

SD42 District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC)

**2008 School Trustee Candidate
Questionnaire**

Responses from:

**PITT MEADOWS
CANDIDATES**

Please vote on November 15th!

Pitt Meadows Candidates (4) for two seats:

Ellen GILLAM
Tom MURRAY
Eleanor PALIS
Kathie WARD (*incumbent*)

In September 2008, DPAC conducted an on-line survey of local parents. DPAC used contact lists of informed and involved parents to email invitations to respond to the survey. Those parents were invited to share the invitation with their parent contacts. 182 responses were gathered.

The survey asked parents to identify their top five issues for the upcoming school trustee election, they were also asked the top five characteristics they consider when voting for trustees.

The written questions DPAC asked candidates are largely based on the survey results. The survey results can be read at http://www.geocities.com/dpac_sd42/

Candidate's were asked twelve questions and given nine days to respond. This document compiles the responses received.

DPAC would like to thank candidates for their thoughtful, considered responses.

DPAC hopes voters find this document useful in making an informed decision at the ballot box on November 15th.

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Candidates were asked about their personal education

Pitt Meadows Candidate Responses:

Ellen GILLAM High School and Business School. I have taken a great number of workshops and classes offered through my employment with SD 42.

Tom MURRAY High School Diploma; Certificates in University courses (Economics, Business Communication & Financial Planning); most recently received a Diploma from UBC Sauder School of Business

Eleanor PALIS Centennial Secondary Graduate 1982

Kathie WARD Education Graduate of Garibaldi Secondary (1980); Income Tax Preparer Certificate

According to respondents to DPACs parent survey in September 2008 as the top characteristic they look for when voting for school trustees is *character (honest, respectful, forthright etc.)*. Therefore, each candidate was asked to provide a character reference from an individual who knows them well and lives in the community they are running in (Maple Ridge or Pitt Meadows).

Ellen GILLAM

I have known Ellen Gillam since she came to Fairview Elementary in the early 1980's to work as a Special Education Assistant with the "Behavior Team", which was the District's main model for working with students with behavioral issues that prevented them from learning in a "normal" classroom setting. I have always found her to be forthright, honest, and focused on doing what she considered the best interests of her "clients".

While we did not always agree on the course of action pursued by the District, I always felt I could take Ellen at her word, and rely on her to dispense with political posturing and concentrate on the point at issue. She was very active in professional development activities, both as a learner and teacher, and continues to be a "lifelong learner".

Her two children graduated from District 42 schools, and two of her grandchildren currently attend District schools. She has a wide and knowledgeable background in working with children, both in school settings, and from the raising of her family in partnership with her husband of 44 years.

She is a "solid citizen", and in my opinion would serve Pitt Meadows well as one of its School Trustees."

Mike Suddaby, 11850 195B St., Pitt Meadows, B.C.

Tom MURRAY

I first became acquainted with Tom Murray in October, 1998, when my husband and I moved our young family to our home on 120'B' Avenue in Pitt Meadows. In the 10 years that I have known him he has proven time again to be a kind, caring individual. He is a very community minded and supportive neighbour who always has the best interests of the community as a whole, and children, in particular, at heart.

Tom is an honest, respectful man who I believe would be a valuable asset to our community in the role of school trustee. He is a person who would be considerate of others and open to listening to their views and opinions. I would wholeheartedly trust Tom to make decisions based on what would be best for our children and their futures. He would be accountable for those decisions and open to feedback from others.

I hope Tom is successful in his bid to win trusteeship-I know the children of our district would benefit.

Sincerely,
Andrea Weir, 19324-120 B Ave. Pitt Meadows, B.C.

