

WHISTLER TRUSTEES ALL CANDIDATES MEETING
WED., NOV. 16, 2011
WHISTLERMOUNTAIN SKI CLUB CABIN

All the candidates were present along with a small, but dedicated group of parents, teachers and one young student.

Candidates were asked to explain the role of a trustee:

Chris Vernon-Jarvis (Incumbent): Our past Superintendent used to say that the trustees run the railway, but not the train. Decisions are not made unilaterally, but as a board. We are available to the public, but we can't allow issues to circumvent the process in place. As an example if a parent has an issue with a teacher, they should first speak to the teacher, then the Principal and then the Superintendent. Trustees don't have the ability to direct Principals or teachers, that is the role of the Superintendent, who is like the CEO of the School District. We form policy and make decisions on capital projects and budget. Total budget for the School District is \$37 million.

Rachael Lythe (Candidate): It is also a trustee's duty to report to their constituents by attending PAC meetings.

Cathy Jewett (Moderator): The trustees (School Board) make decisions about how the budget will be spent at the School Board Office; these expenditures can affect the dollars left over for students.

Chris Vernon-Jarvis: Only one staff member was added in the last six years and that position was to manage a number of Capital projects that were underway at the time. The School Board also chooses Principals and Vice Principals and makes decisions on senior School Board Office positions.

Tanya (SCCS PAC Co-chair): If they have a role then why were parents' concerns regarding the change of principals at SCCS not listened to? We wrote a letter to the Superintendent and School Board. No trustees came to our meetings despite our concerns.

Christine Buttkus (Incumbent): The Superintendent is responsible for day-to-day operations, so they oversee administrators and staff. The School Board hires the Principals, but the Superintendent decides which school they will work at. The SCCS decision to move the Principals was made by the Superintendent. We are parents too and we attend the PAC meetings for the schools our children attend. If there is a concern and we are asked to attend, we will come to other PAC meetings.

Moderator: Let's hear from the Non-incumbent Candidates about how they would like to improve communication with parents.

Riel Cairns (Candidate): I think that we can look to see how trustees are reaching out in other jurisdictions – tweets, blogs, Facebook and newsletters. You make it what you want. I would like to facilitate communication around education. Keep the lines of communication open. Write a newspaper column to be more visible.

Rachael Lythe (Candidate): Studies have shown that children of parents that are involved in their school have a greater chance of success. PACs play a huge role in parent engagement and education. As a trustee I would attend PAC meetings, submit monthly reports to the PACs and visit schools.

Steph (WSS PAC Co-chair): How many schools and PACs are there in the district? How much time do you spend weekly on your trustee duties?

Christine Buttkus (Incumbent): There are 14 schools and PACs in the district that meet monthly. I spend about 3 days a week on my trustee duties and could easily spend more hours, but I have a job and a family as well. We also have limits to the social media we can use.

Riel Cairns: (Using social media) We could talk about broader issues and continue our advocacy.

Chris Vernon-Jarvis: We were told that the Chair of the School board is the only person who may speak on behalf of the School Board. We have an internal forum on the School Board.

Rachael Lythe: Christine, what about your Facebook page?

Christine Buttkus: It is information about issues already in the public domain.

Rachael Lythe: There is still so little understanding in the community about what trustees do.

Susan (SCCS Teacher): What can the School Board do about current class size and composition? *N.B. composition is the number of students with identified Special Needs, three per class is allowed, more than that and teachers must be “consulted”.* *B.C. Supreme Court has given the Min. of Ed. April 21, 2012 as a deadline to negotiate this issue with the BCTF, it is outside Contract Negotiations.*

Chris Vernon-Jarvis: We agree. Put the student with Special Needs on their own classroom with the support they require. We know what we would like to do, but we don't have the funding. We rely on the Superintendent to arrange the classes to accommodate these students. Each teacher = \$90,000.00, we'd like about seven more, but that's \$600,000 we don't have. We would have better outcomes and spend less money later if we could effectively intervene earlier.

Christine Buttkus: Different circumstances require different resources. These issues are the part of the Superintendent's role, trustees do not make decisions on how the classes are organized.

Riel Cairns: Trustees need to advocate to the province on these issues.

Rachael Lythe: Composition is an issue. As a member of the School Planning Council (SPC) we see the adjustments being made at the school level. The support from the staff is amazing! This brings me to point that was raised at the last Board meeting, which I attended. The SSTA (Sea to Sky Teachers Association) was asking the School Board to intervene to the provincial Contract negotiator (BCPSEA) regarding the 15% claw back of Teacher's wages. BCPSEA is implying that teachers are doing less work because they are not completing Report Cards.

