

Laura Thibert responses

Candidate for Edmonton Catholic School Trustee Ward 77

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?

Upon the release of the UCP proposed draft curriculum, Edmonton Catholic Schools had performed a thorough review of the UCP draft curriculum, and I reviewed both these documents in detail. In conclusion, I support the division's findings and I do not support the proposed draft curriculum. Let me assure you that the decision of this nature was given the utmost attention by our division's educational experts, leaders and by all Trustees; and are always taken with the best interests of our students as our paramount consideration. As a division, we have engaged our teachers, administration, Council of Elders, and other stakeholders and provided feedback to the government on this very important topic. Furthermore, I support the division's statement to NOT pilot the draft curriculum.

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?

School boards are responsible to allocate funds based on Alberta Education's new funding model announced in 2020. Unfortunately, this formula is based on a three-year rolling average that is predicated on the past student count and does not allocate funding for the current year student enrollment. This faces a significant challenge for school boards that are now forced to further evaluate all areas of our operations. I have a proven record of achievement; having voted to examine the utilization of schools and programs, enhance learning environments, improve operating costs, and develop a continued focus on student success. It is important to demonstrate to the government that as governors of the school system, we are good stewards of resources. We are accountable to the Minister of Education and building a solid foundation based on sound decisions that ensures today's dollars are spent on today's students. This provides our Division with the ammunition needed to advocate for the funds needed to be an excellent place to work and learn.

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?

I do not support the current P3 model of building and maintaining schools. I believe that once the school is completed the maintenance and operation of the school is the responsibility of the school board and to create a learning environment that ensures student success. Unfortunately, the P3 model is the preferred method for the current government to build infrastructure. I have witnessed first-hand the difficulties that come with this funding model. It makes it challenging for our school Division to ensure our schools remain safe and maintained in a timely manner. I believe that allowing school Divisions to maintain their own buildings is the best way to create an environment that is an excellent place to work and learn.

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?

During my time as Trustee for Ward 77, Edmonton Catholic Schools has been named one of Alberta's Top 70 Employers six years in a row. This recognizes Alberta employers that lead their industries in offering exceptional places to work. I have always supported building and enhancing a culture at Edmonton Catholics Schools that treats all employees fairly and that protects all employee rights as outlined in their collective agreement. I remain dedicated to ensuring a fair and equitable work environment that supports all employees who diligently work hard to make sure we have schools and workplaces that are healthy, safe, and welcoming. I will continue to support all our employees by advocating for the resources necessary.

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?

Further to the previous question, I support all employee rights to ensure a fair and equitable place to work. As well, I remain committed to advocating to the provincial government to support the employees' rights to retain control over the strategic investment policy and to administer the Local Authorities Pension Plan in the best interest of those it serves.

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?

Central always in our consideration is the health and safety of our students and staff. The division administration has been careful in preparing our return to school plans that, out of an abundance of caution, exceeds the guidance provided by the Chief Medical Officer of Health for Alberta. This includes mandatory masks protocols, daily health checks, increased cleaning protocols, and implementing the vaccination program. These are challenging circumstances requiring careful deliberations to balance an array of important needs and priorities. I have supported these plans, understanding that it establishes risk mitigation protocols that seem prudent in the circumstances. I continue to diligently monitor developments in the research and in the community. I remain confident given our experience from last year that we can and will pivot quickly to respond to evolving circumstances.