

Deborah Forbes - Medicine Hat Public School Board

Education Priorities

1. What specific steps would you advocate to improve the quality of education?

As a whole school district, Medicine Hat School District #76 is working on improved instruction. We are working on instructional intelligences and collaborative learning models to help all of our students have successful school experiences. This is a direction we should continue to follow to improve education for all learners.

2. What are the main directions we need to take to develop the full potential of all students?

The inclusive classroom with supports for children with special needs/special rights and at the same time, because we all learn differently, differentiated instruction so that students can learn in ways that they learn best.

3. Please indicate if you strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree or have no opinion on the following statements

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	No opinion
Schools currently have enough specialized staff and resources to develop the full potential of all students.		X			
Increased class sizes will hurt the high school completion rate.				X	
The board should provide support for community schools rather than expanding alternative programs.					X
The school board should make sure that students with special needs should be provided additional supports.				X	
School boards should work with the provincial government to assure access to early childhood education and quality before and after school care programs.				X	
School boards should advocate for the Alberta government to fully fund junior kindergarten and full-day kindergarten as recommended by the Alberta Commission on Learning.				X	
School boards should advocate for the Learning Commission recommendation on class sizes at all grade levels.				X	
School boards should advocate for renewed emphasis on the arts, trades and language learning in their schools.				X	

School boards should advocate for appropriate programs and supports for ESL students.

X

Please comment on any of the above statements: Regarding alternative programs, one would have to know the nature of the proposed alternative program to know whether or not it would be filling a vital need in a school district, at any given time, before one could make a decision on this. Regarding high school completion and class size, if class sizes continue to increase, it could have a deleterious affect on high school completion. There are, however, many factors that contribute to high school completion or lack thereof.

The Roles of the Trustee

1. What are the most important changes that need to be made regarding the role of school boards in Alberta?

School boards need greater autonomy to make decisions that make sense in their communities.

2. How can the school board and you as trustee most effectively influence the financial and policy decisions made by the provincial ministry of education?

By helping the provincial powers that be understand the effects of their decisions at a local level. Keep in contact with MLAs, minister of education, and the premier by phone, email, letter and visits. Advocate for strengthening public education in every possible forum.

3. Please indicate if you strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree or have no opinion on the following statements

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	No opinion
A trustee must be a team player and always defend the decisions of the board, even if the trustee disagrees with those decisions.			X		
All business of the board should be dealt with in open public sessions except when the board is required to protect the privacy of employees or students.			X		
Trustees should actively consult with constituents and school councils on important policy matters.			X		
At times, school boards need to take more active public stands on education issues, even if it means being critical of the provincial government.			X		
The provincial government has seriously undermined the power and authority of trustees and school boards.			X		

Please comment on any of the above statements: Regarding being a team player - vigorous debate should happen at the Board table in public. One should seek to persuade other trustees of a point of view that has merit. Once a decision has been made at the Board table, trustees should endeavor to support the decision of

the Board. It is the Board that makes decisions, not individual trustees. If an individual trustee is asked by the media if she/he supported a particular decision, the trustee should be free to say so and clearly communicate the reasons behind the position. Then it is the responsibility of the trustee to get behind the Board decision and make it work as well as possible.

Education Funding

1. In light of the current funding situation, what strategies should the board use to meet the needs of students and the community?

At a local level, we are doing everything we can to create equity for students with the money we have available to us. Class sizes have unfortunately increased marginally and we have dipped into reserves.

2. What changes respecting the funding of education would you advocate for?

Stable, adequate funding that is on at least a three year cycle. Board are mandated by the provincial government to create three year plans with no idea of what funding will be. This is a waste of energy. Education, along with health, should be the provinces highest priorities for funding in real 21st century dollars.

3. Please indicate if you strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree or have no opinion on the following statements

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	No opinion
Education is adequately funded. School boards can live within their means by "cutting fat".		X			
If a school board cannot balance its budget without harmful cuts to education programs, it should be prepared to run a deficit.				X	
Provincial funding for building and maintaining schools is adequate.				X	
Provincial funding should be sufficient to cover increases to teacher and staff contracts.				X	

Please comment on any of the above statements: Regarding running deficits - Boards are, by law, not allowed to run deficits without a plan for repaying them. If the provincial government continued to cut funding to the degree it has been doing, it will not be very long before a deficit would be inevitable. Regarding funding salaries and benefits, in the last two rounds of contract negotiations, Boards have not set wages; this has been a provincial decision. If the provinces decides on salaries, it should have to fund them.

Privatization and Commercialization

1. Should the provincial government continue to use Public Private Partnerships (P3s) for building new schools, what guidelines would you propose be placed on P3 contracts?

P3 partnerships seem to be a experiment that is failing, so no.

2. What limitations, if any, should the school board place on the involvement of private firms in schools?

Boards should cultivate good relationships with local business and industry. They are part of our larger learning community. Arrangements with private firms that are dependent on taking decision making out of the hands of Boards would not be in the best interests of public education.

3. Please indicate if you strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree or have no opinion on the following statements

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	No opinion
Private sector businesses can operate schools more cheaply and efficiently and should be allowed to do so.	X				
The financing, construction and maintenance of a school should be undertaken as a public private partnership.		X			
Parents should be expected to contribute towards the cost of their children's education by paying school fees and fundraising.	X				
School boards should ban commercial advertising in schools.				X	
Students should be provided with all necessary books and learning materials at no cost.				X	
The public interest is best served by schools that are publicly owned and operated.				X	
To address funding shortfalls, schools should be allowed to have corporate sponsors, including naming rights.	X				

Please comment on any of the above statements: If Alberta is going to continue to have a strong, vital public education system, it should be publicly funded. Education is a 'common good.' All Albertans benefit from having an educated population grounded in good citizenship. We are only as strong as our weakest link so we have to work on making every child as strong as she/he can be without regard for parental income. Every child deserves a best chance for a positive future.

School Infrastructure

1. What reasons, if any, might you vote for the closure of a school?

If a neighborhood has changed to the point that there are no longer local children, if the school district has more student places than students, if no anticipated future use is anticipated, sad but true, a school will have to be closed. If a Board is maintaining a school without children, it is taking money from other children in the district. These comments hold true for urban areas. It is more complicated in rural areas in which increase in travel distances could be so great as to be unreasonable for children.

2. Please indicate if you strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree or have no opinion on the following statements

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	No opinion
Additional government funding should be provided to address the infrastructure deficit.			X		
Community schools with small enrolments should be closed so that larger schools can offer more programs.					X
The school board should work with the province to provide wrap around services in schools.				X	
Some schools should be closed so that the province will build new schools in new neighbourhoods.					X
Schools are a part of the community and should be open to other community activities.				X	
Boards should advocate for changing the province's school utilization formula to account for space used in after school care and other community uses.				X	

Please comment on any of the above statements: Schools should be community centers. The 'no opinion' answers to the school closure/new building questions are there because they are not simple questions. Too many factors have to be taken into consideration when considering these.