

Barbara La Pointe responses
Candidate for Calgary Board of Education Wards 6 & 7

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?

First of all, it is extraordinary to me that 95% of Alberta school boards declined to pilot the draft curriculum. Although the curriculum is currently being piloted in a few school boards, it is not a complete pilot, as the pilot ends at the end of February 2022. It's disappointing that it is not a complete pilot, but rather a premature pilot of the draft curriculum. Further, in April, the ATA said 91 per cent of teachers were unhappy with it, with the union calling it "fatally flawed."

Currently, the draft curriculum is in a pilot with the survey to be returned early spring 2022. With respect to the curriculum, the Education Minister herself says "that there have been no decisions made, the curriculum is not finalized yet." Notwithstanding the remarkable investment by the UPC, education/subject matter experts, and various other stakeholders, it is abundantly clear that the draft curriculum has let down Albertans and failed Public Education.

The ATA report released September 29, 2021 further cites 14 specific problems with the planned curriculum, including:

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- Little relationship between the goals for student learning and the new curriculum
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- Failure to represent a variety of ideas and viewpoints
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- Focuses on content and prescribes pedagogy
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- Francophone and First Nations content is under-included
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- Themes of literacy, numeracy, citizenship and practical skills are too narrowly defined
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The report is drawn from survey responses from more than 6,500 Alberta teachers including subject specialists, diversity specials and school and system leaders.

(source:<https://edmonton.ctvnews.ca/not-suitable-teachers-report-slams-alberta-s-draft-curriculum-1.5605269>)

Further investment is required to really get the curriculum right for Albertans. The future of public education in Alberta is on the line, and Premier Jason Kenny must take action for the best interests of Albertans in Public Education. If the CBE and the government is truly committed to transparent curriculum development, then it will seriously consider the forthcoming survey review, the ATA report and take action to address all of the concerns of Albertans* by way of mediation and meaningful discourse with the goal of a new curriculum being created to meet the needs of Albertans.

It is my sincerest hope that our Education Minister Adriana La Grange will be humble in her role to serve, transparent and open to meaningful stakeholder dialogue, and consider solutions with respect to a redo on the curriculum - inviting collaboration and input from teachers and university professors.

A common goal to bring the curriculum up to standard will prevent what ATA President Jason Shilling states below:

“It is not what Albertans deserve and have become accustomed to over the previous decades. Further, it will not serve Alberta’s students in preparing them for an uncertain future or equip them to respond to the economic, social and technological challenges ahead.”

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.

As a society, we need to have full confidence in public education. It’s important to recognize that in certain instances public funds for public education are being undermined.

In Alberta, school enrollment is growing rapidly, classroom environments are under tangible strains, classrooms are lacking human resources to meet the needs of students and teachers while clearly funding is falling short in this province for public education.

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?

The current education funding formula is under serving public education while predictably underfunding education in Alberta.

Through strategic collaboration of all stakeholders, it is possible to advocate and secure sustainable funding based on requests that acknowledge the realistic breakdown and understanding of Alberta’s New Funding Model. One way we can work to convince the province to provide sustainable and adequate long term funding is by highlighting the problems with the Moving Weighted Average Model. The moving weighted average funding model doesn’t work.

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 de-unionized, 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?

Every child has a right to an accessible public education. We all have a stake in public education. In my opinion, privatization creates barriers to equitable public education. On this basis, as school trustee, I will oppose privatization of school services and encourage bringing previously privatized services in-house.

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?

Just as public education is a child’s human right, it is ethical and a human right to offer living wages and to that effect I support living wage initiatives.

As your trustee, you can count on me to support living wages, full time hours where possible, job security and collective bargaining rights for a better and more equitable world. As your Public School Trustee I will advocate and defend the stability of the public sector.

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.

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 measures 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 recognize, this is not an easy time to be a parent or teacher. As a trustee, I will work with the mandates currently in place, as directed by the government and CBE while advocating for supporting children's mental health. In reality, trustees will play a limited role in affecting covid safety mandates, in my opinion a better question to ask a trustee might be how can we solve the challenges covid has caused in classrooms like overcapacity in classrooms, learning gaps and other disruptions.

Overall, I would comment that clearly CBE needs to have more consistent and proactive messaging with parents regarding the pandemic. It can begin by acknowledging the toll on student's mental health (and teachers' mental health) while creating clear boundaries far in advance on what the threshold is for closing schools. We need CBE to provide absolute clarity so that families can be as prepared as possible to plan accordingly in the case of another province wide school closure. I recognize, this is not an easy time to be a parent.