

ALNWICK-HALDIMAND RATEPAYERS ASSOCIATION SCHOOL BOARD TRUSTEE 2026 CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE

Candidate Information:

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Core Candidate Questions

1. **Experience & Governance:** What experience prepares you to serve as a school trustee and oversee a multi-million dollar budget?

I have been an English Public School Board Trustee for the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board (KPRDSB) for the past 4 terms (16 years). During the past term, I served as both the Vice-Chairperson for one year and the Chairperson of the Board. In addition, I served on the Executive for the past 6 years as the Regional Chairperson of the Central East Region for the Ontario Public School Board Association (OPSBA). I also sat on the OSPBA Program Workgroup which looks indepth at programming changes - additions and deletions - as set out by the Ontario Ministry of Education.

With respect to overseeing a multi-million-dollar budget, during my tenure at KPRDSB I have also sat on the Budget Committee which I chaired during my tenure as Vice-Chairperson and have sat on the Budget Committee my entire tenure. In addition, our Resource Committee receives budget updates on a semi-monthly basis allowing us to continue to ensure we are aligning with what we set out when we pass the Budgets each spring.

In addition, I have sat on the following Board Committees: the Parent Involvement Committee, the Special Education Advisory Committee (of which I chaired for 4 years), the Program Committee (which I chaired for 3 years), the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, the Supervised Alternative Learning Committee, the Expulsion Committee, various hiring Committees as well as the Chairperson Committee.

2. **Student Achievement & Wellbeing:** How will you support strong academic achievement while also protecting student mental health and special education?

I was the Chairperson of the Board when we developed our Strategic Plan for 2022-2026. In this document, we committed to establishing strong foundations for student achievement, particularly in literacy and math while recognizing that we have a diverse student population whose learning pathways are diverse and therefore, differentiated, and need to be addressed in a responsive manner to meet their unique strengths and skills.

Strong academic achievement cannot be met unless we support student mental health. The guiding principles in our Board Action Plan clearly articulates that we value ALL students in their diverse identities and lived experiences and whose positive mental health and well-being is prioritized.

Our Board of Trustees prioritizes Special Education in our strategic plan, Board Action Plan and yearly Budgets. This is a challenge as the Province does not fund Special Education in such a way that we can meet the complex needs we are seeing in our schools on a growing basis. We work to establish as many partnerships as we can within our communities and with our Provincial Health Units to provide as much support as we can to the students in our schools.

3. **Classroom Technology:** What is your position on enforcing Ontario's restrictions on student cellphone use in classrooms?

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within our communities and with our Provincial Health Units to provide as much support as we can to the students in our schools.

4. **Special Education and Funding:** How will you ensure adequate funding and resources for special education and students who need additional support?

It is difficult to answer this question. As Trustees, we are limited by the "per-pupil amount" that is given to schools for funding students. As noted earlier and as can be heard regularly by Trustees, Union Officials, Teachers, there is an "extreme" shortfall of funding for special education. We have continued to see a large uptick in the amount of complex needs, cases of autism and other developmental disabilities in our students. This also includes those students who are struggling with mental health issues.

In our role as Trustees, we can continue to advocate for more funding. Indeed, I have discussed this frequently with my local Member of Provincial Parliament and have invited the MPP to visit our schools and see some of the challenges we are facing. I will continue to do so in the coming term.

As Trustees, and with the Ministry of Education's recent restructuring of Trustee roles, we have input ONLY to Board budgets going forward beginning in 2027. The Chief Executive Officer (formerly known as the Director of Education) is a new role with less emphasis on education and more emphasis on business administration and budgets. Passing and completing budgets are now solely at their discretion. Trustees during Budget times, can make comments and recommendations but no longer have the ability to pass Budgets for implementation. That is now the role of the new Chief Executive Officer.

As a result, our ability to ensure that funding is directed in a specific area, is limited.

That does not mean that I won't continue to seek funding for this vital area, both from our Chief Executive Officer and financial division, as well as from my MPP and the Province.

