

Trisha Estabrooks responses

Candidate for Edmonton Public School Trustee Ward D

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?

The current draft of the K-6 curriculum is not fit to be taught in our classrooms and needs to be rewritten. The errors, omissions, flaws and the significant concerns raised by Indigenous leaders, curriculum experts, educators and school boards need to be addressed. The current draft is not age appropriate and it fails to reflect Alberta's diversity. It is a step backwards and not the up-to-date modern curriculum that this province and its students need. The Board in which I have had the pleasure of serving with, and serving as their Chair for the past two years, has been vocal in our strong opposition to the draft curriculum. We passed a motion calling on the government to delay, revise and rewrite the curriculum based on the overwhelming feedback we received from the people we represent. EPSB is one of the 58 of 61 Alberta School Boards that refused to pilot the draft curriculum. If re-elected, I will continue fighting this regressive and harmful 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?

The funding formula introduced by the current provincial government is not adequate or sustainable. The formula penalizes growing school divisions, such as EPSB, as we are never adequately funded for the actual number of students enrolled in our division. School divisions rely heavily on provincial government funding and using previous years enrollment to determine budget allocations means we have a budget that will not grow with us. Ultimately, this means fewer staff, larger class sizes and fewer supports for students. At a time when we need more support and an increase in investment in public education we are seeing less.

The current provincial government's decision to continue funding private schools is also to the detriment of public education. After I was first elected to the Board of Trustees in 2017, I put forward a motion calling for a defunding of private schools in the province. The motion passed and if re-elected I will continue advocating for public dollars being directed to public education. Alberta is the only province that funds private schools at a rate of 70% of what public schools receive. Defunding private schools could save the province millions of dollars. Those who wish to send their children to private school should absolutely still have that choice, but it's a choice they should have to pay for. The basic premise for defunding private schools is that private schools are not accessible to everyone; they can deny entrance based on faith, income, and ability. A system that limits entrance to students should not receive public dollars that are intended for everyone.

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 am opposed to public private partnerships for building schools. Despite claims that this model can deliver more cost-effective projects, my own research and some of the problems P3 contracts have created for EPSB suggests otherwise. The preferred model of building schools within EPSB is something called Integrated Project Delivery or IPD, which allows community input and feedback throughout the entire process. Several schools within EPSB have been built using this model and are just as cost effective, with a better design than a public private partnership. Unfortunately, school divisions do not have a lot of say whether a school is a P3 or design-build project as the provincial government makes that decision. The current government favours using P3s and while I certainly have reservations about public-private partnerships for schools, it would be irresponsible to reject a funded capital project based simply on the fact that it is a P3. EPSB enrolment continues to grow at about 2 percent annually which means our need for new schools will continue, which also means the next project announced will likely be a P3. As for the second part of the question, I would need further details on what services have been contracted out or privatized in order to answer fully. On the whole, I support keeping services within the umbrella of EPSB and the unions that represent our workers.

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?

Living wages are an important part of re-building a strong economy, as is the overall well-being of workers in all sectors of Alberta’s economy. I am supportive of collective bargaining rights, an employee’s desire for job security and full time hours if desired.

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?

Absolutely.

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?

Masks work, vaccines work and we need both in order to end the global pandemic which has caused so many challenges for students, families and staff. In my opinion, the current Board of Trustees continues to show leadership around COVID protocols in our schools. We passed a motion supporting the continued use of masks, contact tracing and quarantining of close contacts of positive cases. EPSB's re-entry plan went above the provincial measures by mandating masks for all grades in our schools, recognizing that masks are an important part of mitigating the spread of COVID in our schools. School divisions must do all we can to ensure our classrooms are as safe as possible.

Vaccine mandates for staff are one way we could ensure those who cannot be vaccinated, including about 57,000 of our elementary students, are better protected. I continue to believe that staff in our schools are front-line workers and as such a vaccine mandate should also apply to them.