Eleanor PALIS

From the time her children entered preschool, Eleanor was not content to be a parent who simply dropped off and enjoyed time to herself; rather she took on the position of President of Discovery Playhouse Preschool. This drive and ambition would continue throughout all 4 children's school years. Her honesty, forthrightness and integrity provide strength at both Pitt Meadows Elementary and Pitt Meadows Secondary, where she very quickly became involved with the PAC. Although my children were in the PME English program and Eleanor's in French Immersion, I respected her position that this was her family's personal choice and never spoke about it as though it were superior to the English, as sadly, so many parents were. In fact Eleanor was always very vocal about the need to be 'one' as a school and end any apparent division. Eleanor's profile in both schools is positive and she is known by parents and staff for her common sense approach.

Personally, I remember Eleanor asking about my love of running, and at age 32 she decided to take on the challenge herself. I was amazed by her fearless attitude and ability to persevere in order to achieve her goals.

Eleanor has since not only continued to improve her health, she has also participated in 2 half marathons, 10 Vancouver Sun Runs and last year was a leader in Sun Run training clinics. This all speaks of Eleanor's ability to not only go the distance, but to be a driving force and motivator to others.

Eleanor's four beautiful children are wonderful examples of what is possible when a parent makes a concerted effort to be involved in a positive way. It is because of Eleanor's honesty, enthusiasm, great sense of humor and ability to move and motivate people that she has been one of my greatest assets and friends for 13 years.

Sincerely,
Patti Kassis 604-460-1180

Kathie WARD

I met Kathie Ward in 1990. She was a parent of children in the school where I was the principal.

We have remained in touch as fellow citizens of Pitt Meadows. During the eighteen years I have known her, she has shown herself to be dependable and capable. From making costumes for student performers to chairing a Parent Advisory Council Meeting, Kathie is always on time, on schedule and on budget.

Kathie is caring, fair and open-minded. She listens to all parties - students, parents, staff, as well as community members. She then makes an informed decision. Kathie is available and approachable. One way she does this is by accepting all invitations to school activities throughout District 42. The invitations range from Parent Advisory Council Meetings, Staff Meetings, Science Fairs, Christmas Concerts to Graduation Ceremonies. She celebrates with the students their achievements and brings messages from the board in order to support students and encourage them to excel.

Kathie's dedication to education is clearly shown by her excellent attendance at school board meetings. She has missed only one meeting in six years. She attends every board-related workshop and conference to ensure she is up-to-date and knowledgeable.

She is determined to do her best to ensure the students of School District 42 have the best possible opportunity to reach their highest levels of achievement.

I would be pleased to give further information about Kathie Ward and may be reached at (604)465-3579.

Mrs. Lynda Haylow

Candidates were asked about the experiences they feel have prepared them to be an effective school trustee.

Ellen GILLAM

I have had 26 years of experience working directly with students and teachers as a Special Education Assistant in a classroom setting. I have also had 16 years of experience as a union representative working with employees and district staff dealing with employment issues.

Tom MURRAY

As a former School Trustee in S.D.#42 for 3 yrs, I feel I am qualified for another term. I feel I haven't yet done all I set out to accomplish. I feel passionate about fulfilling my goals. As a semi retired person, I have the time to devote myself to becoming a Trustee for the betterment of the whole District. I pride myself as being honest, approachable, fair and up to date on what's going on, on all accounts. My background has been in Financial Planning and previously this was an asset.

Eleanor PALIS

My experiences as an informed and involved parent in the public education system for the past 15 years make me an excellent candidate for school trustee. I have worked alongside staff and parents on many occasions, organizing activities for students at Pitt Meadows Elementary and Pitt Meadows Secondary Schools and have always been a supportive parent in terms of teaching and learning. At the secondary level I have served on the School Planning Council for 5 years and am in my 5th term as president of the PMSS PAC. I have spent the last 5 years striving to keep parents informed and interested in their children's education. Building solid trusting relationships with administration, staff, parents and students has allowed me to gain a greater understanding of the public education system. I have been a part of several district committees, am aware of the recent hot topics such as school closures and high school completion rates.

