

SAIRA WAGNER

Contact information

Website: www.sairawagner.ca; Facebook & Twitter: @SairaforWardi; Email: campaign@sairawagner.ca

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

The role of a Trustee is to be an advocate for schools on behalf of students, parents, teachers, and support staff. Trustees decide on what education policies to implement so that students are reaching their highest potential and are equipped with the necessary skills to be valued members in our society. Also, as Trustees are responsible for electing the superintendent of our schools, it is their duty to ensure that good and effective leadership is in place.

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?

Some of the key issues I think we need to address today are matters regarding student learning disabilities, minority group challenges (e.g. sexual and gender minorities, etc.), and classroom space. Of these three issues, I think we need to concentrate most of our efforts on the lack of infrastructure in the face of a growing population. Making classrooms bigger is definitely not a solution I would support. Rather, we need to steer the provincial government to provide more school buildings. Building new schools comes at a steep price however; I would argue there is an opportunity to save infrastructure costs by amalgamating under-utilized schools in older neighbourhoods and building new infrastructure in growing or young neighbourhoods. I would also advocate for purpose-built schools that will adapt as the population ages to meet future needs, such as an elementary school that could transition into a junior high with a partial retrofit. We need to be thinking creatively and planning a generation ahead to be able to adapt.

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. We need to be more innovative and sustainable when it comes to financing education. The “per-student” formula is not adequate enough to provide all schools with the ability to service the differing needs of students. Parents have designated schools for their kids but, what if their school cannot provide them certain learning supports? The student, in the end, suffers and I do not find this acceptable. Other than reviewing the formula itself, so that there is fair distribution; I would advocate for creating operational efficiencies (i.e. can we save on licensing costs using Google versus Microsoft?) and reducing duplication of services. I would also speak to exploring other revenue streams so school funding is not staggering during a recession. Financing accredited private schools is one of the largest issues we need to consider today. I think we need to start phasing out this distribution as it simply does not make logical sense to fund a school that is not open to every student—especially when our public schools are in dire need of this money. I would rather see this money put into staff professional development or a lunch program.

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

One of the serious challenges faced by FNMI students is the negative stereotypes of Indigenous people. These biases and prejudices prevent FNMI students from developing confidence and feeling connected to our schools. If we foster a cultural connection in schools, we can bring more awareness and an empathic lens towards indigenous people and their meaningful contributions. We can begin in the classroom and formally recognize that we all sit on Treaty 6 territory. Edmonton school buildings

should all carry the Treaty 6 flag. Much of what can be changed is the curriculum itself. History and social lessons should include the history of first contact, colonialism, the residential school system, the signing of the Treaty, and all factual historical evidence that shows how Canada came to be (relayed in an age-appropriate context). I also think we should support teachers through FNMI courses and engagement opportunities so they can have good knowledge themselves and then they can set the tone in the classroom appropriately. Children are malleable and when you teach them empathy towards one culture, it extends toward other cultures as well.

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 mentioned above in question (3), government funding for private schools should be 0%, just like it is Ontario. We need more stability in our public education system and we cannot be innovative and sustainable if we keep handing out our money to the private sector.

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 do support this right. The evidence shows that supporting students who are gender and sexual minorities, in age-appropriate peer support groups, helps improve mental health outcomes and reduces self-harm incidents. The law is clear on this and children have to be protected. Of course, part of GSAs/QSAs includes encouraging conversations, at the appropriate times with trusted adults, but not all children are so fortunate. When a child is more secure in their ability to judge when and how to have this conversation with a parent, it is a win-win. But for the children who lack adequate supports at home, we need to affirm this right for their safety.

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

Students perform better academically and socially when they share the classroom with their peers. One of my platform initiatives advocates for inclusive education and I believe we need to support the diverse learning challenges faced by students. To make inclusion successful, teachers and educational assistants need to be supported through professional development and training. Additionally, instruction needs to be designed collaboratively between teachers and a range of specialists such as psychologists, special education teachers, nurses, occupational therapists, and speech therapists. This collaboration will enable teachers to form effective teaching methods that cater to different learning abilities. Once we shift the environment, attitudes and expectations, all students can perform and learn better in school.