

Saadiq Sumar responses
Candidate for Edmonton Public School Trustee Ward G

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?

We need to ditch the draft. It's regressive, racist, and focused on America instead of Canada. It's also plagiarized. It needs to go. Parents, teachers, and boards all agree on this point, and this is the number one issue I hear when I'm talking to families while knocking on doors in Ward G.

As per our policy information from our website

(https://www.saadiqsumar.ca/ensuring_student_and_staff_success):

"Like parents across the province, Saadiq shares the concern that Alberta's globally admired curriculum is being dismantled by the current provincial government for political gains. Maintaining a top-tier and non-partisan curriculum is key to preparing students for success in their future careers, academic studies, and life goals. As your trustee, Saadiq will work with local and provincial partners (other school boards, the Alberta Teachers' Association, etc.) to prevent the implementation of this outdated and regressive draft curriculum, which would put Edmonton's learners at a disadvantage compared to their national and international peers. Saadiq will also work towards bolstering curriculum content that is representative, engaging, and relevant for 21st-century learners so that EPSB students remain ahead of their peers."

I know that many candidates across the province share my concerns with the draft curriculum. However, it's important for those concerns to turn into action. My campaign team recently had the opportunity to attend the rally for quality curriculum

(<https://www.instagram.com/p/CTw8EmQgbwu/>) and, as your Trustee, I will work hard to stop the draft curriculum from being implemented. We need to pick up where the review left off in 2018 and make sure that the curriculum has as many eyes on it as possible (instead of the handful of partisan "experts" that the government has appointed), including educational professionals - this means bringing in current Alberta teachers, who have mind-bogglingly been left out of this process.

Our students' education shouldn't be used as a political tool by the current government, but should instead reflect the diversity of our province. Alberta has changed, and the curriculum should reflect those changes. Diversity, anti-racism, and reconciliation are some of the pieces I will advocate to be included in a new draft of the 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?

Better funding, whether in the form of per student funding or funding our facilities, is long overdue. I am committed to increasing provincial funding for EPSB, so our students will be set up for success.

It's no secret that EPSB doesn't receive its fair share of funding from the provincial government. Funding levels are essentially frozen while Edmonton's student population continues to grow. This results in less money per EPSB student. The current model forces larger school divisions like EPSB to cover shortfalls with reserve funds, a situation that is unacceptable and unsustainable. I will advocate for equitable funding on a per student basis on a province-wide basis rather than the current model, which adversely impacts growing school divisions. With almost 3,000 new students each school year, I will work to ensure equity and the highest possible level of success for each student.

With the Program Unit Funding (PUF) changes, the government has tipped their hand with respect to inclusive education and students with diverse learning needs. Research shows that early intervention is critical, so PUF reductions push these interventions far too late for some students. I will push for PUF funding to be restored to previous levels and for evidence-based practices and policies at a school board level.

Finally, to ensure EPSB students receive the best education, more classroom spaces are needed, which will lead to smaller classroom sizes, better student learning environments, and less burden on staff. I will advocate for new schools and facilities to better serve the growing number of students in the division.

The existing facilities are aging rapidly and the deferred maintenance bill is starting to add up. The deferred maintenance bill could reach \$1 billion dollars by 2027. EPSB is not unique in this regard (other educational institutions and boards are facing the same issue), but that does not mean that this unpaid bill should continue to be passed down to future generations. I will work to prioritize deferred maintenance projects and secure funding to reduce the deferred maintenance bill for EPSB.

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?

My career as an Engineer has taken me to my current role as a Supervisor, where I work with and manage a team of unionized staff. For all of the work that we do as a company, the first and most important consideration is making sure that the work can be completed in-house. I will bring this same attitude to the school board. The work that can and should be done by our staff should remain with our staff, rather than going to third-party contractors.

While some may find “efficiencies” in contract services, it's important for us to provide compensation commensurate with the work that we are asking for, both in the form of salary

and benefits. Many of our AUPE members have years of experience and their work is highly regarded. We should recognize and reward that high quality of work. If our board doesn't currently have the capacity or expertise to provide required services, we must consider adding resources to our ranks rather than automatically defaulting to contract services.

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?

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?

If our board chooses to underpay employees and not provide them with the right to advocate for better compensation, what lessons are we teaching our students? What values are we instilling in them? Every person should have the right to earn a living wage and live with dignity, regardless of age, gender identity, race, or other factors. In addition, providing stability for our students means that our staff feel and are stable in their places of employment, particularly for our vulnerable students and our complex learners.

Every employee should have the right to advocate for better working conditions without fear of retribution in any form, whether that's being forced to return to work, job loss, or other consequences. Our provincial government is unfortunately taking steps that are turning staff away from our province and our students. I will advocate against any measure that puts our students and, by extension, our staff at risk.

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 measures 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?

Health and safety are of utmost importance to me, both in the context of my career and our schools. The government has effectively abandoned us and left us to govern ourselves with respect to the pandemic. They have not restored much needed tools for our schools like contact tracing and sufficient funding to provide our staff with proper PPE, among others. Masks for all students, regardless of age, should be mandated, to keep our students, staff, and communities safe. Vaccines should not only be mandatory for our students as part of their regular immunization requirements but also for our staff, the only exception being for medical reasons.

For those who oppose mask and vaccine mandates, we need to remind them that this is about the health and safety of every member of the community. Unfortunately, we had our first teenage death due to COVID in our province last week. COVID does not discriminate. It affects us all and we need to show compassion and empathy for our communities by getting people immunized and continue to wear masks until our community is protected. After all, vaccinations and masks in particular serve to protect others.