Kathie WARD

School Trustee for Pitt Meadows - Completing second term 2002 – present.
PAC Chair, Pitt Meadows Elementary.

Candidates were asked to list their top five priorities (in order and in point form) for the incoming Board of Education to address. They could provide one or two sentences of explanation for each point, if they wished.

Ellen GILLAM

i: Class Composition

Integration is the best thing for all students however some students are more difficult to manage than others and should be provided with appropriate classroom support.

ii: Health and Wellness of our Schools

Our schools are our only asset and need to be well maintained. They need to be clean and safe for all students and staff. I will work towards ensuring that adequate staffing and hours are put into keeping our schools clean and safe for all students and staff.

iii: Special Needs Funding

Low incident students get the same base funding as all students, about \$5300. Depending on the coding, some students generate \$16000 in funding. However, that is not enough to cover the costs of SEAs, Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists, etc. This district is grossly under funded in the area of special needs and must lobby the government to increase the monies it provides so that all children get the education they deserve.

iv: All day kindergarten, before and after school care.

School is 6 hours per day. Most parents work 8 hours per day plus travel time. We have the space and the personnel to provide before and after school care. With multi-purpose rooms, gyms, and fully equipped playgrounds what better place for school age children to be while they wait for parents to collect them. This service could be made available at all our schools on a non profit basis. I think this would be a safe way to care for our children and an opportunity to provide a living wage to part time single parents employed by the district.

v: Cooperation, Respect and Communication with partner groups.

This is a huge problem in this district and certainly needs a great deal of work. DPAC, MRTA and CUPE are the backbone and the pulse of a school district and need to be kept informed of decisions that will impact their members in an upfront and honest manner. By communicating in a respectful and consultative way and cooperating with all partner groups we can work towards better meeting the needs of our children.

Tom MURRAY

i: Laptops for students (Gr 4-12)

Laptops for all OR Portable Labs will help in providing equal opportunity for EVERY STUDENT in the district. It's been proven that children are very interested and adept in the use of Computers, therefore I feel this is a great way to encourage them to WANT to learn and therefore stay in school and graduate.

ii: Put an end to Bullying, once and for all.

I have zero tolerance for these acts. There has to be stop to it and I will address it fully. I witness this act almost daily in Pitt Meadows, as children walk by my home on their way to and from school.

iii: Address Special Needs.....help is critical!

More action required. Meet with the parents of Special Needs children and understand what is needed on a one to one basis.

iv: Work towards lowering class sizes to benefit all students and teachers.

Since private schools are increasing enrolment partially due to the fact that they have smaller class sizes and more one on one time per student. We MUST find a way to compete.

v: Focus on all aspects of Student Safety.

Safer buildings, bring back Crossing Guards, eliminate 'the load' off their growing backs (medical problems are inevitable).

Eleanor PALIS

i: Build trusting relationships with a set of common purposes.

Potentially, all new board members. First priority is to check any personal agendas at the door and work collaboratively for all partners in district 42. Agree to disagree in order to get to a solution, but present a united front on decision making. Recognize the positive work that the present board has done and continue to move forward with senior staff in order to benefit the students of Pitt Meadows and Maple Ridge.

ii: Technology

In order to educate today's learner, upgrades of skills for teachers, better access to Information Technology for all school staff and programs for students is imperative. Strengthen the communication triangle..school, student, home through the use of technology. Upgrade antiquated systems still existing in some schools.

iii: High School Completion Rates

Maintain the many successful programs in place and continue to create new ones to keep students interested from preschool through grade 12 and ensure their success. Support administrative and staff initiatives to develop new courses that engage today's learner.

iv: Financial Responsibility

With recent threat of school closures, there must be trust that the best decisions are being made and programs created during this time of declining enrollment. New board members must be provided with thorough information on expenditures, engage in collaboration and consultation processes, and then should respect and support initiatives by senior staff to improve the education of all learners in our district. Keep abreast of what other districts are doing and network to bring ideas into district 42.

v: Best hiring practices

Board must be confident in the ability of those they have hired to do their jobs. This confidence must be in place in all staffing; the contributions of all staff throughout the district should be valued, supported and reinforced. For students to benefit it is essential that the best programs be delivered by the best people.

