

NEDA ASADI

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1. What is the role of a Public School Board Trustee?

I have summarized the information on the roles and responsibilities of trustees based on what is in the Edmonton Public School Trustee Handbook <https://www.epsb.ca/media/epsb/ourdistrict/policies/TrusteesHandbook-June2017.pdf> and the Alberta School Board Association <http://www.asba.ab.ca/being-a-school-trustee/education-funding/>.

The Edmonton Public School Board of trustee was designed in recognition that education is a community endeavour and requires the engagement of all its citizens. Edmonton Public School board trustees have two main roles: strategic leadership and generative leadership role. In their strategic leadership role, “the school board reviews, revises or drafts the school jurisdiction’s mission, values, vision and goals. This role involves planning and making decisions about resources, programs and services that reflect long term priorities”. In their generative role, a school board trustee engages all educational stakeholders in the “direction-setting and sometimes decision-making” process of the future of education.

Some of the responsibilities of school trustees include:

- Serving as an advocate and steward of public education,
- Setting priorities and policies to provide leadership and overall direction for the District,
- Evaluating the results achieved in the District,
- Reporting the results achieved to its public,
- Serving as a communication bridge between the community and the District, and
- Hiring and evaluating the Superintendent of Schools to ensure accountability to students and the public.

It is important to acknowledge, while trustees can have advocacy role they work as a team and they can’t champion an issue. All matters are voted on as a team, while considering the best interest of community.

2. What do you see as the main issues facing public education today? Of these which is your priority? How will you address that priority?

As society changes, education practices also need to adapt to meet the demands of the changing environment. While I believe our public system is meeting the needs of many students, there are also important concerns that needs to be addressed. Some of these issues include the limited digital and financial literacy education that students are receiving, students’ mental health (including bullying and disciplinary methods), the intense pressure on teachers to meet standardized testing and ranking criteria, over-crowding of students in some areas of the city, and limited resources for educators and schools in general. However, I believe the most pressing issue is the need for teachers to meet the diverse needs of the students in their classrooms.

Classrooms are becoming larger and more diverse, and now, perhaps more than ever, it is crucial to uphold our inclusive educational policies and practices. In order to accomplish this task, we need to enable and empower our educators. This can be achieved through advocacy for more comprehensive pre-service teacher training as well as ensuring in-service teachers have effective learning opportunities. While, teachers have various different training opportunities throughout the year, it is important to ensure the training they have received has been effective. Studies have demonstrated

that efficient and effective professional learning occurs when educators receive 30 to 100 hours of training for 6 to 12 months. Further, researcher asserted that effective professional learning should be “intensive, on-going, [and] connected to practice, and should build strong relationships between teachers” (Darling-Hammond, 2009). We ask a great deal of educators who face increasingly complex classrooms. We therefore must equip them with the tools to address these new challenges.

3. Do you believe that education in Alberta is adequately funded? If you answered “no”, what will you do to advocate for more educational funding?

I believe education is a foundation of any society and the stronger the foundation, the stronger the society. Therefore, education can always use more funding to innovate and to better meet the needs of diverse learners. There are still an unacceptable number of students who are falling through the cracks and cannot keep up with the demands of their schooling due to personal and social issues. These children need additional resources and I will advocate for them.

Proper access to education is the right of every child according to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. However, even if we look at education funding through an economic lens, it is more constructive to meet the needs of those who are struggling during the early years of schooling and throughout their educational journey, than to deal with the consequences of dropping out of school. Further, in order for students graduating from Edmonton Public Schools to be competitive globally, they need to acquire many skills currently not taught in Edmonton Public Schools, such as but not limited to coding and robotics. These new initiatives may also necessitate an increase in funding.

4. What will you do to support the success of FNMI students from K - 12? Please indicate goals and objectives, and also action steps.

I believe support of FNMI students is not possible without true inclusion of the elders, scholars, and communities of FNMI. Only once the education system understands the visions and the needs of these communities can it adequately address FNMI students’ needs. Further, FNMI students must see themselves represented in our schools’ policies, curriculum, teaching, school artifacts, and educational staff. Another important action is ensuring the biases and stereotypes directed towards FNMI students and their families is overcome and eradicated. Another important action step is providing PD opportunities with specific focus on issues related to FNMI students to be taught by elders and indigenous scholars.

5. What is the appropriate level of government funding for private schools? (For comparison, funding of private schools in Canada ranges from 0% in Ontario, to 70% in Alberta.)

I don’t agree with public money being used to fund private schools. Alberta pays the highest amount of taxpayer dollars to private schools as compare to all the other provinces. At the time where students in public schools are faced with limited space and classrooms can benefit from educational assistance it doesn’t seem like the best or most logical approach. Public education system is one of the most valuable asset Canadians have and we need to ensure public schools are strong and can support all of their learners.

6. Do you support the right of students to keep their sexual orientation or gender identity as private information (information that can be shared by teachers only with express consent of the student)?

I pledged to support LGBTQ2 students (<https://www.supportourstudents.ca>). I will absolutely stand by all students (regardless of sexual orientation) to ensure that they not only feel safe and accepted but thrive in our public schools. To that end, I agree with the motion. We cannot and should not accept any form of marginalization of any of our students in our schools.

During my PhD in educational policy studies, I studied about the disproportionate rates of disengagement, homelessness, and suicide among LGBTQ2 students. GSAs, and ensuring that they remain a safe space for students, are one piece of the broader changes to bring inclusive education to our whole schooling system.

7. Do you support inclusion in the classroom? If so, what supports would you consider necessary to make inclusion successful?

I do support inclusion policies and practices. Inclusive practices add to the knowledge and strength of classrooms and schools. However, I am cognizant that while we have relatively comprehensive inclusive educational policies, our practices are still falling behind. Within our education system, differences are usually viewed as deficits. Students still need to fit into a mold that is viewed as a “normal” learner. Within that framework, students’ experiences, talents, and knowledge are devalued and not recognized. Therefore, students cannot maximally benefit from their learning, since knowledge is best created if it is based on their existing knowledge.

Also, I believe there are times that students need to be in specialized or different settings so they can receive the needed attention and alternative curriculum. In my research with refugee learners who have had interrupted or no formal education, our results indicated that students needed training on the language of schooling before they were comfortable and ready to attend regular classrooms and before they could compete with their counterparts who had been attending school throughout their lives. As such, I advocate for inclusive practices, when it is not within the deficit framework, when classrooms are provided with knowledgeable educators and educators assistant (when needed), and when the needed support and resources are in place.