

## BY-ELECTION CANDIDATES ANSWER PUBLIC EDUCATION QUESTIONS

On January 18, 2016, a representative of the Parent Advocacy Network for Public Education (PAN) and Families Against Cuts to Education (FACE) emailed the following two questions to each of the candidates in the Coquitlam–Burke Mountain and Vancouver–Mount Pleasant by-elections and asked them to respond by January 22, 2016. A follow-up email was sent on January 22, and those candidates that had not yet responded were contacted by phone/voicemail and Facebook message on January 23.

### Question 1

The bi-partisan Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services concluded unanimously in November 2015 that "current funding levels and assistance are inadequate, which is causing significant operational and program delivery problems in schools throughout BC." If elected, will you vote to support the select standing committee's recommendations to increase public education funding to an adequate level in the 2016 budget?\*

### Question 2

Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following four statements:

- A. All children have the right to equitable, accessible, high quality public education in their neighbourhood.
- B. It is unacceptable for parents to be required to pay for educational necessities through fundraising efforts.
- C. Resource spaces, arts spaces and early learning spaces are educationally integral spaces for elementary schools and not 'surplus' space that should be eliminated.
- D. Seismic upgrades to schools should be a top priority for BC's government.

The candidates' responses are in the following tables, in their own words.

\*The committee's report can be found at <https://www.leg.bc.ca/parliamentary-business/committees-reports/14>

*Note: PAN and FACE are non-partisan and do not endorse any candidate or party.*

PAN: [www.PANVancouver.ca](http://www.PANVancouver.ca); [parentadvocacynetwork@gmail.com](mailto:parentadvocacynetwork@gmail.com)  
FACE: [www.FACEBC.wordpress.com](http://www.FACEBC.wordpress.com); [facebc.vancouver@gmail.com](mailto:facebc.vancouver@gmail.com)

## COQUITLAM–BURKE MOUNTAIN

### **Paul GEDDES—Libertarian Party**

As a libertarian I want to encourage innovation in education. We are humans (not machines) and there is no single best way for parents to help their children gain the tools and attitudes to help them succeed in life. Rather than come up with a top-down, we-know-what-is-best-for-everyone plan, libertarians want flexible institutions where those with alternate visions can compete with each other for parents' attention. Instead of arguing with each other about what must be included in education, libertarians would rather return economic power back to parents and let them choose among competing programs.

#### Question 1:

No, I would not support such spending. This type of top-down centralized spending is precisely what is wrong with the current system. Rather than funding a government monopoly, funding should be returned to parents to let them choose among all the many various education options that would arise.

#### Question 2:

[A] No. This so-called "right" is a claim to an obligation to other people's earnings. We live in a civilized country where many people enjoy helping others. But this cooperative society's ties are weakened when special interest groups demand such help.

[B] Asking parents to voluntarily come up with extra funding encourages school spirit and cooperation.

[C] We should leave choices about art space, etc., to parents and their willingness to pay for them.

[D] Again we should leave this choice up to the parents. There may be other safer alternatives in a more competitive educational system.

**Joan ISAACS—BC Liberal Party:** No response.

### **Joe KEITHLEY—BC Green Party**

#### Question 1:

Yes I would vote to increase public education funding to an adequate level in the 2016 budget.

*(continues)*

**Joe KEITHLEY—BC Green Party** *(continued)*

Question 2:

I agree with all 4 parts of question # 2.

Our education system is barely creaking along and it's easily one of the most important things that we should be putting a lot more money into.

**Jodie WICKENS—BC New Democratic Party**

Question 1:

Yes. As a parent and parent advocate I have seen the impacts Christy Clark's underfunding of Coquitlam schools firsthand. I have worked alongside parents in advocating to ensure that every child gets the education they deserve and that staff in local schools have the resources they need.

Question 2:

[A] Agree. Neighbourhood schools are an essential part of strong communities. Kids in Coquitlam are commuting long distances because their local school hasn't been built as promised.

[B] Agree. Children in Coquitlam receive the lowest level of funding in the province, with no relief in sight. Education funding is almost \$600 per student less than the provincial average. Our kids are not getting basic education needs met. The B.C. Liberals chronic underfunding of our education system has put an ever increasing burden on parents to pay for educational necessities.

[C] Agree. There is a great deal of inconsistency as to how the government determines surplus space such as not considering classrooms used as Strong Start centres as surplus but considering classrooms used as child care centres as surplus. School boards should have more flexibility to determine how excess space is used. They should not be forced to sell public assets that they know they will be needing in future.