Kathie WARD

i: Addressing the overcrowding in the eastern portion of our district.

I feel that overcrowded schools are not the best learning environments for students and they are not good working conditions for staff. I also have a concern around safety for all in the building.

ii: Addressing declining enrollment.

I feel that it is important to be sure that the schools with really low enrollment are meeting the needs of all learners, and that we are able to provide all the services to our students.

iii: Maximizing the budget.

The fact that our budget is directly tied to our enrollment, it is imperative that all budget decisions reflect keeping the focus on a clear alignment to student achievement. For me, it is "what is best for students".

iv: Vandalism

The dollars that are spent every year on vandalism is staggering, and these dollars should be going into the classroom, upgrading equipment and providing services.

v: Access and choice of programs

It is important to recognize that not all students are University bound, or that they will all do well in a classroom setting or that they will all graduate in 5 years. We must be prepared to be flexible and willing to look at the needs of each individual student. We need to be willing to look outside of the box and diversify the courses and delivery model to meet those changing needs.

Question for Candidates:

Parents identified student achievement (how well all students are learning) as their top issue. What role should the Board of Education have in monitoring and supporting student achievement in school district #42? How should the board communicate to parents and the public the results of their efforts to support student achievement?

Ellen GILLAM

I think the Board of Education should have a clear understanding of how student achievement is being assessed in order to monitor its progress. I think the results of the Board's efforts to support student achievement should be communicated to parents in written form. How often that should happen would be a good discussion to have with parents and I would support such a discussion.

Tom MURRAY

As stated in my first priority, Computer Literacy is vital for the future of children. My goal is to improve 'standings' for all students. Computers will help children want to learn and this is paramount in my opinion. There has to be incentive. The results will no doubt be evident on each child's report card.

Eleanor PALIS

I believe parents ultimately have the responsibility to keep themselves informed. The board of course will examine data from provincial exams and FSA results and should continue with district indicators such as DART program. For those who are not satisfied with FSA's or provincial exams at

senior level, the board and district should investigate new systems with schools to monitor achievement. Board can publish data on webpage, continue with achievement contract, schools can use their websites and continue with student led conferences and reporting periods.

Kathie WARD

Schools have "School Improvement Plans", the Board has "Board Goals", the District has the "Achievement Contract", all of these documents have areas of focus that directly align with student achievement and structures to support the focus. It is then incumbent upon the Board to then align it's budget to provide resources and structures that support student achievement. All of these plans can be reported out through the school PAC, newsletters out to parents and through the Superintendents quarterly reports and on the website. It is important to know how what we are doing, how well we are doing, and what are needing to change.

Question for Candidates:
School safety is a significant issue for parents.
What should the Board of Education do to ensure our schools are safe for all students?

Ellen GILLAM

All our schools are inspected on a rotation base by the maintenance department. Doors, windows, ramps and crawl spaces are checked. All schools are checked by Administration and the maintenance department after an earthquake. At the request of any school air quality is tested. Each school has a safety committee that checks schools monthly for hazards such as blocked 2nd doorways in classrooms, or desks in the halls. Elementary schools must keep all outside doors locked with the exception of the front door, which is visible from the office. Classroom doors lock from the inside when they are closed. Fire drills, earthquake drills and lock down drills are performed in all schools.

Tom MURRAY

One major issue in my opinion is overloaded backpacks. Programming computers (i.e., laptops) with the necessary downloads of textbook information should lighten the load for every student tremendously. Another issue is structural safety of schools.

