

Aurora Votes 2018: Crowe vows to keep schools open if re-elected Catholic trustee



By Brock Weir

Over the past 18 years, Elizabeth Crowe has taken an active role in the education of local students and families serving in various capacities on the York Catholic District School Board.

Next week, she hopes voters return her to the role as trustee for Aurora, King, and Whitchurch-Stouffville and, if she's returned to the Board table, Ms. Crowe says she will focus on keeping local schools open.

"There is a big rumour going around that we may be closing some of the elementary schools in Aurora and that is definitely not on the books, and I am going to try and make sure that it is not on the books," she says, noting that here in Aurora elementary schools within the Catholic system have been experiencing declining enrollments. "We're just not getting the same numbers coming into Junior Kindergarten that we used to, so I would like to gather a committee of parents from each of the elementary schools in Aurora and maybe someone from the parish as well, and we should brainstorm some sort of strategy to also increase awareness of our schools and the good things that are happening. Not having as many schools as the public board, often Catholic parents choose the nearest school, which tends to be a public school. I will try to increase enrollment and work with some community partners and build our classrooms with possible daycare and that kind of stuff that would be conducive to the environment of a school."

Looking back over the last term on the Board, Ms. Crowe says one of their biggest accomplishments is achieving the highest graduations of all the English school boards in Ontario. They have also taken great pride in making sure all principals are specialists in religious education.

As a trustee, she's proud that just a few years ago the Board brought in phys-ed and music specialists into all elementary schools and began the process of converting a classroom in every elementary school into a music classroom suitable for both music and drama. Then, for families of older children, there is the introduction of the international baccalaureate program at Cardinal Carter Catholic High School, which Ms. Crowe cites as another significant achievement.

Yet, in her view, there is much work still to do, and the work of a trustee is never done.

"There are always different issues coming up [including] the mental health strategy, which is something that wasn't around two years ago," she says. "It is not that it didn't exist, but now we have increased awareness for that. I would definitely like to see us implement that more fully."

Challenges in the four years ahead will also come with working with a new Progressive Conservative government in Ontario, but working with a change of government is something she says she has already experienced during her time on the Board.

"If I get re-elected, my first thing will be to meet with all the local MPPs and build relationships with them," she says.

Looking ahead to the next four years, Ms. Crowe says she is firmly focused on that issue of declining enrolment. That declining enrolment has posed some challenges with the Board's budget, she says, but the budget was "good" this year and maintaining that while keeping up with "special education needs in our system" will be the task ahead.

"We have been lobbying the government for increases in special education funding, so has every other board in the province, our

public Board is also overspent, we overspend our allocation, but it is very important that we provide programs for those students,? she says. ?The challenges that are being faced by our teachers in the classrooms and by our parents are more complex than they ever used to be and I think we haven't been able to keep up with our investments in special education and that would be a number one focus for me in the New Year.?