

## Candidate Responses to DPAC Questions

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### Question 1

School District 40 has faced challenges with overcrowded schools and delayed construction of new facilities, impacting both student learning environments and community growth. Where do you see the key gaps in the planning and funding processes for new schools in SD40, and what specific plans do you have to address these issues to ensure timely and adequate infrastructure for the district's growing student population?

#### ***BC NDP Candidates***

We recognize the challenges that fast-growing school districts face. David Eby and the BC NDP team are focused on building and expanding schools throughout B.C. We're working closely with school districts to create more student seats and build classrooms faster, while easing budget pressures.

We're taking action by fast tracking prefabricated additions for schools in high growth school districts. So far we have built 790 additional student spaces as part of completed projects at École Fraser River Middle, École Qayqayt Elementary, Skwo:wech Elementary, and a seismic upgrade at Lord Tweedsmuir Elementary.

We're also shortening provincial approvals for capital projects and financially supporting project offices for school districts to help deliver school projects. Unfortunately, John Rustad's Conservatives have a plan to set our kids back, instead of actually building new schools, they want to increase class sizes by 20% and cram more kids into the classroom. This is exactly what he did before. Not only did he close 267 schools but he froze school construction funding as well.

We will make sure BC is working to meet the needs of people by investing \$2.262B for expansion and replacement school projects that address enrollment growth.

#### ***Maureen Curran, BC Greens***

We obviously have two key issues in SD40, the first being the lack of easily acquired lots for new schools and the second being the way that our present model doesn't allow for funding new school projects in a way that permits sensible and realistic planning to accommodate growth. Both of these show a refusal to modernize and adapt to present circumstances.

It used to be that new schools were required in new developments and so land could be put aside at the same time. It used to be normal that as one neighborhood would get developed and

become more dense another was seeing its family demographics shift to be older and without children, so it made sense to be more conservative and ride those waves. But those days are over, and we need to get our policies aligned with present reality.

We need to overhaul our systems so they fit this new reality; densification demands new funding formulas and a new planning structure, and it means the province has to provide help in obtaining new school sites that fit within this high density vision. The only way to solve this is to coordinate planning between the province and municipalities.

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## **Question 2**

With large developments like Columbia Square and the 22nd Street Plan in New Westminster, there are growing concerns that municipalities are not required to allocate space for schools, while provincial approval and funding processes cannot keep pace with the rapid rate of growth. This puts added strain on already overcrowded schools. Do you see any issues with the current lack of mandatory collaboration between municipalities and school districts, and how would you address the delays in provincial funding to ensure that school infrastructure keeps up with community growth?

### ***BC NDP Candidates***

Schools are a critical part of communities. As such, new developments should consider schools and if new schools are needed the city and the developer must work with the school district. We are committed to working with school districts to ensure we build schools for today and for tomorrow. A lack of investment from previous governments coupled with record breaking population growth has left too many students in portables. David Eby and the BC NDP team are working hard to meet student needs by building 125 new, expanded and seismically upgraded schools that are complete or underway for more than 70,000 students.

We aren't letting up and our provincial budget will include a 50% or \$2.262 billion increase for expansion and replacement projects to tackle enrollment. John Rustad kept our children out of school buildings and in portables because his government froze school construction for eight straight years as the province grew rapidly between 2009 and 2017. We inherited a massive deficit of school spaces. Fast forward to today, we cannot afford not to build schools. It would have been a lot less expensive had Rustad built these projects years ago when these needs were first identified.

### ***Maureen Curran, BC Greens***

This needs to be a three-way conversation, and the province needs to take the lead. The funding formulas for CACs allow for a new and streamlined process to get developers to pay for other required services like fire and sewer is a great idea, because we need to get more homes built - but we need to make sure schools aren't left out. Where is the tied-in funding for school spaces? This is particularly important when we take into account how the funding gaps for schools have grown as costs have risen and the increases provided have fallen short. There is

nothing extra available in any school, nothing there to absorb a bit more - it's all been used up years ago due to a decade of underfunding followed by another near decade of benign neglect. It is time to reinvest in schools so they are all able to do more than the bare minimum.

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### **Question 3**

Many school districts facing rapid enrollment growth are forced to use operating funds to purchase portables, which cost approximately \$200,000 each. Funds that are intended for teacher and staff salaries, classroom technology, and student resources. This creates a significant budget shortfall and an inequitable funding situation, as districts experiencing rapid growth are hit hardest. What is your proposed solution to address this inequitable funding challenge that results from the necessary use of portables to accommodate rapid growth and how will you ensure that growing districts are not forced to divert critical resources to temporary solutions?

