

The Leader-Post (Regina)

Fates of schools depend on board

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Illustrations: Colour Photo: The Leader-Post / Kirk Kelln

Colour Photo: Russ Marchuk

Colour Photo: Brian Smyth:

Colour Photo: Barbara Young

Colour Photo: Stella Dechaine

Photo: Robert Petry

Photo: Dale West

Colour Photo: Logan Drydale

Colour Photo: Bob Ivanochko

Colour Photo: Rhonda Parisian

Colour Photo: Angela Fraser

Colour Photo: Garry Schenher

Colour Photo: Don Wren

The fate of many public schools in Regina will be decided during the next term of the Regina Public School Board, making it the hot topic many candidates are facing on the voters' doorsteps.

"Renewing Regina public schools is the most talked-about item, there is no question," said Russ Marchuk, a current board trustee who is hoping to retain his seat in Subdivision 1 following Wednesday's election.

Facing declining enrolment, crumbling facilities and rising costs, the current board accepted an administration report last November recommending the closure of nine elementary schools and turning Robert Usher Collegiate into an elementary school. The board was supposed to vote on the recommendations in March but after just two weeks -- when parents and students loudly voiced opposition to the plan -- the board scrapped the proposal.

In the spring, the board decided to bring in an outside consultant to facilitate the Renewing Regina Public Schools process with the goal of developing a long-term plan for the division.

After some initial meetings, public consultations were put on hold until November and a report is expected to be presented to the school board in late May or June 2007.

Marchuk said it is important the newly elected board have a long-term plan for the division to deal with facilities, program delivery and ways to deal with declining enrolment.

But Kirk Kelln, who is running against Marchuk for the Subdivision 1 seat, said he is strongly committed to small, neighbourhood schools, adding that schools

that have a population of more than 100 are economically viable.

"We have to stop looking at schools like they're disposable structures.

"We need to return them to the centre of our communities as being integral in the life of the community and you don't let those kinds of things rot, you invest in them and renew them," said Kelln.

Don Wren, who is running in Subdivision 7 against Angela Fraser and incumbent Garry Schenher, said a reduction in a school's population isn't necessarily a bad thing because it may result in smaller classrooms and more individual attention.

He believes the problem that exists is maintaining sufficient levels of funding.

"I believe that every person is more than willing to pay for a good education for their children.

"If that means they pay more in taxes, I think they may be willing to do that. I'm not saying that's the first thing I'm going to do, but it does have to be an option," said Wren.

Fraser, a former full-time teacher who currently works as a substitute, said that while closing a school is never a good first option, the board must balance being fiscally responsible with what is best for the students and families in a community.

"Do we want to be pouring all kinds of money into these schools, open at all costs, when you have a school with 100 or fewer students and you can't have the kind of sports teams, extra-curricular things and clubs that you would have in a larger school because you don't have enough students or enough staff to run

all the different programs?" Fraser asked.

Schenher explained that once the public consultation is complete, a long-term capital plan must be created, which may or may not include school closures.

He said that making promises to never close schools isn't a responsible way to govern a school division.

"In all likelihood, (the plan) will include some closures but we need to hear from the public what they're willing to pay for.

"We have an excessive amount of square feet for the number of kids we have in the school division so we need to reconcile that with a long-term plan and based on consultations with the public and what is financially feasible," said Schenher.

There will be at least two new faces on the school board with current board chairman Ernie Pappas and veteran member Cathy Hill both not running.

Brian Smyth, an IT consultant, is running in Subdivision 2 against Barbara Young, an education consultant.

Subdivision 3 features a three-way race between Stella Dechaine, a parent and volunteer, physics researcher Robert Petry and retired teacher Dale West.

Incumbent Rhonda Parisian will try to retain her seat in Subdivision 4 but faces competition from Logan Drydale, a local realtor, and librarian Bob Ivanochko.

Current board members John Conway and Barb Saylor have been acclaimed in Subdivision 5 and Subdivision 6, respectively.

REGINA PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARD

SUBDIVISION 1

3 Kirk Kelln:

I will restore neighbourhood schools, reduce class size, thin the curriculum, bring back standardized testing, require intensive daily physical activity, group students by ability and learning style (instead of age), and raise minimum passing grade to 75 per cent. When we require more, I know our kids will become more.

SUBDIVISION 1

3 Russ Marchuk:

Renewing Regina public schools will be a top priority. I would call it "getting our house in order." A clearly articulated facilities and capital plan to deal with declining enrolments and aging infrastructure will free up the resources necessary to enhance an already existing quality program without burdening the taxpayers.

SUBDIVISION 2

3 Brian Smyth:

Brian Smyth believes that the public school board could benefit from "new blood" that would help in solving some challenges creatively. Smyth, an IT consultant, has held leadership positions at the school, community, non-profit and service club level. He has an interest in seeing education meet workforce demands.

SUBDIVISION 2

3 Barbara Young:

As we work toward system- facility renewal our priorities must include: Responsive programs; strong school/community connections; and innovative, affordable program delivery. I support an open, collaborative, visionary board, focused on preparing students for leadership, citizenship and transitions to work and further education. When students flourish, the community flourishes.

SUBDIVISION 3

3 Stella Dechaine:

Responsible Education -- My goal will be to work towards safe, well-facilitated and maintained schools providing quality, competitive, and forward-thinking education to all students allowing them to attain the education they need in an environmentally friendly place. I will strive for fiscal accountability. I will represent my constituents.

SUBDIVISION 3

3 Robert Petry:

Academic achievement begins with attention to the individual student. The public school system must respond to each student's needs, listen to the wisdom of our teachers, parents and communities, and plan strategically to ensure that a high-quality education remains a basic right for all students.

SUBDIVISION 3

3 Dale West:

I feel the important issues are: A safe and caring learning environment; celebration of successes; development of programs for all students; increase in provincial funding; public input for any possible school closures. Don't just settle for a better way -- chose the BEST way -- the WEST way.

SUBDIVISION 4

3 Logan Drydale:

As a father of sons attending elementary school, I demand the best education for our children. I'll ensure that our dollars are spent in the best, most efficient way. I am dedicated to building our city around neighbourhood schools without increasing property taxes and regular communication to all local

residents.

SUBDIVISION 4

3 Bob Ivanochko

Bob Ivanochko, librarian, is a Core resident whose daughters attended Thomson School. Bob wants to enhance accountability to children, in services to community schools. Bob has a recognized history of work with community groups. He will continue advocacy for resources to support citizens with access to life-long learning opportunities.

SUBDIVISION 4

3 Rhonda Parisian:

My goal this term is to continue to support classroom resources for staff and students, innovative skills and trades training, balancing the changing needs of our children with good financial management, maintenance of our schools and the new school community councils being implemented for more school/community-based decision-making.

SUBDIVISION 7

3 Angela Fraser:

Resolve the issue of "school renewal" so the school division can move forward without the possibility of major changes hanging over it; wise and creative use of resources; keep interests of students, staff and parents foremost in decision-making; hire more teaching assistants to support students in the classroom.

SUBDIVISION 7

3 Garry Schenher:

It has been a privilege to represent northwest Regina for the past six years. A vote for me will ensure continued emphasis on responsible fiscal management, infrastructure renewal, innovative programming, strong professional development for all staff, increased shared services and educational partnerships for program development and efficiency gains.

SUBDIVISION 7

3 Don Wren:

To succeed in life, our kids must learn how to learn. For schools to help them do that, we must elect decision-makers who understand children's needs. You have the power to change kids' lives on election day. Their future is in our hands -- our future is in theirs.