Eleanor PALIS

Examination of district's and schools' codes of conduct to ensure uniformity. Parking lot safety is a great concern and the board should ensure that administration at schools find this a priority and are visible daily. Work with municipalities on existing traffic plans in school zones. RCMP Liaison program is a great addition to schools, builds relationships with community and should be revamped and rekindled. Overcrowding and the use of portables poses safety risks. Continue present board's reviews of catchment areas to address enrollment concerns.

Kathie WARD

It is my hope that the District Code of Conduct will address the safety concern for parents. I also feel that the Mission, Vision and Values sets the standards in our district and if we are all modeling the respectful behaviour, so will our students.

Question to candidates:

Please outline what you would do to improve education services for special needs children in Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows public schools.

Ellen GILLAM

All children deserve an education but not the same education. If we could group certain children together for a given time each week we could work on their needs be it reading or dressing themselves. A lot of special needs children need life skills. Skills such as traffic lights, McDonalds or making their own lunch. Even setting a table is easier to do with a small group of children rather than just one child. This could be done at different schools. We have started this type of class with the Academies and the Partnerships in high schools. With this type of program we could use our SEA to benefit more children at one time and benefit those that have no time allotment. Money is the big problem here and we need to lobby the government for more.

Tom MURRAY

The Government MUST come forward with more funding in this area. Until they do, Special Needs students are limited in what they can accomplish. Lobbying the government for additional funds for Special Needs Students must be a priority. In the meantime, we MUST look at the resources we have now and put them to better use.

Eleanor PALIS

Work with the systems in place and understand that each student comes with individual circumstances and needs. A parent is a child's best advocate and must build relationships from the start. In speaking with parents, staff and support staff at one school, I hear satisfaction, but realize this may not be the scenario for others. Delays in assessment for coding are frustrating for parents and staff. When avenues within the school and district have been exhausted, the Ministry of Education should be lobbied to expedite coding, support, etc.

Kathie WARD

I feel that our school district is cutting edge when it comes to our Inclusive Education, that being said, the Ministry consistently states "the money is the money" so maybe it is time to tackle this from a different angle, starting with lobbying for more specialized personnel, working with the Post Secondary Institutions to provide more training in specialized areas, and lobbying the government for reduced wait times for diagnosis or coding and better access to existing services.

Candidates were asked to read the summary of DPACs “trustee election” parent survey at http://www.geocities.com/dpac_sd42/ and comment on specific issues beyond what was covered in the above questions.

Ellen GILLAM

No response.

Tom MURRAY

Without getting 'wordy'...ALL issues must be reviewed and addressed.

Eleanor PALIS

None, other than a thank you to DPAC for creating the survey.

Kathie WARD

No response.

**Question to candidates:
What will you do to improve relationships between
the Board of Education and partner groups?**

Ellen GILLAM

In order to improve relationships between the Board of Education and partner groups I will ensure that we engage in meaningful consultation before decisions are made that could impact these groups. Respectful, honest communication with all groups where everyone's opinions are heard is imperative to improving and building relationships. This is an area that has suffered very badly in the past and it is time the Board of Education walks the talk. I have always been respectful when communicating with the district's partner groups and will continue doing so.

Tom MURRAY

Promote the need for more one on one meetings with all partner groups. Controlled forthrightness and honesty (by all parties) are a must in order for the District to run smoothly and be an asset to all concerned. If not, in the end, it affects the Children and THEY are our future!

Eleanor PALIS

Solidifying relationships over the last 15 years has been the product of my involvement; the more I was involved, the stronger the relationship became. It is best to set the tone with intelligent, respectful conversation that engages everyone at the table. I try to assess and understand after listening carefully before I respond or comment. A positive attitude combined with honesty and integrity is the first step in improving any relationship.

Kathie WARD

I have and will continue to recognize that we are all individuals and we are all entitled to our opinion. I have learned a great deal by applying a "listen to learn" approach. I believe we all have the same focus, our students, and that we should keep that in the forefront at all times.

