

Susan Vukadinovic Responses

Candidate for CBE Trustee Wards 8 and Ward 9

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?

Yes, I do 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 delve into this issue a little more in the detailed version of my platform, which you can find here: <https://www.susanvukadinovic.com/platform>.

So you don't have to go looking for it, I will cut and paste it for you here:

The problem I am going to solve:

In March 2021, the provincial government released a [K-6 draft curriculum](#). Experts have identified [a number of critical flaws](#) in the proposed curriculum, and 59 of 61 school boards across the province have rejected participating in the pilot program for the 2021-22 school year. Parents are concerned that the [flawed](#) curriculum will nevertheless be forced upon our kids in the 2022-23 school year.

How I will know I have succeeded:

I want the MLAs we elected to govern our province to [listen to regular Albertans](#) and shelve the draft K-6 curriculum released in March 2021. I would like to see an independent, full and open rewrite of the draft curriculum. I expect no less than a proper, world-class curriculum that is developmentally and instructionally sound for our kids.

How I am going to solve this:

I assume that UCP MLAs are doing their best to serve Albertans, but if the March 2021 draft K-6 curriculum is what their best looks like right now, it is just not good enough.

Albertans deserve better. Our kids deserve better.

Right now -- after two school years interrupted by pandemic lockdowns -- it is too risky to subject Alberta's children to a flawed, unsound, sub-par curriculum. It is not a risk I am willing to take.

As a Trustee I will reach out to our elected provincial-government representatives and hammer home three key points.

First, getting buy-in for a revised curriculum should have been a relatively straightforward task. Teachers, parents and other stakeholders across the political spectrum all agreed that the curriculum was due for an update. Everyone even largely agreed about which parts of the curriculum needed updating (e.g., science of reading (SOR), consent, financial literacy, coding). *It's not too late for the UCP to turn this unnecessary political controversy into a political win.*

Secondly, the UCP needs to start seeing parents as partners in education. Parents want their elected representatives to listen, to respond, and to be accountable. We all want the new curriculum to be successful, and in order to be successful, it *must* enjoy the broad support of Albertans.

And, finally, I will share with UCP MLAs a lesson that, as a parent, I've shared with my kids: Sometimes it is okay to STOP. Sometimes it is okay to say, "We got this wrong." Taking a step back is not a sign of weakness; it's a sign of maturity and strength.

We need to get this right for the sake of our children and their learning. It matters to me. It matters for our kids.

Next steps for Albertans:

- You can learn more about the too-long history of what should have been a routine curriculum update [here](#).
- You can provide your own feedback on the draft curriculum released March 29, 2021 [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).)

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 the current education funding formula is sufficient for the CBE.

I delve into this issue a little more in two different parts of the detailed version of my platform, which you can find here: <https://www.susanvukadinovic.com/platform>. I cover it in Priority #1 and Priority #3.

So you don't have to go looking for it, I will cut and paste it for you here:

Priority #1: If I am elected to the Board of Trustees for the Calgary Board of Education on October 18th, I will push back against oversized classrooms.

The problem I am going to solve:

- Class sizes have ballooned since [the budget cuts of 2019](#).
- Here is just one of the many examples I'm hearing at people's doors: "There are 31 kids in my daughter's Grade 1 class and 17 of them are learning English as a second language or coded for learning disabilities or other challenges. 31 kids in Grade 1! That's not fair to the kids who have complex needs and it's not fair to my kid either."

How I will know I have succeeded:

I want to see class sizes reduced to bring them in line with the recommendations in the [2003 report from Alberta's Commission on Learning](#):

- 17 students per class from Kindergarten to Grade 3, when kids are learning to read.
- 23 kids per class in Grades 4 to 6, when kids are mastering the art of reading to learn.
- 25 kids per class in Grades 7 to 9, when academic expectations begin to take off.
- 27 kids per class in the crucial high-school years.

How I am going to solve this (Strategy #1 of 2): First, I will demand honesty from the people we elect to represent Albertans in the provincial legislature.

- [The provincial government has cut per-student funding](#), but our elected representatives are trying to claim that this budget cut was actually a budget *increase* by cherry-picking individual budget lines.
- That's not honest. I like honest.
- Here is the truth: Yes, 2020-21 funding has increased, but it is still lower than the funding invested in our kids in 2018-19. In the meantime, the CBE opened three new schools and welcomed around 2,000 additional students.
- The math here isn't complicated: 2,000 more students plus about the same number of teachers equals larger class sizes.
- As a starting point, let's get on the same page about the budget cut. It *is* a cut. Let's call it a cut.

How I am going to solve this (Strategy #2 of 2): Secondly, I will do a better job of communicating the business case for investing in [public education](#).

- When there are 30-plus or even 40-plus kids in a classroom with one teacher, common sense (and research data) tells us that we're shortchanging our kids.
- Cutting funds to public education while announcing funds for other initiatives is a choice. The amount of money the UCP has cut from public education is a drop in the bucket compared to other expenditures announced since 2019.

- Increasing class sizes is particularly shortsighted on the heels of a pandemic that has affected the mental health, physical health and academic progress of school-aged children [in different ways](#).
- Alberta's future prosperity depends on whether we are willing to invest in our kids.

#FundPublicEducation

And here is the second instance in which I talk about how I would work to convince the province to provide sustainable and adequate funding:

Priority #3: I will make the business case for restoring early intervention supports.