#### ***BC NDP Candidates***

With 350,000 more people choosing B.C. as their home in the past two and a half years, BC remains a desirable place to live and raise a family with good-paying jobs and a strong clean economy. John Rustad not only froze school construction for 8 years, he closed hundreds of schools, in growing BC communities. David Eby has made it a priority to build schools to make up for the deficit Rustad left behind. Over 125 school projects including new seats for over 70,000 students. We know that we need to have new spaces open sooner, so on top of new construction, David Eby and the BC NDP are using innovative construction options like prefabricated classrooms to get more spaces opened in a fraction of the time. The BC NDP are working to bring communities more student spaces faster, while reducing portable usage.

#### ***Maureen Curran, BC Greens***

Locally we have seen that BC Housing has been able to provide the city with extra support services like a toilet and shower portable for citizens who are unhoused, because it is their joint responsibility to meet those needs. I'd like to see a similar plan for the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Education has to have some skin in the game here and should be coordinating to help local districts sensibly bridge these gaps between rapid population growth and new school completion. This is particularly obvious when it's the implementation of provincial mandates and policies that have created this increased need.

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### **Question 4**

Recent statistics from the BC Adolescent Health Survey highlight that student mental health is on the decline, with increasing numbers of youth reporting anxiety, depression, and high stress levels. Given the growing mental health crisis among students in our province, what specific actions will you take to ensure schools have the resources and support systems in place to address these needs, and how will you work to improve access to mental health services for students across British Columbia?

### ***BC NDP Candidates***

Strong mental health is key for both students and teachers alike to perform and feel good both at school and at home. Rustad has a proven track record of underfunding schools and putting our children last. The BC NDP are making sure we are in no way repeating the mistakes of the past by taking action and continually investing in mental health and wellbeing programming in schools. Critical to this is having the trained staff on hand and able to help youth. The BC NDP took a leadership role to ensure students were fully supported by hiring over three hundred more counselors throughout BC public schools than at the start of the 2016/2017 school year. Having spent an additional \$5 million this academic year, we are making sure that students have access to the supports they need to stay healthy and active at schools.

### ***Maureen Curran, BC Greens***

This is a Green Party promise - providing access to mental health services in every school. We see the need for investing in our youth, investing in prevention and working to address this crisis in a way that is both more effective and just plain sensible. We know that helping catch students who are struggling before it hits a crisis point is where we are most likely to be able to provide the most effective care, and we also know the long term costs of failing to do so are already crippling our system further down the line. Our goal is ending stigma and building a new generation of young people who know how to identify their mental health needs and access the help they require to stay on track and become their most successful and fulfilled selves. To do this we will lower ratios for the number of students per counselor and provide extra funding for psychologists, counselors and youth workers.

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## **Question 5**

Inclusion BC has reported significant gaps in public education for students with disabilities and neurodiversity, such as delays in accessing assessments, insufficient classroom support, and inadequate training for teachers on inclusive practices. What do you think needs to change in BC's public education system to ensure that these gaps in inclusion are addressed, and that all students with special needs have equitable access to the support and resources they require?

### ***BC NDP Candidates***

It is crucial that every student has access to assessments and the services that they need. Recognizing the diverse needs of students begins with their classroom teachers. To ensure that teachers have the skills to identify students' assessment needs, David Eby launched the Provincial Outreach Program. This program closes gaps in provincial literacy and learning disability supports, through increased early literacy screening (K-3), interventions and outreach programs alongside resources for parents and caregivers. Inclusivity and support are cornerstone values of the BC NDP and this is why David is connecting new students with disabilities and diverse abilities to occupational therapists, speech language pathologists,

learning support teacher consultants and school psychologists. New Provincial School Outreach Teams are being equipped with over \$3 million a year to provide these services especially in rural and remote areas. This program equips teachers and support staff with training, professional development days, and resources to address the literacy needs of students with disabilities and diverse abilities. Rustad's track record of closing schools, reducing funding and giving tax breaks to his wealthy friends directly translates to the elimination of supports for people who need it in BC.

***Maureen Curran, BC Greens***

I'm proud to say it is a key part of the Green Party Education platform to work to bring in more education assistants and work to address the lack of access to learning supports and resources that has meant too many of our youth have left school without having had the opportunity to develop the skills they need to achieve their potential. Our plans include improved pay and hours for EAs so that they can earn a living wage; no more will short staffing require a low incident student be sent home early due to being unsupported for part of the day, nor will EA coordinators have to plan a constant game of musical chairs to cover breaks. We also have plans to improve resources for teacher education and professional development so there is more consistency in knowledge and skill base in all areas of inclusion.

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**Question 6**

What is your position on supporting SOGI (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity) inclusive education in our schools, and how will you work to ensure that all students, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, have access to a safe, welcoming, and inclusive school environment?

