

Education trustee candidates share their visions for Aurora students

Monday's municipal election will determine not only Aurora's Mayor and Council members for the 2022-2026 term, but also who will be Aurora and Whitchurch-Stouffville's voices around the York Region District School Board and the York Catholic District School Boards.

Ahead of the October 24 ballot, candidates for the Trustee positions at both Boards have shared their respective priorities for Aurora students.

YORK REGION DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD CANDIDATES

Luther C. Brown

Brown is a retired Toronto District School Board principal and PhD candidate with a focus on finding ways to produce equitable schooling outcomes for Ontario students. His top three priorities in his own words are academic excellence, student safety, student wellbeing and belonging, special education, developing critical thinking skills, preparedness for the technological future in STEM, communications, and the arts.

Students and community need to feel that their trustee serves their best interests and represent them effectively. To represent the interest of students and the community the trustee must listen to students, parents, and community. The trustee must also be unafraid to present the interest of the constituency in the boardroom or in the district. [I believe] in accountable and responsible governance, that effective district leadership is vital in serving the needs of our racially diverse community, and that policy development must serve the needs of the district and community.

Bridget Kilgallon

Kilgallon bills herself as the only YRDSB Trustee candidate who is also an Aurora resident. Her top three priorities, she says, are putting students first, empowering parents, and leading with integrity.

The guiding force of every voting decision I make would center the academic success and well-being of the students. I would ask the question, 'Does this serve the best interests of the students as a collective?' This is the lens through which I would discuss and evaluate all guidance, directives and policy set out by the Board for review. [On empowering parents I'd provide] a strong liaison and feedback loop from parents and families back to the Board is a top priority for me. Many parents are unaware of this central role and responsibility of the trustee and I'd like to change that. Focus on community outreach, school/council visits, parent opinion surveys and Board meeting transparency and involvement.

Trustees work as a team and will influence the stewardship and allocation of a \$1.5 billion budget. Decisions made will impact the strategic and practical direction of your child's education over the next four years. I support spending in the classroom and an academics-first prioritization. My corporate career has been spent working on teams, solving problems, brokering fair solutions and being measured by results. As a parent with years of child-focused volunteer work, I'm a fierce protector of children and child safeguarding is always my #1 concern. I am a strong, clear communicator and will lead with integrity and dedication.

Asim Sayed

A certified teacher in Ontario, Sayed comes into the race with 10 years' experience teaching high school math and science for gifted children.

Priorities include student safety and community engagement.

?Foster and promote parent and local community engagement which is to bring a strong voice to the community, bring open communication to establish confidence and trust of the people of Aurora and Whitchurch-Stouffville, and stay connected! Considering the threat made in a video posted to social media last academic year that prompted hold and secure at Aurora HS and Wellington PS. I am prepared to advocate for working with York Regional Police to bring community programs in which police officers are invited to teach about law and enforcement to the students and to provide resources and professional development workshops focussed on intervention strategies for the teachers to help and support how to handle such situations.

?I will work with the other Board trustees to ensure that the Director of Education effectively implements the policies of the Board and that local and federal politicians understand local issues and needs and encourage them to make education a top and a high priority. In June 2020, the opening date of the replacement facility for Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School, was initially delayed from September 2023 to 2024. Last year, it got further delayed to September 2025. I will work with the teams at municipal and provincial levels to ensure the opening is not further delayed and the opening of Aurora 2C Elementary School stays as September 2024 as proposed.?

Mary Sled-Lucas

Sled-Lucas is focused on ?collaborative communication with parents and stakeholders in the education system,? safety for all in the school environment and increased financial support to ?directly benefit student achievement in the classroom.?

?Transparency is required so that constituents know what children are learning, how well they are learning, how their tax dollars are being spent and are given the opportunity to participate in discussions on the allocation of education resources in their community. I will start by in-person meetings with each of our public elementary and secondary school Parent Councils to hear their concerns.

?The data does not support the recent ban on police officers in schools. An extensive Carleton University study shows that School Resource Officer (SRO) programs reduce crime and bullying and provide extensive social and economic benefits (students feel safer and less stressed, miss less school, are better able to learn and are mentally healthier). Also, school staff benefit from police support and spend less time on disciplinary matters and property damage. SROs are more likely to recommend diversion when appropriate, so students can often avoid criminal charges. The ban on police must be reversed as it is making schools less safe and has negative mental health consequences for our children.

?YRDSB operates on a \$1.5 billion budget. We need to examine ways to reduce excessive costs and waste in the bureaucracy and pass on these savings to address needs in the classrooms. There should be more data-driven decisions on whether a policy is helping students and teachers before investing in it. New policies affecting teachers should allow for feedback by them before implementing. Also, instead of single source contracts, an option for open bidding in the Board procurement process should be examined. In general, competitive bidding is better for the taxpayer unless quality is compromised.?

Elizabeth Terrell

A former trustee for East Gwillimbury and Whitchurch-Stouffville, Terrell is no stranger to the YRDSB. Her priorities include fostering the replacement of Dr. G.W. Williams Secondary School, student mental health supports, environmental stewardship and balancing the budget.

?Recovering from the COVID pandemic has left many families in disarray. We need to continue with strong Mental Health supports for all of our students to help them be resilient to persevere with their educational dreams and goals. Most students are now back in the classrooms and we need to continue supporting them throughout this pandemic recovery. With all the climate changes that we are seeing around the world we need to be the positive change at the local public school level. We need to expand upon our existing EcoSchools program, recycling and outdoor classrooms. We need to document and commit to Environmental Stewardship teachings and actions at all our school buildings and properties. Updating all of our outdoor education centres to have Indigenous holistic teachings to include survival skills, natural medicinals, save the soil and water is life.

?With the current director retiring, the new Board of Trustees mandate will be to hire a new director. I believe that we need the new director to have solid financial experience to help us balance the budget. From my trustee experience I believe that the Ministry of Education required budget deficit restructuring plan should not include direct cuts to classrooms. Therefore, some budget areas to look at are back office, principal/vice-principal placements, French immersion and transportation.?

Melanie Wright

Wright's priorities include increased funding to schools, community building, and inclusivity.

?[I'm] an advocate for increased funding for schools to improve student achievement and well being, accessible mental health recourses, decrease barriers for students with exceptionalities and create additional STEM and Arts programming. I will ensure fiscal responsibility and accountability when allocating funds during the annual budget meeting. I'm a local candidate with school-aged children who wants to build a strong school community through proven leadership, and open and honest communication. I'm committed to understanding the needs of the community by attending school council meetings at all schools in my electoral area and working with student councils in our local high schools.

?I'm dedicated to reviewing current policies and procedures surrounding equity and inclusivity, caring and safe schools and respectful workplace and learning environment to ensure they are accessible and meet the current needs of our community.?

YORK CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

Ali Itwar

Itwar's priorities include student safety, transportation and increased collaboration.

?Physical and Mental Safety for all children, school staff and volunteers: this is a basic requirement for a successful education. Needs-based bus transportation: students with unsafe walking access to school should be eligible for bus transportation. Increased collaboration with industries, to assist students with future career planning: with economies in turmoil and markets evolving, students need every opportunity to find their interests and a career that suits them.

A response from incumbent YCDSB Trustee candidate Elizabeth Crowe had not been received by press time.