

Two candidates in the running for UGDSB trustee

Written By **JASEN OBERMEYER**

This article is a follow up and correction to an article that mistakenly appeared in the Sept. 6 edition of the Shelburne Free Press.

With the upcoming municipal election in October, that also means the election for school board trustees, which for the Upper Grand District School Board (UGDSB) has two names in the hat running for the one local position.

Incumbent Lynn Topping, and newcomer Alethia O'Hara Stephenson contest the position. Speaking to the Free Press, both candidates discussed their overall platforms and abilities to be a trustee.

A resident of Shelburne for 44 years, and a trustee for the past 14, Ms. Topping said there are some things that began this term that she wants to continue during the next, mainly the French Immersion program, which was previously only available in Erin. "We made the changes to have French Immersion in Orangeville, so it wasn't such a long ride for the children in the north end of Dufferin County."

She explained that the implementation of the Secondary French Immersion program in the high schools will allow for a shorter bus ride for students, enable them to remain in their local area, take part in extra curriculum activities, and get a part-time job. "The students in Orangeville have to travel down to Erin. There is only one bus for them."

Her first time running for the position, and a resident of Shelburne for four years, Ms. O'Hara Stephenson explained that this is her opportunity to give back to the community, and advocate for all students, "ensuring that they have a voice at the board, and they have the access and resources to succeed."

Some of the issues she looks to tackle are bullying, overcrowding in schools, which she attributes to the town's high residential development, and further implementation of the French Immersion program.

Both candidates said they like the town for its sense of community, and being a safe place for their families.

They both said that with the huge growth happening means a more diverse town, and a need to have acceptance, equity, and inclusion.

"All students have a voice, all students deserve to get the best they can," said Ms. Topping.

Ms. O'Hara-Stephenson said, "I think there's a great need for academics, athletics, and arts," as they all go "hand-in-hand," and schools shouldn't be focusing on just one area.

She added there needs to be an increase in mental health awareness and services. "We need to get beyond talking about it behind closed doors, and be more public about it."

"I have pushed for a lot of equity for Dufferin, including experimental learning, French Immersion," commented Ms. Topping. "I have been a very strong voice for Dufferin at the board table."

She added that she is most proud of accomplishing the implementation of the French Immersion program, and the creation and opening of Glenbrook Elementary in 2014.

Discussing the qualities they possess to be a trustee, Ms. O'Hara-Stephenson said having over 20 years of experience in the insurance and financial services industry, leading and managing teams, ensuring that students adapt to the changing world, as well as several years experience leading and participating in various community events including and youth mentoring.

Ms. Topping pointed to her past years as a trustee and what has been accomplished, explaining her involvement and experience are what makes her qualified.

The election will take place on October 22.