***BC NDP Candidates***

Every student, regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and other protected characteristics, deserves to feel safe and included in their school communities, and have equal opportunities to learn. It has been upsetting and distressing to see misinformation and disinformation used to attack our children and youth. It's very simple - SOGI is about teaching kids to respect people who are different. SOGI has been used in classrooms since 2016; John Rustad supported it then and nothing has changed about the program. David Eby is taking decisive action to make sure that classrooms are welcoming spaces that reflect the diversity of our communities including creating an extra measure of protection for schools with the Safe Access to Schools Act. This Act creates bubble zones of safety around schools, necessary because of the hateful and divisive rhetoric from supporters of John Rustad. His team continues to put our children at risk even while at school. Students and staff need to feel safe from harassment and bullying at all times.

***Maureen Curran, BC Greens***

SOGI is a wonderful program that teaches kids in an age-appropriate way about diversity in individuals and families. Our differences are something to be celebrated. Every child is unique

and deserves to be warmly accepted and encouraged to be no one but themselves. This is a backbone of an inclusive society and such a fundamental concept; we need to work together to break down misunderstandings and push back against misinformation until everyone is aware of what SOGI really stands for.

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## **Question 7**

School districts across BC, including SD40, are facing a severe shortage of teaching and support staff, particularly in critical roles like speech-language pathologists, psychologists, counsellors, and learning resource teachers. This shortage has a direct impact on student support and well-being. What specific steps will you take to ensure that these essential positions are fully staffed on the first day of school and consistently throughout the school year, and how will you work with districts to address recruitment and retention challenges in these vital areas?

### ***BC NDP Candidates***

We know a tight labour market for teachers and educators is a reality, not just in BC, but throughout Canada and internationally. At the same time, we cannot compromise on the education of our children. David Eby is taking leadership to ensure that our children have the support they need by hiring over 800 special education teachers, and more than 200 teacher psychologists and counsellors as part of the Classroom Enhancement Fund. We're not stopping there because the BC NDP will make sure children, especially those in rural, remote and First Nation communities, are connected to specialists like occupational therapists, speech language pathologists, learning support teacher consultants and school psychologists through \$9 million in funding over the next 3 years.

John Rustad has never put students first because his solution to the ongoing issues in the education sector are to increase class sizes which will reduce the individual attention our students need. David Eby is working hard with education partners to develop a comprehensive K-12 workforce strategy to support and sustain a stable, qualified, and engaged K-12 workforce, and provide increased funding for classroom supports.

### ***Maureen Curran, BC Greens***

As a teacher myself I know that the two biggest reasons for teacher burnout are lack of support for students and lack of support for educators themselves. After having worked 4 years with SFU PDP teacher training, I appreciate the Green Party platform item that will allow student teachers to be paid for their practicum, because right now that financial burden of giving up a part time or full time job to go and train as a teacher is a huge barrier and added stress. By funding classrooms and schools and especially by providing students with mental health, food programs and the EAs they need, fewer teachers will be pushed past their limits, which reduces those who quit, take leaves or choose early retirement. If we have also provided better health care, childcare and affordable housing, personal stresses on those educator are lessened and overall resilience is increased.

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## **Question 8**

The BC Area Standards not only prescribe some of the smallest per-student spaces for schools in Canada they also do not incorporate climate resilience or adaptation measures, such as mitigating the impacts of hotter, drier weather, increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, and energy supply uncertainties. Given the challenges posed by climate change, what is your plan to support school districts in building and upgrading facilities to be more resilient to these environmental changes and ensure safe, sustainable learning environments for students?

### ***BC NDP Candidates***

Climate change impacts people's lives and costs our economy billions of dollars. Kids are looking to us to lead on clean initiatives and support their futures. We are both building new and upgrading schools to meet seismic requirements, and achieve climate change and energy efficiency standards set out in our CleanBC plan. As part of this year's budget, our government provided \$291.9 million for school maintenance projects to equip schools to be more energy efficient and climate resilient. We are not only focusing on large-scale modernization but incorporating unique and out-of-the-box ideas including creating green corridors by installing rain gardens, planting trees and native plants around schools to reduce heat, help mitigate flooding and cut carbon emissions as was done in Saanich.

John Rustad will halt these measures to protect our children as soon as he can because he is clear about 2 things: denying the science of climate change and cutting services for people to pay for tax cuts for the wealthy. Rustad holds extreme views including believing that climate action is a plot to starve billions of people to "reduce the world population" so how can he be trusted to support our students for success.

### ***Maureen Curran, BC Greens***

As someone who has tried to carry out a lesson in rooms that got below 15 degrees for days on end or over 27 degrees, I am painfully aware of the need for more planning and forethought in this area if we hope to provide good learning environments well into the next decade. Clearly having a wider strategy that includes designing communities and energy production to be more resilient and prepared for climate shifts is an underpinning of our wider plan. In the school context, the Green Party's plan includes undertaking comprehensive reforms in facilities management to ensure all schools meet high standards of safety, functionality and climate resilience, with regular reviews every 10 years to keep all buildings fully up to date.