

Locke Spencer responses

Candidate for Lethbridge Public School Trustee

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?

1. Yes, I agree with the calls to redo the curriculum. I do not support the new curriculum; it did not have nearly enough broad and public consultation to justify its adoption.

There were many problems identified by many stakeholders across a broad range of subjects. The vast majority of school divisions rejecting the opportunity to trial the new curriculum speaks volumes.

Over the last decade in Alberta, K-12 curriculum has become highly politicized. We need to get the curriculum out of the election cycle and back into the hands of stakeholders: the public, education and topical experts, parents, teachers, and school divisions. We cannot tear up our curriculum every time someone new gets in office. There are many simple elements of the past few iterations of the curriculum that should be updated that have stalled as political casualties.

Changes to the curriculum need to be more informed by education experts, with an iterative and meaningful public consultation process before being run in smaller trials, finalized, and broadly adopted.

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?

No, I do not believe that the current funding formula is sufficient for my district. The current education funding program in Alberta, first implemented in Fall 2020, prioritizes predictable funding over sufficient funding with a 3-year rolling weighted enrollment average used to establish funding levels. As Lethbridge is seeing high growth, the funding model actually lags our enrollment growth. While such a system can be fine tuned with census and other data to better account for population growth, this is currently not the case. A K-12 Education funding review by Riep, 2021 indicates that Lethbridge School division is down \$183 per student as a result of this model. School boards play an important role in providing local expert knowledge to inform and lobby for their needs. The provincial education funding framework needs to provide sufficient funding for all school divisions while recognizing unique characteristics of each division including urban/rural differences, local poverty levels and other traits which may require consideration in funding of special programs. It is the role of school board trustees to advocate for sufficient funding in general (i.e., base funding and funding outside of the current funding framework), as well as identification and justification of specific funding areas for the school division (i.e., differential, target, support, and capital funding needs). The Lethbridge community has unique opportunities for target and support funding projects, with population growth requiring attention to short-term and long-term capital project needs.

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 will oppose privatization of services and infrastructure, including P3s. I will support the deprivatization of previously privatized services. In my view P3s are an accounting trick for governments to take on more debt without it showing up that way in the financial records. I expect that this ends up costing more than traditional financing in most instances and would rather open and transparent bookkeeping processes be employed. For services, any privatization efficiencies are often made on the backs of underpaid staff and cut corners, with few exceptions. One exception that may require careful consideration is busing. For many years, Lethbridge School Division had a very productive partnership with the city of Lethbridge for busing. This partnership allowed for a more efficient infrastructure program where the city owned and maintained a larger bus fleet and had control of how the two services worked together, with city buses being available for some school routes. This partnership was changed recently and the school busing is currently done under a different provider. This was not a good change as there have been many challenges with the new system. While there may be a way for the school division to own all of its school buses and run this in-house, I would also support a carefully evaluated partnership with the city of Lethbridge for this service (if that option were available).

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?

Yes. I support living wages, all staff having the option for full-time employment where desired, job security, and collective bargaining rights. If we cannot provide these then we cannot provide a sustainable system. I serve as the chief negotiator for the U of L faculty association where we are currently in collective bargaining, and I know how important this process is for other public sectors. I have participated in community town halls speaking up for funding public education and supporting workers rights. I will bring this experience to the school board. Investing in people will pay off in the long term and must be a priority.

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 oppose legislation against staff, cuts to pensions, and restrictions to strike. I was incredibly disappointed by the motion of the province to take over the teachers pension fund (and note that a better agreement has been reached a few weeks ago, but still not as good as it was before the interference). The right to strike should be protected as a freedom of association within chartered human rights in Canada. There are much better tools to create a vibrant workplace for teachers and support staff than the last resort of legislated restrictions to keep people at work. Support and empower people and you will see their best.

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 fully support mask mandates within schools to limit and reduce the spread of COVID-19 in schools. This is not a difficult ask, and it helps to prevent much more serious consequences. We do not fully understand all the risks of COVID-19 in children, especially higher risk groups such as immunocompromised individuals. Masking helps to protect all of us: children, teachers, support staff, families, and the general public. I have children under 12 who do not yet have an approved vaccine that they can get. Masking is one of the few tools that this group has access to.

It would be better if we had an education program that resulted in herd-immunity vaccination levels instead of mandated compliance. I support vaccine mandates for staff and any individuals eligible for vaccination because we need to place the needs and safety of the many, and the most vulnerable, above the wishes of the individual while our community risk is high. The goal of such a mandate is not to fire the uncompliant, but to work with people to provide the best information and educate people on this so that they choose this protection for themselves and their families. There are many activities that are not allowed in schools and people accept this as

part of the social contract. Reducing our chances of carrying extremely infectious materials into our schools is an acceptable requirement.

I recognize that some individuals may have legitimate reasons that a vaccination is not viable for them (e.g., immune-compromised or immune-suppressed due to organ transplant, etc.), in these rare cases I would support alternate arrangements for those unable to be vaccinated, while ensuring that alternatives do not place others in any greater risk. I am in a workplace where vaccination is required.