

Feeds:[Posts](#)[Comments](#)

Considering Running for School Trustee? A Few Things to Know First

May 12, 2026 by cultureofeyes



Full disclosure upfront: I am writing this post about an election where the trustees who are elected will become my bosses. Make of that what you will. I will try to be objective anyway.

In October 2026, communities across British Columbia will elect school trustees. In West Vancouver, the five seats on the Board of Education will be on the ballot. While trustee elections rarely generate the headlines of municipal or provincial campaigns, I would argue it is important for everyone in your local community to vote. The trustees elected in October will help guide a school system that locally serves thousands of students, employs hundreds of staff and can shape what learning looks like for years to come.

I have had the privilege of working with several boards of education during my time as a superintendent. Watching how those boards approach their work, the questions they ask, the relationships they build and the way they navigate difficult decisions has shaped my thinking about what good governance looks like in public education.

So this seems like a good time to ask: what does a school trustee actually do? And more importantly, what does it take to do it well?

The Role Is Not What Most People Think It Is

Here is where I want to be honest, because I have seen the disappointment up close. People run for school board because they care deeply about education. Maybe they had a frustrating experience as a parent. Maybe they want to champion a cause they believe in. Maybe they want to make sure their community's values are reflected in the school system. All of those motivations are completely valid.

But the role itself often surprises people.

Trustees do not run schools. They do not manage teachers, intervene in individual classroom decisions, become involved in individual parent concerns or direct the superintendent on operational matters. They do not have a role in day to day operations of a school district. What trustees do is govern a system. As the BC School Trustees Association (BCSTA) describes it, trustees listen to their communities, guide the work of their district, hire and evaluate the superintendent, and set plans, policies and oversee the annual budget.

That is different from managing. And that distinction matters enormously.

Over a decade ago, I wrote about what makes board governance work well and the relationship between a board and its superintendent. Those posts came out of a presentation with our then-Board Chair Cindy Dekker at the BCSTA Fall Academy. One of the things we kept coming back to then is still the thing I come back to now: when governance works, it is because the board and the superintendent have a clear and respectful understanding of who does what.

In West Vancouver there are twenty board policies and more than a hundred administrative procedures. That distinction is not bureaucratic tidiness. It is the foundation of a functioning organization.

There is also a second gap that can catch people off guard. Trustees are elected as individuals, but they govern as a corporate board. Your personal passion, your neighbourhood concern, or your single issue does not become policy simply because you hold a seat at the table. Trustees are also not there to represent a small circle of voices, whether that is friends, networks or a single issue group, but to consider the needs of the entire system. Governance requires building consensus, thinking system-wide, and sometimes accepting and articulating decisions that reflect the collective judgment of the board rather than an individual preference. That is not always easy, especially when you care deeply about an issue. But it is central to how public governance works.

And then there is a third gap: much of the work is policy and budget, not community events and ribbon cuttings. The work of the board is done in the board room. The unglamorous work of reviewing financial statements, navigating complex funding formulas, understanding collective bargaining context, and studying Ministry directives occupies far more time than most candidates anticipate.

What Makes a Good Trustee

Before answering that question, it is worth saying something clearly: school trustees across British Columbia volunteer extraordinary time and care to their communities. The role is demanding, often misunderstood and rarely glamorous. Yet hundreds of people across the province step forward each election cycle because they believe deeply in public education. Our system depends on that commitment.

The best trustees I have worked with over the years share a few things in common.

They are curious more than certain. They arrive at meetings with questions rather than verdicts. They understand the difference between the governance work they do and the operational work staff does, and they respect that boundary even when the issues are complex or emotionally charged.

They stay connected to their communities without treating the board table as a platform for a single constituency. Strong trustees think about the entire system — every student, every school — even when the conversation begins with a local concern.

And they commit the time the role actually requires. It is not a full-time job, but requires an ongoing regular investment of time. The learning curve is real, and the work demands preparation, reading, and thoughtful engagement.

One of my favourite lines from those 2014 posts still holds: if you show us a district that is going strong, you will almost certainly find a board and superintendent who are in sync and committed to doing what it takes to work together for students. That relationship is not accidental. It is built deliberately through clear process, trust, and mutual respect.

I also think about a post I wrote in 2023 called *Different Voices* after a BCSTA session where I was struck by the range of perspectives in the room — student leaders, Indigenous education representatives, international families, 2SLGBTQI+ voices. Boards are strongest when they actively listen to the many voices that make up their communities rather than assuming they already know what those communities need. That kind of listening is a skill, and it matters in public governance.

BCSTA provides extensive professional learning and resources for trustees through the Trustee Academy, the various virtual and in-person workshops, and other supports. None of that replaces the learning that comes from showing up with openness and humility, but it is helpful that new trustees do not have to navigate the role alone.

Why This Work Matters Right Now

School systems are navigating a moment of significant change.

Artificial intelligence is reshaping how we think about learning and knowledge. Student mental health needs have increased in ways few people anticipated a decade ago. Communities are becoming more diverse, and expectations of public institutions continue to evolve. At the same time, school districts operate within complex financial constraints and shifting provincial priorities.

None of those realities are solved by a single board meeting or a single decision. But they do shape the conversations that happen around board tables across the province.

Thoughtful governance matters in moments like this. Communities benefit when people step forward who are willing to listen carefully, ask good questions, and make decisions with the long-term health of the entire system in mind.

If You Are Considering Running

If you are thinking about running for school trustee, there are a few simple things that can help clarify whether the role is the right fit.

Prior to running attend several board meetings. Not one. Several. The texture of the work becomes clearer over time, and a single meeting rarely shows you what the job actually feels like month after month.

Talk with current or former trustees and ask them what surprised them about the role. Ask what they wish they had known when they started. And if you have the opportunity in your district, learning about the school system you would be governing can be valuable context as well.

The school trustee role deserves to be approached on its own terms. It is demanding, consequential work that benefits from people who are genuinely interested in governance and in public education.

As BCSTA has put it for more than a century, a high-quality public education system is the foundation of a strong democracy. The people who help guide that system locally matter. October is closer than it seems. Now is a good time to ask yourself seriously whether you want to do this work. If the honest answer is yes, I hope you run.

That work belongs to all of us.

The BCSTA is hosting an evolving series of resources on board elections available [HERE](#).

The image at the top of this post was generated through AI. Various AI tools were used as feedback helpers (for our students this post would be a Yellow assignment – see link to explanation chart) as I edited and refined my thinking.