

Julie Kusiek responses
Candidate for Edmonton Public School Trustee Ward F

1. I support the current Edmonton Public School Board position that the draft K-6 curriculum needs to be rewritten. I have signed the Public Education Pledge of the Alberta Teachers' Association. As trustee, I will oppose any piloting or implementation of curriculum that does not uphold the core values of public education. I will advocate that no curriculum changes should hit Edmonton classrooms until concerns raised by parents, educators, and curriculum experts are fully addressed.

Alberta can develop a first rate curriculum that we can be proud of. The way to get to a better curriculum (in all subjects) is to get a process that meaningfully involves curriculum experts, educators, and parents. The process must be transparent and accountable.

On the doorsteps, I'm hearing concerns about the social studies curriculum. As a parent, I share these concerns. I am also hearing some appreciation for aspects of the proposed math curriculum, along with some concerns. In all subjects, we need a curriculum that is developmentally appropriate and based on best practices. We need a curriculum that will help students gain the literacy, numeracy and critical thinking skills they need to be lifelong learners and global citizens in the 21st century.

2. I do not believe the current funding formula for Edmonton Public School is sufficient. There are three things I'd like to do to help address these issues:
 1. Advocate for a "growing district top up." Alberta has moved to the Weighted Moving Average (WMA) to provide funding to school districts, rather than the previous per student model. While this formula has the benefit of funding predictability for school boards, it does a disservice to growing school districts like Edmonton Public. Not all new students coming into Edmonton Public year after year are accounted for in the WMA formula. What I'd like to see Edmonton Public Schools and other growing school districts advocate for is a "growing district top up." This would mean that the province could continue to use the WMA (providing predictability of funding overall) but that school districts with growing enrolment could submit their final student numbers in September. The province would then provide a top up late in the fall to account for the difference in students that would have been used to calculate the WMA and the actual number of new students that are coming in.
 2. Advocate for gaps in grant funding to be reinstated. Grants from the province to school boards were recently reorganized. I will work with EPSB administration and my trustee colleagues to determine where the new gaps are due to the re-organization and work to ensure Edmonton Public Schools gets the funding that's needed to provide excellent, equitable public education.

3. Advocate for more accountable dedicated funding for students with complex learning needs. I will advocate in three ways:
 - a. Program Unit Funding (PUF) and early intervention is a priority and should not receive funding cuts that leave children behind.
 - b. Coded students should have dedicated funding that follows them in their learning journey. Previously, the province calculated funding for students with disabilities or complex learning needs on a per student basis. The province now provides funding based on demographics and not per student. From there, Edmonton Public provides funds to principals to use. In many cases, principals do not have enough funds to meet the needs of coded students, and they must find the funds in other school budget items.

This issue can be partially addressed by having dedicated funding that follows coded students. This will help ensure that coded students have the learning support they need. It will also help meet parents expectations from our public school system, and will help principals plan and budget. To fully address the issue, there must also be sufficient funding in the first place for each of the coded students.

- c. Advocate for provincial funding towards a special fund for Edmonton Public School principals to access (similar to the Equity Fund) for the purpose of serving students with complex learning needs who are not coded but who still require additional learning support.

3. I do not support privatization of school services and infrastructure, including P3s. Students and all Albertans are better served by schools that are publicly built, owned and operated. P3s do not serve the public well in the long run and can lead to increased costs for the public taxpayer. Public education, including its infrastructure, is too important to be left in the hands of private interests.

I have a track record of being a strong advocate for public programs, services and infrastructure. One such example is through the [THRIVE YEG project](#) (2018). I created this project to counter calls for austerity in Edmonton's city budget that would have meant cuts to city programs, services and infrastructure. It worked, and made an impact on how the narrative around the city budget played out. As trustee, I will take a similarly positive but powerful approach to elevating the importance of public education and its related programs, services and infrastructure.

As trustee, I would like to investigate moving the yellow bus service back in-house. I am hearing frustrations from parents about the reliability and consistency of privatized yellow bus service. I believe that an EPSB-owned and operated fleet of yellow buses with unionized drivers will lead to higher quality yellow bus service. This is something I think would address the concerns of many families. As part of the investigation, I would also like to revisit the idea of sharing yellow bus service with Edmonton Catholic School District.

4. I support stable public sector jobs in education. I agree that this means living wages, full time hours (when desired), job security (keeping in mind that the safety and wellbeing of students always comes first) and collective bargaining.

It also means a supportive and respectful workplace. I am hearing that some teachers are exhausted, demoralized, and feel like more and more is being put on their shoulders. They face the daily challenge of keeping students safe in the classroom during COVID-19. They no longer have the prep blocks they used to and are prepping at home in the evenings. They are doing their best to provide the learning environment they expect of themselves, but it's increasingly hard. Teachers and all staff need a supportive work environment so that they can in turn create a great learning environment for students.

As your trustee, I will work with my board colleagues to advocate to the provincial government the importance of public sector jobs to our public education system.

5. I support teachers' right to strike and would oppose attempts by the provincial government to restrict this right. I also support honest negotiations to avoid reaching a point where a strike is the only way teachers can make their concerns heard.

I know how stressful a strike can be to students. I was a grade 12 student when teachers went on strike in 2002. I joined their protests at the Shaw Conference Centre, even though I was anxious about what the strike would mean when it came to preparing for diploma examinations. It was a formative experience and shaped my views on how the right to strike can be a powerful tool. The book, No Shortcuts by Jane McAlevey also shaped my views on how the right to strike can lead to better working conditions for teachers and a better education for students.

The long term pension plans of teachers and other workers under the Local Authorities Pension Plan (LAPP) should be protected. Concerns around being legislated to use Alberta Investment and Management Corporation (AIMCo) as the fund manager and not having representation on the AIMCo board are valid.

6. I support measures to reduce transmission of COVID-19 in our schools. This includes:
 1. Mask mandates
 2. Vaccine mandates for staff, contractors and volunteers coming into schools. I am also open to looking at mandatory vaccinations for students eligible to receive the vaccine in order to attend in person learning.
 3. Lobbying the provincial government to reinstate contact tracing
 4. Lobbying the provincial and federal government for financial support towards ventilation upgrades in public schools
 5. Looking at ways to get portable HEPA filters into classrooms as a short term solution

I have been vocal on the COVID front since the beginning of the pandemic. For example, in March 2021 I initiated a letter writing campaign to protest against the provincial government's potential lifting of public health measures. Over a three day period, over 500 people wrote letters to the Alberta government using the online tool I put out.

If you want a school board trustee with strong leadership on polarizing issues, and who will bring stable leadership to an ever-evolving situation, then I encourage you to look at my website further, including my full blog post on COVID.