

# JOSEPH LURI

## Contact information

[www.josephluri.com](http://www.josephluri.com); 780-423-9687; Twitter: @JosephLuri; Email: [info@josephluri.com](mailto:info@josephluri.com)

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

Broadly, by legislation, trustees have oversight to operate a school system that meets all the legal requirements of the province with regards to finances, curriculum, infrastructure, and more. This is a large task that needs to be approached with serious commitment.

But for me personally, the role of a trustee is to ensure that every child or youth has the fullest opportunity to be supported to learn and grow and become both a strong healthy individual and a committed member of civil society. A trustee must deeply care about children and community.

In practical terms, a trustee is a representative of all the voters, and more broadly, all the people, of the ward they represent and so their role is to both bring forward in debate the perspectives and ideas of those they have been elected to represent and to take back to those people full information about what the trustees are doing and considering. This same two-way communication that should happen with the residents of the ward should also be happening with all the teachers and staff of the schools within the ward.

Trustees also have a duty to a larger field than their own ward, and must be prepared to share in the responsibility to make the sometimes difficult decisions that relate to the entire school jurisdiction, and beyond that to be strong smart advocates with other orders of government such as the City of Edmonton and the Province of Alberta.

### 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?

Based on my decade working in schools and on listening to a wide range of people, I have identified 16 things I feel are key issues. I am adding this full list at the end of these questions.

But at the top of the list for me is the need to do more for the youngest children and their families. Unless every child is able to make a strong start in life there will be deep consequences for the individuals and broad consequences for the community that will be costly in both human and fiscal terms. And so, I want to work towards such things as better availability of full day kindergarten in more schools, the expansion of a quality pre-kindergarten program, improvements to transportation so young children do not have so much time in travel, earlier and better identification of special needs and then the proper provision of services for children identified.

Many newcomer and Indigenous families are having more children than has been the norm in Edmonton in some past decades and better attention to the growing number of young children in the city is vital.

Most of the actions needed to address this priority involve funding, so this is why EPSB trustees must be dedicated to be an effective advocate for good education with the province. Some of the answers are also in insuring that more training, both at university and in-service, is available for educators to meet these specialized needs well. This will mean working with post-secondary institutions as well.

The starting point for much of this is simply to ensure the general public in Edmonton understand how important these issues are, and to gain their support so that advocacy can be more effective. We need those without children to realize this is a big issue for their lives too.

**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?**

No, I do not believe education is adequately funded. The failure of the provincial government for a long time to plan and invest in adequate infrastructure, both maintaining what exists and building new, is a major problem that has led to overcrowded schools and long travel times. While I believe there is some encouraging progress now, it remains a serious issue. The need for a new senior high school in north Edmonton is one outstanding case in point.

Funding needs to ensure we have enough teachers so class sizes allow for good learning and so teachers are compensated so that they want to make a long-term career commitment to EPSB. Funding needs to ensure the full range of other positions needed for quality education are also in place at adequate levels.

While individual trustees and the EPSB board need a good plan for their own advocacy on funding, it is also essential they provide leadership in integrated lobbying of the province that involves all school jurisdictions and other organizations such as ATA and unions that represent other staff. There will be a provincial election in 2019 and supporters of public education need to have a smart plan in place well before to make quality education a top issue in that election.

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

There are many actions needed to address this important goal. Some of them are similar to actions needed for the success of newcomer students as well, from my experience working in a number of schools with many students from both demographics.

An adequate understanding of the significance of culture is vital, with a focus on seeing how culture in many ways, but especially in understanding of how learning happens, can be a positive aspect of schools and not a “challenge” only. We need to engage in fuller learning as a jurisdiction with experienced FNMI educators and elders to do this and we need to have the flexibility to continue the good work underway in some schools already to integrate learning and culture for FNMI students and their families.

We need to ensure the curriculum takes seriously the action steps of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and does not treat this as a passing issue. The seven sacred teachings of FNMI peoples are also fundamental values of living well for all of us so finding effective ways to integrate them in education has potential to transform how all of us live in civil society. Some of this can be done by EPSB but there is also a need to work with the Province.

