

Ray Buziak responses

Candidate for Grande Prairie Public School Trustee

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?

I do not support the K-6 draft in its present form nor do I support the process that created it including some of the people involved in the development process. I do not support the imposition of the curriculum in the face of opposition from teachers, curriculum experts and tens of thousands of Albertans. Some dissension and resistance to a new curriculum is to be expected but when it is this extensive and vehement it should signal that the wrong road may have been taken.

Alberta has a high performing school system. It makes sense to update curriculum content so it better addresses the needs of our students and communities; better addresses change in society and moves us toward a preferred future. Dr. Dwayne Donald, University of Alberta professor of education, expert in Indigenous inclusion in the curriculum said "Curriculum is a sacred kind of work because it has to do with the stories that we want to tell our children." Those stories should come from a cross-section of society not from a single ideology.

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?

We have chronic underfunding. Enrolment increases but the teacher complement doesn't keep pace. Classroom complexity increases but support for students with complex learning needs doesn't. The system is hurting. Yes, we need to find efficiencies but we can only squeeze so much out of our people before they feel the pain, too. That's where we are now. Diverting money to privatization is not the answer. It will weaken the system when, in fact, we need a stronger public system. Boards need to make both their success and their needs widely known in ways that say we can do even better if we make specific enhancements to funding and therefore to classroom conditions. There is a tendency for government to use boards to deflect responsibility. There has to be a better way. Boards have to be prepared to own it where necessary or place the responsibility back where

it belongs when the situation warrants it. I would like to work toward an enhanced partnership with government.

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?

Absolutely. I'm committed to the principle of universal access to a free, high-quality, adequately funded public education system. To quote Sir John Ralston Saul:

"As for public education, it is a simile for civilized democracy. ...Any weakening of universal public education can only be a weakening of democracy. ... I believe that there is a profound understanding in our society of the long-standing essential role universal public education plays in making us a civilized democracy."

Public education is an institution that every child should have access to regardless of their socio-economic status, race, creed, colour, ethnicity, culture, sexual identity or any of the other protected grounds listed in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This access should be without fees. Fees, however small, are barriers.

I will absolutely support bringing previously privatized services back in house. Extensive privatization destroys democracy and creates a two-tiered system. We then run the risk of having the public system become a wasteland or dumping ground. That is not in our best interests as a society.

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?

Absolutely. I spent 10 years as chair of our ATA local's teacher welfare and negotiating sub-committees and 9 years as an ATA economic consultant for northwest Alberta. Many of items in your question were the focus of my work over those 19 years. I will bring my experiences in the area to bear on school board decisions.

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?

I joined with your members in lobbying Cessco after their demand to rollback wages and pensions for their workers. This abysmal treatment of their workers was unacceptable to me. As an ATA member I could appreciate the workers' frustration especially after the government unilaterally moved ATRF to Aimco which then promptly lost billions on volatility bets. In my view a pension is a done deal. Once the commitment is made and the money is there it should stay there. The workers have made a long term commitment to their employer and their payback is the pension.

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 don't have a problem with our board making vaccination mandatory in the absence of any such order from the CMOH. Again, this comes down to both our duty of care and to managing the apparent conflict between the individual and the common good. I don't think requiring vaccination is out of line. It is consistent with other conditions of employment such as having to provide a criminal records or vulnerable sectors check.

Masking to me it makes sense. I compare it to smoking. We do not allow smoking in our buildings mainly because second hand smoke is harmful. By comparison when people breathe they can shed the covid virus into the air in much the same way as smoke is spread. If it makes sense that smoking is not allowed in our buildings, it also makes sense to have people wear masks to prevent them from shedding the covid-19 virus into the atmosphere for others to breathe. The virus is more likely to cause a serious outcome in much less time than is second hand smoke, therefore wearing a mask makes sense.