

## **Aleska Silvester-Degen responses**

### **Candidate for Grande Prairie and District Catholic School Division Ward 1**

Curriculum: Curriculum experts, educators, parents, and many of the current school boards have pointed out the flaws in the draft k-6 curriculum.

1. Do you agree with calls to scrap the draft curriculum and start over to develop a curriculum that is accurate in capturing Alberta's colonial history, diverse present, and modernized to reflect the world we live in?

To say that I agree with this statement would be an understatement. I have been very vocal about how irrelevant, racist and age inappropriate the draft curriculum is, not to mention the many errors that can be found throughout and the timing of its release which completely disregards all that our staff and students have been through over the last 18 months. I voted against implementing the draft curriculum for our district and will continue to actively speak out against the curriculum unless significant changes are made that address all of the issues I have outlined.

Funding: Alberta continues to be a growing province, with more students entering the system. While we're told funding is tight for public education, Alberta continues to subsidize private education with millions in public dollars.

2. Do you believe the current education funding formula is sufficient for your district? If not, how will you work to convince the province to provide sustainable and adequate funding?

I do not believe that for profit education should receive public funding. Historically, Alberta has provided public and separate school students with an outstanding education. Should parents feel the need to seek out alternate education for their child(ren), this expense should not be incurred by the taxpayers of Alberta.

Privatization including P3s: AUPE members know very well that privatization regularly fails to find "efficiencies" and any cost savings are often off the backs of workers who become deunionized, with lower pay and benefits. They also work on the front lines of service delivery and see the problems caused by high-turnover low wage private providers, and the bureaucratic burden caused by having to deal with a third party instead of an in-house provider.

3. Will you oppose privatization of school services and infrastructure, including Public-Private Partnerships aka P3s? Will you support bringing previously privatized services in-house?

I will oppose P3s. A school district can not function without any of its workers. The last 18 months have shown just how valuable our support staff are and they deserve to feel appreciated. I believe in a board that works alongside its staff and students, not above them, and I have a deep appreciation for the work that every individual does. Every staff member, regardless of their role, helps to ensure the success of the students and that is the ultimate goal. A short term cost saving usually results in an overall greater loss. I prefer to look at the big picture.

Schools as Employers: As our economies recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, good jobs are an important factor. Public sector workers spend in their communities, and many households impacted by private sector recessions have been able to keep the bills paid thanks to a stable public sector job.

4. Will you support your employees and your community by ensuring the school board employs staff with living wages, full-time hours where desired, job security, and collective bargaining rights?

I absolutely will! As the mother of a special needs child, it was truly heartbreaking for me when a number of our support staff were laid off due to the pandemic. I have witnessed first hand how valuable these employees are to our students, their parents and the schools. It is imperative that we retain good support staff to ensure the success of our students.

5. Will you oppose attempts from the provincial government to legislate against school staff including cuts to the Local Authorities Pension Plan, or restrictions on their right to strike?

Yes I will. As I have already stated, I appreciate the work of our support staff and believe that they deserve to feel supported and appreciated.

COVID Safety: With the negligent provincial response to now three preventable waves of COVID-19, school boards have been put in an awkward position of needing to take measure to protect their students and staff throughout the pandemic. Many are introducing measures of their own, but not all have.

6. Do you support measures such as mask mandates, and vaccine mandates for staff to limit and reduce the spread of COVID-19 in your schools?

I do support mask mandates. I personally brought a motion forward to our board a few weeks ago to mandate masks when the government would not.

While I believe in vaccines and believe that everyone who is eligible to be vaccinated should be, I feel that this is beyond the responsibility of a school board. We do not have a team of medical experts at our disposal like the government does and most, if not all, of us are not medical experts. I can not definitively answer yes or no to how I would approach vaccine mandates. My mind may change as the situation changes and/or we receive new information. Ultimately, my goal is to keep our staff and students safe and in whatever capacity I can, prevent the healthcare system from becoming even more overwhelmed.