

Michelle Kowalchuk – Ward 4

<https://votekowalchuk.ca/>

Question: What is your vision for public education in this division?

Public schools play such an important role for children and youth in our society and always have. If the family is the ‘first teacher’ for any child, school is arguably the second. First, it is important that all children have a place in our public schools, in other words – universal access where every child feels safe, included and that they have the capacity to graduate and succeed. Focusing on fundamentals of education is of course important but so is developing critical thinking, as well as social and mental wellbeing.

Question: The appropriate funding of public education is essential to a healthy system. Provincial contributions have fallen to just 50% of RETSD’s total operating costs and recent increases have not kept up with inflation. How do you plan to ensure robust funding so students in this community have access to the same quality classrooms, services, and supports as other students in Winnipeg?

If there are discrepancies in what RETSD students are receiving in comparison to students in other divisions, I want to understand these differences and will advocate for equitable resources. With my past Government experience, I understand how to have these conversations. In some instances, it may also involve being creative with existing funding or partnering with other entities/agencies to enhance services and supports so that funding can be used in the best way possible to support students. I have forged many successful partnerships in my past professional experience and can bring this approach to this role as well.

Question: Ensuring safe learning and working environments is a growing challenge. What is your approach to addressing violence in schools, and how will you balance the needs of students while also protecting the safety and well-being of staff?

I’m very familiar with these concerns and it is absolutely a challenge for schools trying to balance the needs and safety of students and staff. During my time working in policy with the province as well as while I was at MACY, I was aware of and often involved in trying to come up with solutions to many such situations. It’s difficult to

provide a succinct response to this challenge because each situation can be quite different and there are often (as noted) competing needs. Although we don't want to tolerate violence, we also need to understand the reason for aggressive behavior and then be able to plan accordingly. Certainly, having enough classroom support for students with additional needs is important. Also making certain that safety/crisis protocols are in place and that everyone is aware of them and ensuring that mental health resources are available to

schools throughout the division. I have experience in these areas and am prepared to assist where I can within the trustee role.

Question: Teachers and school staff are essential to building safe and caring learning environments. How will you support educators in creating positive classroom conditions and what actions will you take to address workload, resources, and staff well-being?

I couldn't agree more that school staff are absolutely essential to building safe and caring learning environments. On this question I have to say that listening to school staff about what their ideas are is an important part of understanding how to make improvements. Taking a look at what is known in the field about creating positive classroom conditions; is there knowledge that exists in the field that can be useful? Are there any innovations that are worth considering? Of course, we also know that budget factors into discussions about workload and resources. I look forward to hearing from those with more first hand experience in this area than myself and supporting solutions that work.

Question: Schools have worked hard to identify students in equity-deserving groups and make them feel seen, respected, heard, and valued. How will you support RETSD's policies on equity and inclusion?

I appreciate this question and can say unequivocally that it is great to see that RETSD is doing this work. When we listen to the experience of students, no one wants to hear that a child stopped attending school because they felt they did not belong; and if we do hear that, we have failed that child. I have professionally done work in supporting learning and policy development regarding gender diversity. I worked with various community partners to develop [Growing up OK](#) and worked on [Supporting](#)

[Transgender and Gender Diverse Students](#) . I have also worked for several years from a rights-based approach, and this will factor into my work as a school trustee. I strongly support the idea that children and youth have a voice which deserves to be heard, valued and that they are the experts of their own experience.

Question: The role of technology in schools, most notably AI, continues to present opportunities but also profound challenges. The negative impacts on teaching, learning, and the cognitive and social development of our young people is increasingly a concern of our members. What are your ideas on how we can ensure that technology in RETSD serves and enriches the experience of students, staff, and systems?

This is an interesting question and thanks for including it. As we have seen with many technological advances, these things are often in our society before we have a chance to develop regulations, ethical standards and competencies in using them in a beneficial

instead of harmful way. Most people have the reaction that AI is simultaneously amazing and scary, including me! I am not an expert in this area, but I am really interested in digging into this topic a little more and working with others in the school environment to ensure that students are understanding about responsible use of AI in a way that does not detract from foundational learning.