**Question to candidates:
What do the words accountability and
transparency mean to you? If elected, how will you
put your beliefs into action?**

Ellen GILLAM

I believe accountability means to take responsibility for one's actions and decisions and to explain the results of those actions or decisions, when requested. I believe transparency is also a form of accountability that includes open and honest communication with all parties. If elected I will make sure that open and honest communication occurs at every level and will work towards making all Board of Education meetings open to the public. I think "in camera" meetings are for confidential personnel issues. We are spending taxpayer money and therefore taxpayers have a right to timely response to questions. I have always had a reputation for being honest and upfront in my dealings and have always kept my word. I don't plan on changing if elected.

Tom MURRAY

Accountability means just that! If elected to the Board I WILL be accountable for all my actions, otherwise I would not be the kind of Trustee that ANYONE would care to deal with or put their trust in. That was my mandate when I was a Trustee previously and that will most certainly continue now. As for transparency....I am an open book! Again, approachable and a good listener.

Eleanor PALIS

Many years of volunteer service to students, schools and my community in general speaks to my accountability and transparency. Any job I have committed to has been seen through to completion and I frequently receive feedback regarding the success of these endeavors. I have never held a personal agenda in any of the initiatives I have taken on; in fact my motivation is typically for the benefit of others before that of my own family. I believe we all can learn from each other, and therefore will continue to network with my varied contacts to best support all.

Kathie WARD

Accountability means making an informed decision by garnering as much information as possible, being able to defend it, and being able to admit if you were wrong, and then having a willingness to adjust or change if needed. Transparency means being open and honest. I bring these beliefs into every aspect of my life; therefore I will continue to approach every issue in the same manner.

**Question to candidates:
Do you support the current revenue generation (money making) activities of the school district? Would you work to maintain, expand or reduce these activities? Please explain.**

Ellen GILLAM

To be honest I'm not sure what the current revenue generating activities are but I strongly believe that the Ministry should properly fund school districts rather than relying on revenue generation. If revenue generating activities are going to continue to be a necessity then I would have to carefully consider each one's viability.

Tom MURRAY

Most definitely! These activities provide much needed revenue for 'extra' needs for the student and classroom.

Eleanor PALIS

Any initiative that puts the best interest of students at the forefront is worthy of support. The reality of today's world is that the government pot can only go so far. If initiatives are cost effective, available in a fair and appropriate manner and add value to public education there should be little doubt that there would be benefit to students. I fully support the use of schools as early childhood education sites, and recognize the benefits of the recently implemented academies to our senior students. As the Ministry reduces funding we must strive to support students in District 42 in creative means.

Kathie WARD

Yes I do support the current revenue generation activities. At this time I can say that I would maintain what we are doing. As to expanding an activity, it would depend on what it was, what the contract may entail, and what the implications to the education of our students would be. I believe each activity should be reviewed with the impact on students in the forefront.

**Question to candidates:
If elected, you may be on the School Board with someone you dislike or disagree with. How will you handle this situation if it occurs?**

Ellen GILLAM

I have always conducted myself in a professional manner regardless of whether I like or dislike and individual. I believe that all conversations/interactions need to be respectful and that everyone has a right to be heard and their opinion valued. In the end there is nothing wrong with agreeing to disagree.

Tom MURRAY

As stated earlier, I am approachable, tolerant and willing to talk through 'situations' without creating problems. A peaceful, approachable Board is a productive Board.

Eleanor PALIS

The situation of not getting along with someone you work closely with is lifelong and universal. I try my best to listen, to ask questions, to assess and understand before making comments. I treat people respectfully and expect the same in return. When people are in decision making positions, they must learn to put differences aside and focus on the subject at hand. Collaboration where all parties are heard and considered allows for the best decisions to be made.

Kathie WARD

We are all individuals and each of us brings strengths and weaknesses to the table, it is important to treat each other respectfully and model our District Mission, Vision and Values. As I stated earlier, I fully believe in "listening to learn".