

# Malik Amery– Ward 12 -14 – Calgary Board of Education

## Education Priorities

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

1) Class Sizes, Composition and Education Specialists available in all schools. Currently the CBE's Resource Allocation Method (RAM), allocates resources to safeguard class sizes only within K – Grade 3, inherently creating ballooning classroom sizes in the vulnerable Grade 4 – Grade 12. This is a consequence of erratic provincial funding, compounded severely by a Trustee Board which lacks the financial expertise and foresight necessary to effectively allocate the limited financial resources equitably and accurately. As an additional consequence of the overall inadequate provincial funding and budgetary mismanagement of the Trustees, students with special needs have unfortunately bared the burden of underfunding and misdirected resources. Educators must be provided with adequate preparation time in order to prepare, adapt and modify lesson plans and materials to ensure that all students learning needs are fulfilled and in particular those students with special needs. The misallocation of resources and irresponsible funding has contributed to the overall demise of Education Specialists throughout the public school system. These specialists, inclusive of teacher-librarians, councilors, ESL (ELL) teachers, physical education teachers, and learning assistance teachers (to name a few), are an imperative part of the education process. Ideally, every public school should have each of the aforementioned specialist educators readily available. It is essential that resources are provided and allocated to ensure every school has a set minimum standard of Education Specialists available at every public school. The implications of inadequate classroom funding are not only immediately evident on the student, but the long-term implications on the economy and society are immeasurable and alarming.

2) Effective, Authentic and Personalized Student Assessment; incorporating both quantitative grading and qualitative personalized feedback. Proposed report card changes lacks critical information necessary to convey the academic achievements of the students and indisputably fails to serve as a depiction of their overall academic standing. More importantly, the elimination of the personalized teacher commentary, further inhibit the parents and students understanding of how they are progressing as this qualitative specific/individualized commentary is fundamental in assessing how their children are doing and their overall strengths and weaknesses. It's an "emerging" problem!!! Teachers not only must be given the opportunity to provide in depth quantitative and qualitative feedback (via report cards); a balance between instruction time and student assessment must be clearly defined to afford educators with the opportunity to provide immediate and continuous evaluation of students to ensure the education system is responding to individual student needs and provide educators with the opportunity to modify teaching strategies if the need arises.

3) Enhancements in educational technology, inclusive of investments in the overall learning environment which now incorporate areas focused on fostering critical thinking and providing the medium necessary for students to learn how to work collaboratively. These are deficiencies prevalent in almost all existing schools, with only the few (limited) new schools recently constructed and/or currently proposed incorporating new technologies and working spaces such as breakout rooms and media centers into the student education environment. The public school system is currently plagued by a maintenance deficit of \$921 MILLION; which should be denoted as conservative given that this would not include the foresight necessary to allocate additional capital to remedy the technology and learning environment "deficit" which is alarmingly prevalent and quickly growing. A greater focus on educational research (additional provincial resources and private funding), in particular significant due diligence must be conducted prior to the adoption of new technologies and school configurations in order to ensure thoughtful consideration has been given to the proposed innovations and that the "return on investment" with respect to student educational enhancement is evident and supportable. This process commences with the continuous engagement of the principal stakeholders i.e. the students, parents, educators, and community.

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

The re-evaluation of the functionality and fundamentals within the classroom themselves is paramount to attaining the full potential of all students, primarily addressing classroom sizes which continue to grow across the city. Not only does this have significant consequences on the quality of education received, but also accessibility of these learners; especially those with special needs or those who require ESL instruction), to educators and support personnel. Concurrently, the CBE must ensure that educators have continuous access to professional development programs. These programs must be aimed exclusively at fostering innovation pertaining to their teaching approach, identifying the needs of students and to provide educators with the necessary skill set needed to work with students with special needs and those which require ESL instruction. Operating budgets must be realigned to provide funding necessary to address the priorities pertaining to reducing classroom sizes, access to early childhood education, providing professional development programs to educators, readily available student alternative programs aimed exclusively at fostering professional growth (i.e. Engineering, Arts, and Music), addressing the individualistic needs of students and ensuring the implementation of technology in the education process.