The problem I am going to solve:

The provincial government's cuts and restrictions to Program Unit Funding (PUF) are causing irreparable harm to [delayed and disabled children](#) and will increase the economic burden on our society in the future.

How I will know I have succeeded:

I want to see the provincial government reinstate funding for essential developmental therapies and support in a school setting for children with significant challenges affecting their ability to learn or manage school.

How I am going to solve this:

I will do a thorough job of communicating the business case for investing in early intervention therapies:

- When concerns are [identified early](#), studies show that rapid and consistent educational intervention can have a significant positive impact on kids' functional outcomes.
- Without help, their [outcomes are not as good](#), and [the costs to society are higher](#).

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 deunionized, 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?

Yes, I oppose privatization of school services and infrastructure, including Public-Private Partnerships aka P3s.

Yes, I support bringing previously privatized services in-house.

P3s usually drive up costs. In the case of schools they also offload the initial cost from the province and transfer the interest that taxpayers have to pay to the school boards, which in turn reduces what the school boards can spend on maintaining other school buildings and infrastructure owned by the school board. P3s can also result in school boards having less say in how infrastructure is designed and built and managed. I am not positively inclined towards the P3 model.

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 will support CBE employees and my community by ensuring the school board employs staff with living wages, full-time hours where desired, job security, and collective bargaining rights.

I touch on this issue on the detailed version of my platform. So you don't have to go looking for it, I will cut and paste that section here:

Bonus Priority: I will bring back some good, old-fashioned Alberta pride in the CBE.

I will do a better job of sharing with Albertans the true and inspiring story of our efficient, effective, world-class public-education system, and the talented people who are dedicated to our children.

I want to hear people expressing gratitude for the kind souls who are attracted to the teaching profession.

Lately I've heard some people grouching that teachers still have jobs, when so many other Albertans have experienced pay cuts and job losses. I don't really get this race-to-the-bottom mindset. If we were to arbitrarily eliminate teaching jobs and cut teacher salaries (which haven't increased in Alberta since 2011) just to spread the economic pain to more Albertans, we'd end up with even larger class sizes, an even smaller tax base (remember, teachers pay taxes, too), and our economy would suffer an even larger downturn (because teachers are consumers, too).

Recently I received a flyer in my mailbox extolling the benefits of a government-funded infrastructure project that is bringing steady, well-paying jobs to Alberta. Shouldn't we use the same proud language to describe jobs in education as we use to describe jobs in construction?

Teaching children is physically demanding and mentally punishing work that keeps teachers on their feet for most of the day. It's a hands-on profession, not one for paper pushers.

Teachers are the backbone of schools. We can't afford to keep breaking their backs.

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 am inclined to.

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?

Yes, I support the CBE's decision to have both students and staff wear masks at the beginning of this school year. With the recent increasing rise in and high number of COVID cases, it is the prudent decision to ensure safety and some level of certainty for parents and families so that students can return to school and stay in school this year.

In terms of my position towards mask mandates and vaccine mandates going forward, I don't have a pre-determined approach for covid protocols & vaccinations because it is an evolving situation that requires medical knowledge, which school boards as a whole and school board trustees as individuals do not have.

Covid protocols, mask mandates and vaccination policies are ultimately the responsibility of the Government of Alberta, because provincial politicians and bureaucrats have access to expertise and data provided by their staff of health officials and medical experts. School boards do not have a staff of health officials and medical experts.

My focus is on kids and giving every kid access to a top-notch education. I feel I have skills and knowledge to bring in the area of managing our public education system, and not in public health.

I can tell you, however, what I've been hearing so far when I'm out door-knocking....

People in Ward 8 and Ward 9 are telling me that this has been a tough couple of years, full of unprecedented challenges. The uncertainties, loss and isolation of the COVID-10 pandemic and its associated restrictions have disrupted many people's emotional and physical well-being. This has been exacerbated by the constantly evolving public-health guidelines and news stories, which have increased anxiety and fear in many people.

This anxiety and fear has resulted into three overarching trends I'm hearing about from Ward 8 and Ward 9 residents this fall:

- The mood of the public has really turned. Those Calgarians who are vaccinated, the majority, have had it with mask mandates and shutdowns during this fourth wave that are purely being implemented to avoid overwhelming our healthcare system by people who are not yet feeling confident about the vaccines. Many people who are getting in touch with me are mad that decisions being made at the Government of Alberta level (not the CBE level) are allowing the greatest public-health crisis of our lives to drag on far longer than it needs to.
- I am hearing from parents that this 2020-21 school year must be energetic, full-on and without theatre. For the sake of our children's academic and social growth, the coming school year must restore the routine, standards, fun, play, friendship and ambition of Calgary's excellent public education system, at primary and secondary levels alike. Our kids are in school to dream big, work hard and learn well, and prepare for a difficult but brighter tomorrow.
- The vast majority of parents I've met over these past few weeks support the CBE's decision to have both students and staff wear masks at the beginning of this school year. With the recent increasing rise in and high number of COVID cases, it is the prudent decision to ensure safety and some level of certainty for parents and families so that students can return to school and stay in school this year. But the vast majority of parents also agree that once Calgary's vaccination rates reach a rate recommended by health experts, then masks, cohorting, physical distancing and all of the more theatrical elements of the COVID era should be excised from schooling with maximum speed.