A disproportionate percentage of FNMI students come from families living in economic poverty and often struggling with precarious housing that leads frequent moves and so less stability in school. Trustees need to do some work on how they can have a role to reduce poverty as a partner in overall municipal work such as EndPovertyEdmonton. The board also need to address the way to handle the urban migration of Indigenous students from many rural and remote areas of Alberta to Edmonton so they have smooth entry into our schools. And another aspect of the economic reality of many FNMI families that impacts children in particular is that families struggling to pay the rent and feed the family do not have discretionary income for culture and recreation so the school system needs to find ways to compensate for that, since these are important elements of becoming fully human. Finding ways to use school buildings as community hubs more may help with this.

From my conversations with Indigenous and newcomer parents and friends, I think there is great potential for more to be done in bridging and connecting these two populations, and a real interest in this. I think plans could be developed to make some of this possible in the context of schools and educational programming.

I do not believe we currently have an adequate understanding of the systemic issues that may be having an impact on the success of FNMI children and youth and one of my platform issues is the need for more research into this matter of systemic matters that impact some students so we can move beyond just addressing issues on the surface when they are noticed.

**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 do not support public funding of private schools at all. EPSB already has found ways to include within the public system a wide range of schools and programs of choice and I am open to continuing to do this prudently and with full care to avoid elitism or any human rights violation. But government funds should not go to private schools.

This is not just an economic issue. Public schools are an important tool for bringing diverse people and views together to learn from each other and to find the common threads that weave together to make for strong healthy communities. Let's have all our children in good public schools.

**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)?**

Yes, I entirely do, and believe the school board must insist on this. It should be clearly and fully assured through provincial legislation but even if not, it must be the perspective of EPSB. I have signed the pledge of SOS in this regard.

This is an issue of particular importance for some of the students I have worked with from some cultural communities and I know it is a life-and-death matter that must be taken with great seriousness.

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

Both as a human rights and an educational issue I do support inclusion. We all need to learn to live together and appreciate each other and share in the responsibilities we have to each other.

But for schools to commit to inclusion without adequate resources in the sense of specialized staff, equipment, space, and time is not helpful to anyone. Many years ago there were absurd situations when inclusion began to be a feature in the community with ramps located in impossible places, etc. This is a warning of how easily we can do a few token things and then feel we have addressed inclusion.

To be truly inclusive we need to commit to the costs of its practice.

We also need to be sure we take advantage of all the best research and current good practices for every variation of inclusion, as decisions are made about how to enact it. It is not "one size fits all" but rather needs to be designed for a multitude of particular situations.

And we need to understand better the full breadth of inclusion. Most of us think of physical, developmental, or mental differences in this regard, but I feel there needs to be more attention to understanding some of the linguistic and cultural issues that are also part of comprehensive inclusion.

## 16 ideas for Better schools, better student achievement

- Full-day kindergarten more available, to support young families
- Pre-kindergarten services to ensure every young child is ready for successful learning
- More day care & after-school care spaces needed, as well as better coordination with schools
- Every child must feel safe and supported at school- one resource is confidential GSAs
- With rapid population growth, north Edmonton needs a new senior high school
- Programs of choice options need review and enhancement
- School services must ensure no youth is left to fail or “written off”
- Earlier & better identification of special needs-- with proper programs for those identified
- Voice of Edmonton must be strong in provincial curriculum review and revisions
- Schools should be leaders as models of reconciliation with Indigenous families and communities
- Schools support growth of civic engagement by students
- Poverty & school success are linked-- school board needs to work with EndPovertyEdmonton
- Identify & address systemic barriers that work against underprivileged populations
- Edmonton teachers must reflect cultural diversity, & all teachers need cultural competency skills
- Funding is vital-- school board must be strong voice advocating with province
- Schools are important neighbourhood resources-- more can be done to make them activity hubs