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

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

## 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?

Fostering of the autonomy of independent school boards, ultimately enhancing their ability to respond to local concerns and address local needs. Unambiguously, reinstatement of the school boards authority to access some portion of the provincial tax base, systematically allowing them to raise funds from their communities to support local priorities and bridge funding shortfalls; is a change that must continuously be pursued. In addition, legislation should be explored which would enable school boards to have the authority to pass bylaws which would allow them to collect education development charges on new land developments under certain circumstances which must be unconditionally directed to new school sites. These changes in legislation will only be accomplished if Trustees work to organize and mobilize the principal stakeholders; advocating in unison unconditionally.

### 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?

The most pertinent way to influence the financial and policy decisions of the Alberta Government is through continuous communication, unwavering stakeholder engagement, collaboration between all interested parties, and lobbying. A successful lobby group requires a strong leader with the skill set necessary to work collaboratively with the principal stakeholders, to derive a common voice, with common ideologies and a common mandate. This leadership role is the primary responsibility of the elected Trustee, who should work with all stakeholders to gather statistics which convey the direct consequences of inadequate financial decisions and misdirected legislative policies on the education system. In addition, it is the Trustees primary responsibility to nourish the relationship with the Provincial Government and in particular the Minister of Education, in order to ensure that the concerns, issues, needs and ideologies of the principal stakeholders are not only conveyed but more importantly understood and addressed.

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

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>No opinion</b>
A trustee must be a team player and always defend the decisions of the board, even if the trustee disagrees with those decisions.	<b>X</b>				
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.				<b>X</b>	
Trustees should actively consult with constituents and school councils on important policy matters.				<b>X</b>	
At times, school boards need to take more active public stands on education issues, even if it means being critical of the provincial government.				<b>X</b>	
The provincial government has seriously undermined the				<b>X</b>	

---

power and authority of trustees and school boards.

---

*Please comment on any of the above statements:*

## **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?**

It is the responsibility of the Trustee to ensure that the limited financial resources are allocated as fairly and efficiently as possible. School Boards and in particular the Trustee, must work very closely with the students, educators, community members and government to ensure their concerns are conveyed, understood and adequately addressed. The funding formulae which the Province employs must be aligned with the multi-year strategic plan (CBE's Three Year Education Plan and Inspiring Education). It is imperative that any strategy employed to meet the infrastructure needs of the City, must reflect the boom and bust cyclical elements of the Alberta economy. Long-term sustainable provincial funding must be geared towards both the short-term prevalent issues and the long-term strategic plan of the school board. In times of prosperity, the provincial government must employ foresight and invest in developing and enhancing the education system. In flourishing economic conditions, the opportunity is also prevalent to advance the education system and ensure that it remains aligned with the long-term strategic plan of the government and school boards. Surplus funds generated in prosperous times should be mandated to be used for future educational initiatives; not to bridge operational deficits stemming from provincial funding shortfalls. To bridge provincial funding shortfalls the school board should explore new mechanisms to generate sustainable long-term revenues; seek budgetary efficiencies by reducing backstage administrative staffing; re-evaluate Administrative and Trustee salaries, relentlessly lobby for school board authority to access a portion of the provincial tax base, and seek authorization from the Minister of Education to borrow responsibly, essentially deficit financing in the near term to safeguard the learning environment. Although borrowing comes at a cost, the overall costs incurred from borrowing (interest rates) are reasonable; however the consequences of not borrowing would be detrimental to the educational success of today's students and would ultimately derail the long-term strategic priorities of the school board. Lastly, supplemental means of revenue generation should be explored such as endowment funds or education lotteries (equivalent to the Health Trust lotteries). It is irresponsible to cut educators and funding directed into the classroom and towards students with special needs as a means of bridging budgetary shortfalls created by the province and the misallocation of scarce resources by Trustees.

