hope?

While some of the goals of Manitoba government's Education Review are positive, such as focusing on improving learning outcomes and student engagement, the government seems intent on over valuing standardized testing while failing to recognize that we already use data extensively to identify areas of improvement. In Pembina Trails we work collaboratively with Teachers, and we are accountable to our public.

The Pembina Trails School Board has focused on student achievement and developed our three expectations for student learning – that all our students will be engaged, that all our students will meet provincial numeracy and literacy standards by Grade 8, and that all our students will graduate. I believe that our entire Divisional community has embraced our three expectations and I believe that we are achieving success.

The recommendation of the Educational Review that existing School Boards be replaced by six to eight Regional Boards is concerning. I greatly appreciated the support of Teachers in opposing Bill 64, and I hope that we will be able to successfully oppose any further attempt at eliminating or diminishing School Boards.

5. First Nations students are amongst the most vulnerable learners in the Division. What steps will you take as a Trustee to strengthen supports for First Nation Students? How will you advance and implement the Truth and Reconciliation Committee's Calls to Action 62 and 63?

I agree that our Indigenous students are amongst the most vulnerable learners in the Division. The Division's Indigenous Student Success Teachers have helped our schools navigate the needs of our Indigenous youth; however, we need to do more for our Indigenous community. I support the TRC's Calls to Action, and I am committed to lobbying the federal and provincial governments to provide the resources necessary to implement Calls to Action 62 and 63.

6. Some school divisions have chosen to deal with inadequate funding levels from government by increasing class sizes, cutting access to clinicians and intervention specialists, etc. These decisions impact student learning. How will you ensure services are preserved? What will you do as a Trustee to ensure education funding levels are stable, predictable, and adequate?

I agree that we need stable, predictable, and adequate funding. It is regrettable that the provincial government has, in essence, removed the Division's ability to levy taxes. Without adequate funding we have had to make difficult choices, however, we have tried to preserve services and keep class sizes as low as possible. Working with the MSBA and our education allies, including MTS, we need to constantly pressure the provincial government to ensure we have the funding that we need.

7. Recent shifts in social attitudes have led to conversations about systemic biases and racism. As a Trustee, how would you help ensure that the Division explores potential systemic biases within

the Division? In your view, how should plans for examining and rectifying such matters be developed?

Systemic racism is unacceptable. I believe that we must review our policies and practices to ensure that we have not been unintentionally excluding or negatively impacting certain populations. We also must do more to ensure that our work force is diverse and more closely reflects the diversity that we see within our student population. I believe this is a conversation that we must have at the Board level, and, if re-elected, I will push to have this conversation as soon as the new Board is in place.

8. How will you ensure that the Division studies closely the idea of full-day kindergarten and other programs related to early childhood education to ensure a successful start for early learners?

Studies have shown that full-day can be beneficial. We established full-day kindergarten at Westgrove School several years ago and expanded it to a number of other schools, mostly in high needs areas, but had to cut these additional programs due to budget constraints last year. This was a very difficult and uncomfortable decision for the Board.

Unfortunately, the provincial government does not provide any funding for full-day kindergarten or other programs related to early childhood education. We need to lobby the government to provide funding so that we can offer full-day kindergarten throughout the division.