5. **School Safety & Digital Conduct:** How should schools address student safety and emerging issues such as cyberbullying and AI-generated harmful content?

Addressing student safety in an era of evolving cyberbullying requires a shift from reactive discipline to proactive, multi-layered safeguarding.

Areas in which schools can build in effective framework include:

1. Updating Policies and Legal Framework - examples include explicitly defining AI Misuse in policies and student codes of conduct to specifically name AI-generated harm

and Clarifying Legal Consequences whereby not only is it a school infraction but depending on the incident, may also be seen as contravening the law.

2. Implement Immediate Incident-Response Protocols: Ensure trained education/administrative leads capable of handling incidents; containment and triage of said incidents; proper reporting protocols.

3. Embed Digital Literacy into the Curriculum: Include Critical media evaluations; digital footprint awareness; understand and develop active bystander training, framing online culture as a collective responsibility whereby students understand and feel free to speak up and refuse to share harmful content.

4. Provide Trauma-Informed and Restorative Support: Include Prioritizing Victim Safety and Psychological supports and Restorative Practices.

5. Families and Community Partners: Include items such as Parent Workshops (we hold a Parent Conference every Fall - this would be an ideal time to address this issue); Partnerships with our Local Law Enforcement Agencies - are there workshops that can be given to student/families regarding this topic.

These are some of the issues that should be considered.

6. **Provincial Direction & Local Voice:** How will you represent local parents and communities when their concerns conflict with provincial requirements.

My role is to support parents and communities. As Trustees, we have to work within Provincial guidelines and our Board Budgets and Priorities.

That does not preclude us from working with our Senior Administration team to look for workarounds or to bring to their attention areas of focus that we may be neglecting or have not faced before.

I also have no qualms about reaching out to my MPP to share the challenges we are facing.

7. **Rural Schools:** How will you advocate for fair funding, transportation, programs and the continued viability of smaller rural schools?

Advocating for the viability of small, rural schools in our district, and indeed in Ontario as a whole, requires a strategy tailored to Ontario's Ministry of Education's Grants for Student Needs (GSN) framework, local Pupil Accommodation and Student Numbers and our local Transportation Consortia.

Within this framework can be included:

- Challenging the benchmark funding that the government uses tied primarily to enrolment numbers. Advocate for a model where base operations including

administrative staffing are fully funded regardless of utilization rates. Recognize the value of small schools in communities, particularly with the current moratorium on school closures. Work with MPPS and rural municipal councils to advocate for specialized programming to ensure small schools remain vital.

Continue to pressure the Ministry to update the student transportation funding formula to reflect actual road mileage, fuel volatility and geographic dispersion.

As far as programming is concerned, particularly in our small Secondary Schools, continue our partnerships to provide hybrid and virtual course options; advocate to the Ministry for additional Specialist High Skills Majors tailored to economies where students can gain industry certifications locally in preparation for real-world experience; Challenge the Ministry for targeted funding for Special Education and Mental Health Parity such as additional resources for itinerant specialists so that no child is denied support or forced to endure long travel schedules to more urban centers.

Leverage the provincial "Community Hubs Framework" to permit co-location and partnerships with Municipal Activities including local service clubs and community-based programs which are often struggling to find space.

I would like to advocate for joint municipal-school board advocacy to that our Municipal Governments are aware of and concerned for education delivery in their municipalities.

Optional Closing Statement: Is there anything else you would like residents to know that was not covered in this questionnaire?

Local schools in our communities and municipalities are not just buildings - they represent critical social and economic infrastructure within communities.

Schools are both economic drivers and asset anchors within communities - they attract young families, support local employment and protect property values. When students are forced to be bused out of their local municipality for high school, their connection to their hometown weakens. Ensuring a vibrant local education network encourages our students to stay, work and contribute to their local community after graduation.

Schools serve as vital civic and social hubs. Many of our schools serve as double-duty gathering spaces for community events, youth sports and local service organizations.