[D] Agree. When parents send their children to school they expect them to be safe. Unfortunately this is not the case for far too many schools. The B.C. Liberals have a legacy of delays to seismic upgrading and this is not acceptable.

## VANCOUVER—MOUNT PLEASANT

### **Gavin DEW—BC Liberal Party**

I appreciate your concern, and I agree that education is a priority for the community of Vancouver-Mount Pleasant, and for all of British Columbia. My mother is a teacher, and education has been a priority for me long before I entered politics.

Here in British Columbia, we have a world-class education system — it's well-funded, we have dedicated, talented teachers and administrators, and our students rank first among all English speaking countries in reading, science and math in international testing. Plus, with our historic, six-year negotiated settlement with BC teachers, we have the opportunity to do even more to enhance our children's education experience and support their achievements without disruption in the classroom.

The BC Liberal government has made significant investments in this world-class system. The 2015 budget included a \$421-million increase over the next three years, with total education funding to top \$5 billion this year - that's \$1.2 billion more than when the BC Liberal government took over from the BC NDP in 2001. Average per-pupil funding has risen by 42% since 2000-01 (\$6,262) to an estimated \$8,902 for the 2015-16 school year.

The BC government has also committed \$1.4 billion over three years to maintain and replace aging facilities, build more student spaces in growing communities and improve school seismic safety.

Not only has this government made significant investments in learning today – it has also committed to helping families plan for the education programs of tomorrow. Last year, to help families save for the future, the BC government committed \$1,200 to each eligible child in our province through the B.C. Training and Education Savings Grant – an important investment in our children's future that the BC NDP rejected in 2013.

We have a lot to be proud of in BC's education system. But there's always more we can do when it comes to better preparing our children. I believe we should always be working to improve education outcomes to equip the next generation with the skills they need to succeed.

If I'm elected on February 2nd to represent the people of Vancouver-Mount Pleasant, I will keep working with government, the BCTF, and BC communities to ensure that we continue to improve our great education system, for the benefit of the next generation, and those to follow.

**Pete FRY—BC Green Party**

Question 1:

Yes, I agree with you that current funding levels and assistance are inadequate.

I'll add that this is a position that is also strongly held by the party and our leader Dr. Andrew Weaver <http://www.andrewweavermla.ca/2014/05/26/path-bc-public-education/>

I'm especially concerned about how this inadequate funding will effect the schools here in Vancouver-Mount Pleasant. As you know, the VSB are constrained by provincial seismic funding formula that must see schools maintained at 95% capacity. I feel this is incredibly shortsighted, particularly for a city growing in population and density. I will fight to make sure East Side schools are not lost.

I also support affordable public child care, and see early childhood education and support as an important foundation for K-12.

Question 2:

Yes, yes, yes and yes.

**Jeremy GUSTAFSON—Your Political Party of BC**

I agree with all four statements in question 2.

[With regard to Question 1] I've read the recommendations and as I expected agree with them as well.

I'd also like to mention one of our platform points is to get computer training for kids at the elementary level.

**Bonnie Boya HU—Libertarian Party**

Question 1:

No, I would not vote for more, unconditional, funding in K-12 education. We need assurances that present public funding is being spent on direct services to students, not on bloated management. Public funds should follow the student and each school should have a school-based-management model operating, where parents are part of decision-making. Also, we believe there should be more freedom in what parents can choose to get the best education for their children. Some US states have Education Savings Accounts where parents get an account from which they spend on different specialized services in their community such as talent development, special needs services and customized tutoring. We would favor a voucher system. *(continues)*

**Bonnie Boya HU—Libertarian Party** *(continued)*

Question 2:

[A] All children should have access to high quality education — public or private or home education. Vouchers are desirable for parental choice to get the best fit for student's needs.

[B] Good basic education should not require extra costs.

[C] Public buildings should serve their intended purposes. If public schools are consistently under-enrolled, they should be sold.

[D] Safe public buildings should obviously be a priority.

**Melanie MARK—BC New Democratic Party**

Question 1:

Yes, absolutely. As a mother and former advocate for children and youth I know how essential a fully funded public education system is to make sure all children have the opportunity to succeed.

Question 2:

[A] Totally agree. Parents, students, and the broader community depend on local schools in building a healthy inclusive neighbourhood.

[B] One hundred per cent agree. We must make certain all students in the public education system receive the same quality education.

[C] Whole heartedly agree. School Districts must have more control over determining how space is used.

[D] Agree. This must be the top priority. All parents want their children to be safe.