

TRISHA ESTABROOKS

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

A public school board trustee is there to listen, advocate and provide leadership around all issues related to public education. An effective school board trustee serves the families and voters of Edmonton and brings their hopes, concerns, and challenges forward so that their voice can be represented. When people are engaged with their education system, public education is stronger. Our children benefit by having strong, vocal and accountable school board trustees.

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?

There are many issues facing public education and our students. The growth of student enrolment within Edmonton Public schools is fabulous but we need to ensure that there are sufficient dollars to support these new students. Needed supports include the hiring of additional teachers, classroom aides and the construction of new schools to help all students learn and grow. Another issue is ensuring that schools are safe, healthy places for all students regardless of their gender, sexual identity or ethnicity. Gay-Straight Alliances must be supported along with a child's right to join a GSA without their parent's permission. Finally, a top issue for me is the allocation of public dollars for public education. Millions of taxpayer dollars are currently being spent on students who attend private or charter schools. This is unacceptable and if elected I will advocate for a significant decrease in spending, with a plan to eventually defund private schools from the public purse. Alberta needs to join the trend across the country and put a renewed focus and reinvestment of money allocated for private schools into the public system.

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 am encouraged by the current government's decision to fund enrolment growth in Alberta schools and their decision to go ahead with numerous school projects in the Edmonton area. Although I support the reduction of school fees for families in our city I am concerned about possible reduction of school staff to make up for this expense. A strong public education system is one that is well funded and built on the certainty that enrolment growth will continue to be funded. If elected I will advocate that money currently being spent on private schools be allocated to public schools. It's a pretty simple equation: public dollars for public education.

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

This is an important question and one that requires the attention of many people and organizations from our city's strong indigenous community. Success for First Nations, Metis and Inuit students means these students must feel welcome, safe and included at all schools. Edmonton Public is working hard to increase graduation rates, incorporate more FNMI lessons and offer mentorships to FNMI students. This is only happening in some schools, however. I am encouraged that the new school curriculum will include more on indigenous people, in particular the legacy of cultural genocide left in the wake of residential schools. However, I feel that we cannot wait until the curriculum is put in place. Our FNMI students need to see themselves better reflected in classroom learning materials

now. I have made only one promise on the doorstep, and that is to hold a town hall meeting about education issues with the constituents of Ward D if I am elected. Supports for FNMI students will be on the agenda.

Goal: Increase graduation rates among FNMI students

Action: Provide mentorship to students from indigenous leaders and students who have graduated. Lobby provincial and federal governments for further FNMI scholarships for students who graduate from high school.

Goal: Teach inclusive, accurate history of our first nations people in classrooms

Action: Advocate that the current curriculum review stays on track and encourage Albertans to be involved in the curriculum redesign. Additionally, I believe it is important to encourage teachers, school administrators to include FNMI stories, history and culture to students at all grade levels. I believe all school board trustees should attend a course on FNMI history and culture as well as have an in depth understanding of the work and recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Goal: Decrease drop-out rates of FNMI students

Action: One way to support families and to give students a better chance for educational success is to support them from a young age. Full-day kindergarten is an important step in helping children feel welcome and succeed in school. If elected I will push the provincial government to live up to their promise of full-day kindergarten. Additionally, I am encouraged by the success of the aboriginal liaison positions within Edmonton Public schools and will advocate for strengthening and expanding this program.

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.)

As I outlined in a previous answer, public funding belongs in public schools. I support a parent's right to choose where their child is educated, and public schools need to be a strong, sustainable long-term option. Parents can choose to continue sending their children to private schools as tuition rates increase in tandem with government reductions of annual funding for private and charter schools. I believe the amount of funding to private schools should be phased out within five years, with the goal of completely defunding private schools being the end result. I realize this is a politically sensitive issue but it's one that needs addressing given current economic realities within our province as well as the basic tenet of what public education means - access for all.

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 am a strong supporter of Gay-Straight Alliances or GSAs and a student's right to join these clubs without their parent's permission. GSAs are student-led and student-organized clubs that are meant to provide a safe, inclusive environment within the school. The goal of providing a safe space is jeopardized if a child's parent must be informed if they join a GSA. LGBTQ students' voices must be respected, heard and supported within Edmonton Public Schools. I support teachers and trust that many will put the interest and safety of the child first as well as encourage students to discuss how they are feeling with their parents. But no one should need to ask permission to feel safe.

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

Inclusion in the classroom is a basic tenet of public education and as such must be upheld as a core value of Edmonton Public schools. Well supported inclusion involves teacher education, transitional support for students with special needs or disabilities into the school, as well as a coordinated team approach to learning. Classroom supports, such as teacher aides, are essential for the inclusion model's success. Teachers must be well supported and encouraged to plan lessons with inclusion and the needs of all students in mind.