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

An adequate funding model for the public education system is one which is geared towards both the short-term and long-term objectives and priorities of the CBE, its three year capital plan, and the priorities denoted within Inspiring Education. The funding mythology should also be re-evaluated to enhance the transparency of the derivation of allotted funding per student, the RAM allocation criterion and funding allocated to special needs children. It is imperative that the funding model is sustainable, secure and employs foresight; allowing the school board to address today's prevalent needs, while providing it with the opportunity to plan for the future. Given the cyclical nature of the Alberta economy, in times of prosperity, the provincial government must be proactive in providing and developing the apparent needs of the education system. In lean years, the provincial government must stop short-changing the education system by continuously cutting the education systems primary revenue stream, the mill rate. I would also advocate for the reinstatement of the school boards authority to access some portion of the provincial tax base, allowing them to raise funds from their communities to support local priorities and bridge funding shortfalls. I would also explore the implementation

of bylaws which facilitate the school boards ability to implement development levies on subdivision developments, with funds direct exclusively towards the construction of new schools. If the provincial government cannot provide sustainable long-term funding, supplemental revenue generation mechanisms such as endowment funds and education lotteries should also be explored.

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

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

*Please comment on any of the above statements:*

**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?**

I would endorse the use of Public-Private partnerships to address the infrastructure deficiencies plaguing new communities as long as they are high quality, sustainable, and accountable public infrastructure. They must lower and/or avoid additional public debt. The formulation of the Public Private Partnership relationship must remain transparent, with negotiations and final terms of Public-Private deals open to public scrutiny. Public-Private partnership contract duration is not excessively long in duration (allowing for Municipality/School Board flexibility). P3 partnerships must also deliver capital projects faster (major issue in deep south Calgary); improve cost effectiveness (ensuring that they are getting the most for every dollar spent); and the financial information required to evaluate P3 proposals must be available for public scrutiny.

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

It is imperative that limitations are put in place to not only restrict but also manage involvement of private organizations in schools. While corporate sponsorship already serves as an additional revenue generating mechanism for most public schools, the amount, type and degree of sponsorship must be monitored at the school board level. Organizations whose product offerings focus on obesity and alcohol (such as McDonalds and Molson), would contribute significant financial resources to schools however would not be an appropriate fit. Involvement of private enterprise in the overall financing model of public education can often inadvertently create issues of inequality between schools; creating variances in program offerings, accessibility to

technology and equipment between schools. Long-term sustainable funding is another prevalent issue associated with private enterprise funding arrangements, as these sources often do not make commitments to provide financial resources over any extended period, particularly in times of economic instability. As this type of funding would ultimately serve as a stopgap to provincial funding shortfalls, which more often than not occur in times of economic downturns; accessibility and sustainability of this funding mechanism may not be relied upon. There certainly is a place and opportunity for private organizations (and post secondary institutions) to get involved within the public school system. It is imperative that the school boards attentively and continuously monitor the implications of the private enterprise involvement and must ensure the benefit of such involvement remains significantly skewed to the students and that this involvement is distributed in an equitable and sustainable way.

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

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

*Please comment on any of the above statements:*

## **School Infrastructure**

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

The implications and consequences of school closures reaches far beyond the obvious (and devastating) impact on the children and parents. A closure of a school has a direct impact on the ALL principal stakeholders, but

also negative externalities on the community are also prevalent. Community moral, engagement, rejuvenation and property values are all negatively impacted when a school is closed down. The closure of any school depicts nothing but a short-sighted perspective. I would seek alternative uses for the facility to sustain its operation as the mature community rejuvenates. I would also explore the incorporation of alternative programs to draw additional attendance. I would also investigate the possible sub-lease of a particular portion of the school (assuming a partition could be completed at a reasonable cost), to perhaps a Charter School, allowing the facility to remain open. Lastly, in a worst case scenario, I would investigate the removal of certain programs (or class offerings) to mitigate the budgetary concerns. Any such removal would require constant reassessment to ensure that demand has not resurrected. Simply put, school closures are NOT an option for me, as they depict a lack of foresight.

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

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

*Please comment on any of the above statements:*