Moderator: Let's not get side tracked about the contract negotiations. BCPSEA and the BCTF are playing a game that has little to do with the issues the School Board can affect.

Caroline Jauvin (WSS PAC Co-chair): How many trustees are on the School Board?

Chris Vernon-Jarvis: Two in Whistler, two in Squamish, one in Pemberton, one in Area "C" (Britannia Beach, Pinecrest, etc.) and one in Area "D" (Pemberton Meadows, Mt. Currie Darcy, etc.) – Total Seven, the Chair is elected by School Board members (other trustees).

The first two years I was a trustee, education was never mentioned. The third year we went on a retreat with other board members and Andree Janyk and I insisted that we discuss improving education. There are still three layers between the School Board and the Public, but things are changing.

Christine Buttkus: Regarding the advocacy at a provincial level. As a small board, we do what we can, but trustees as a group advocate through the B.C School Trustees Association (BCSTA).

Via e-mail: I have been informed that our school is the only school in the district that has Collaboration Days. My understanding is that these days were made when the school first opened to support teachers and have them collaborate with other school to ensure the new school was running smoothly. The school has been open since 2004, I think they know what they are doing now and the teachers are competent enough to run things on their own. Please explain why these days should still be given to our teachers and how it benefits our parents that have to pay an extra 10 days worth of childcare because of these days and how it benefits our students for missing out on an extra 10 days of instruction compared to every other student in the district.

Moderator: To clarify, Collaboration Time was introduced before Spring Creek opened. Initially it was one Wednesday afternoon a month, which parents found awkward to fit around existing childcare and work. It is community wide, therefore all three public schools have this time. When the high absentee rate in the elementary schools for the Ski Program was noted it seemed like a good fit, as the schools were almost empty.

Susan (Teacher): Time is added to each day so the time is made up. We use that time to create education activities. Otherwise there would not be the time to do the special programs. It helps support the School Culture. Teachers are also able to work together to update their techniques when new curriculum is introduced.

Margot (Parent/retired Teacher): As a former teacher I ask parents to continue to support Collaboration Time.

Tanya: How is this time approved?

Moderator: The Principal presents local Calendars 30 days before the June 1st – usually at the April PAC meeting. The PAC approves the Calendar, but staff must also approve it. This calendar is based on hard dates set by the MOE and the School Board – i.e. Provincial Exams, Spring Break.

Christine Buttkus: Schools that have access to Collaboration have better Student Achievement.

Rachael Lythe: We have had discussions at PAC about how to change Collaboration Time to work better for families. There needs to be better communication on what Collaboration Time is.

Via e-mail: Whistler schools have about 42 International students that pay approximately \$1200/mo. (*N.b. \$14,000/yr.*). Where does the money go, do schools get the money?

Chris Vernon-Jarvis: The money is split. Part of the funds go to support the International program – recruiting and special events for the students for example; the school receives what they would receive for a regular student plus another thousand dollars or so; the balance goes to General Revenue.

Margot: How do we challenge our students so that they succeed in university? How many students go on to post secondary?

Chris Vernon-Jarvis: the numbers of Whistler students going on to University have increased. Only seven went the first year WSS was opened, now a 60- 70 % carry on to higher education.

Moderator: We have had a wonderful opportunity to speak in a fairly informal setting and I see we could carry on, but I am going to ask our Candidates to give us a one-minute summary of their platform.

Rachael Lythe (Candidate): I come from a family immersed in education. I volunteer at the school and in the community. I believe that through engaging parents, students and trustees that this will result in improved student success.

Chris Vernon-Jarvis (Incumbent): This school year has started with many challenges – no Superintendent, our Secretary-Treasurer left on sick leave, our Teachers engaged on Level One Job Action. We worked thorough these challenges and our focus remains on education.

Christine Buttkus (Incumbent): We have advocated around students. The bubble we have see around Whistler and high success rates is changing. The latest EDI (Early Development Instrument) results are shifting, there are challenges ahead. Change is never going to happen as fast as we would like. I remain committed to finding solutions to these challenges.

Riel Cairns (Candidate): I would like to increase the visibility of education in our community. Engage the public in this dialogue; they need to recognize the importance of the role that education plays in our society. There are so many possibilities – we can bring educators to Whistler - encourage education conferences to come here. I was raised by my Grandfather, who was a leading educator and is my role model. I look forward to working to improve the communication between parents and trustees.

Moderator: Thank you to Christiane Loring for organizing the venue. Thank you to our audience for their thoughtful questions. Thank you to our trustee Candidates and good luck to all of you on Election Day.