

Paulette L. Kurylo responses

Candidate for Grande Prairie 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?

A. 1. The proposed K-6 curriculum is a hefty document and I can admit that I am not a professional educator, nor have not read it in its entirety. My comments are based not so much on first-hand knowledge but rather on what I have gleaned from my reading of reports from our Superintendent, the Association of School Boards, and teachers and parents with whom I have spoken.

What I have learned is that the proposed curriculum has met with a great deal of opposition, especially from parents and teachers. It would appear that major concerns have been raised about a focus on memorization of dates and events, especially at lower grade levels, eurocentric studies rather than study of more relevant issues of local and Canadian history and events, the lack of inclusion or expansion of indigenous issues, to name but a few. This feedback makes me concerned that any attempt to push the new curriculum forward without review and revision could be damaging to the education of our children.

I support our Board in its decision to not pilot the program, but rather encourage the Government to proceed with patience and to seek more input from teachers in particular. As part of that feedback to government we have asked our School Administrators and key classroom Teacher volunteers to begin the work of reviewing the proposed curriculum subject by subject and to produce a report which will be submitted to Alberta Education on behalf of the Division.

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?

A. 2. School Boards are the grassroots representatives of our community. It is therefore the local Board of Trustees that have the best understanding of the needs and desires of the local community, and it is our role to ensure we advocate for and implement programs and services to meet those needs. I believe that School Boards should have a strong voice in the direction and distribution of the funding processes in support of public education. Schools must be equipped to provide quality education for all students, of all abilities, and it is the job of the locally elected School Board of Trustees, with the support of their parent and community membership, to advocate strongly for all funding necessary to accomplish their goals.

I do not believe the present funding formulae is adequate for the needs of the present day. Technology access must be supported more, and it appears that the present issue of COVID-19 safety will continue to put extra pressure on provision of safe environments for teaching and learning.

Part of the financial issue all school divisions face is, as a result, at least in part, to the continued apparent desire to expand support for private education. I am an advocate of a strong and effective Public Education system for ALL students first and foremost, and will therefore continue to voice my support in that regard.

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?

A. 3. I do not support the expansion of use of P3s in the provision of new schools. It is the responsibility of our public systems of government to provide the institutions of learning for our children. These should not be limited or restricted in any way by a need to meet private goals for future private gain. It is my belief that individual school divisions can address specific community needs for access to educational or recreational objectives within the Public System alone.

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?

A. 4. I am proud of the working relationship we have with our staff, both professional and non-professional. We have long had excellent communication processes in place to ensure issues that affect the operation of the Division and the working conditions of our employees can be addressed. It is my commitment to public education excellence that leads me to say we must always hire the best candidate for every position and support them to the fullest so they may do their jobs to the highest level possible.

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?

A. 5. I have long been a proponent for the value of organized labor in our Division and throughout the province. I do not support government legislation that reduces the rights of workers or meddles with existing pension plans.

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?

A. 6. Masks are an essential part of our fight against COVID-19, as are Vaccines.

However, the mandate to force individuals to wear masks for the entirety of the day whilst in school, or be vaccinated in order to attend or work in a school is, in my opinion, beyond the scope of the Board.

I do not believe we need to make absolute or polar opposite decisions with regards to these issues. It does not need to be all or nothing. I am more in favor of a compromise whereby masks are worn in group situations such as hallway travel at class exchange, and in common areas, but permitting more freedom in the segregated class unit. I also appreciate and respect the right of parents to refuse vaccination for their children. I believe accommodation can be made for those children and teachers who refuse vaccination that will permit the continuation of a safe learning environment for all.

Our School Division has taken every precaution to provide a safe physical environment for children and staff, and I believe that prudent and respectful use of other measures such as selective masking and distancing will enhance that safe environment.