

2SLGBTQIA+ Questionnaire for Waterloo Region Municipal Candidates

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Do you identify as a member of a 2SLGBTQIA+ community?

Prefer not to answer

What role are you running for?

Kitchener Public School Board Trustee (WRDSB)

What do you believe are the most critical issues for the local 2SLGBTQIA+ community? If elected, how would you work with the local community to address these issues?

In the school board realm, misinformation and fear mongering are the most critical issues. We have some families who don't understand what their children are being taught and why. It's important to me that I act as a cultural bridge builder as someone who comes from an immigrant background and has had extensive learning opportunities and can educate on the provincially-set curriculum and 2SLGBTQIA+ issues.

In 2021, the Waterloo Region District School Board released its first-ever student census survey. 22,871 students from grades 4 - 12 responded to this survey - that's approximately 50% of the WRDSB student population. The census found, after English and French, the top 6 languages of students in our schools are: Arabic, Chinese, Urdu, Punjabi, Hindi, and Spanish. I speak 3 of these languages and have nearly a decade of engaging families from these language groups. Census participants also identified with more than 200 ethnic and cultural origins, and racialized students made up one-third of the student census participants. If we want to engage families in respectful ways to prevent harm to students from marginalized communities, we need board members who have lived experiences in these communities. I bring critical missing perspectives to the table and can understand the implicit and explicit needs of diverse families.

In the communities I've worked with, many families require culturally-sensitive conversations that take into account their backgrounds and perspectives. I take a harm-reduction approach by educating communities that have the least awareness of 2SLGBTQIA+ topics. As a trustee, what this could look like is:

- Communicating with families who have questions in culturally-sensitive ways
- Organizing an "ask anything" event in certain languages collaboration with community groups like SPECTRUM or OK2BME for parents/guardians to attend where they can ask questions in a respectful manner (while taking into account how to protect the safety of facilitators)

Have you ever participated in 2SLGBTQIA+ Cultural Competency Training?

Yes I have. I've completed this training as a student and in various work environments. I facilitate sexual violence prevention training and I educate others on ways to prevent disproportionate harm to 2SLGBTQIA+ community members as well. I have also served as a board member of a sexual assault centre so I have experience in strategic decision-making to serve diverse community members.

Systemic homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia are still prevalent in our community, resulting in significant socioeconomic disparities within 2SLGBTQIA+ communities. If elected, how will you combat homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia?

See first answer

If elected, how would you address the ongoing issues of homelessness and mental health, especially as they disproportionately affect members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community?

This is a really top-of-mind issue for me. As the youngest person running in this election, and as someone who has facilitated intersectional mental health workshops for almost 7 years in this region, I have worked to ensure schools and community groups understand the importance of protecting 2SLGBTQIA+ students. Early intervention is always better than reaction with regards to mental health challenges and housing instability.

The mental health workshops I facilitated were through a program called WAYVE, which stands for Wellness, Acceptance, Youth Voices, and Empowerment. This was a youth-adult partnership with youth in the community and the Canadian Mental Health Association of Waterloo-Wellington. I have training on sexual health education through ACCKWA, as well as mental health training from trans facilitators and OK2BME. Every week, the WAYVE team received trainings on various pressing community issues from community experts. This informs the way I make policy decisions in any leadership role I hold.

I know how intersecting challenges of class, gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, and disability affect students. I've volunteered with nutrition programs in our community and developed accessible skill-building workshops for youth to find meaningful employment. I understand the needs of young people who rely on these services and how discrimination impacts them. I will bring my perspectives to the board table to protect and amplify policies that support students and families who may be disproportionately facing these challenges.

I have worked with youth who have complex family dynamics, conflicting spiritual/religious needs, foster home backgrounds, and precarious housing situations. If elected, I will bring my intersectional lens on 2SLGBTQIA+ issues to the table to inform policies.

It is critical to me that we make decisions about youth from diverse communities by tapping into knowledge and perspectives from a wide array of young people and families. Key aspects of my platform (meenaforschools.com/platform) include student voice & leadership and accessible communication. Under these pillars, I explain that I hope to be more engaged with students and families in our schools through dropping into events and by engaging with students and families online. This will also serve as a feedback tool for me to gauge the effectiveness of mine and the board's work. Families/students experiencing homelessness and significant mental health challenges face tremendous access barriers to school resources, and the barriers grow for 2SLGBTQIA+ youth. Reaching families & students through avenues that suit them is one way to listen and to communicate support, resources, and options early.

Do you agree with the statement that "trans rights are human rights, and must be protected as such?"

Yes

What is one motion would you bring to council that you think will improve the lives of specifically queer people, racialized individuals and/or marginalized residents and why?

I would like to be a part of building a staff wellbeing strategy to address targeted attacks to WRDSB staff who speak out on equity issues and clear curriculum misinformation. Staff from marginalized identities are disproportionately harmed by actions driven by misinformation. Trustee Joanne Weston motioned in a recent school board meeting to develop a staff wellbeing strategy. I have experience with creating policies for staff wellbeing, particularly with online stressors, so I'd like to be a part of this strategy development.

When thinking about our schools, do you agree that 2SLGBTQIA+ representation in books and lessons is critical at all grade levels? How would you support 2SLGBTQIA+ students in schools?

Yes I agree books are critical at all grade levels to represent the variety of families under our school board. The board has capacity to collaborate with community groups to hold conversation circles on books that families may have questions about.