

## Bridget Stirling – Ward E – Edmonton Public School District

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

Reducing class sizes so that students get the instructional time they need. Improving equity for students with special needs, ELL, FNMI, and other students who need additional supports to reach their full potential. Ensuring teachers and other staff have the supports and ongoing professional development they need to excel in their roles and that schools have the resources and staff to support students' success. Supporting early childhood learning programs and early intervention for children who are at risk of falling behind. Developing initiatives to support high school completion including developing supports between youth and adults in schools and a transition support initiative for students entering grade 10. Continuing current efforts on anti-bullying initiatives and policies and looking for ways that we can do even better. Continuing policy review and modernization to ensure that our policies as a board are up to date and reflect the current needs and realities of our district.

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

Class size caps and smaller class sizes. Predictable, sustainable, and adequate funding to ensure schools have the resources to support learning. Focusing on inclusive education and school diversity to ensure that all students are able to achieve their full potential. Ensuring children have needed supports early. Sustained efforts beginning in early childhood and primary grades and carrying through to high school to help students succeed and increase completion rates.

### 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.	<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-				<b>X</b>	

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day kindergarten as recommended by the Alberta Commission on Learning.

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School boards should advocate for the Learning Commission recommendation on class sizes at all grade levels.

**X**

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School boards should advocate for renewed emphasis on the arts, trades and language learning in their schools.

**X**

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

**X**

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*Please comment on any of the above statements:* I believe we can support both alternative programs and community schools and that alternative programs can help smaller community schools thrive while also alleviating size pressures on schools with capacity issues. I would like to see full-day kindergarten and more focus on the arts, trades, and languages, but we need the funding support to make these programs happen while ensuring that our current programs do not suffer cuts as a result.

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

School boards must be democratic and accountable to their constituents. As such, increased autonomy is important to preserve the democratic nature of our elected boards. The granting of natural persons powers to the boards will increase our ability to act as we believe is best for our districts; however, recent actions such as imposed settlements erode the ability of boards to engage in activities such as collective bargaining and undermine the independence of the board as an elected body.

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**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?**

Our role must be one of advocacy for public education funding. We do not always need to be adversarial-- there is value in relationship building and collaboration, and when possible, I believe we work together to find solutions. However, my role as a trustee will always be to speak first for the needs of our students, their families, our staff, and the communities we serve.

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**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					<b>X</b>

public sessions except when the board is required to protect the privacy of employees or students.

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:* Trustees may disagree, but once the board reaches a decision, launching a public feud undermines the board's efforts and creates divisions that impede the ability to work together. We must be respectful in our disagreements and also respect the democratic nature of the board structure. While we may do research and discuss issues outside of public meetings, our debates and rationale must be made clear to the public and should happen in a transparent and open way. Board business should be conducted in public as much as possible.

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

The board should be advocating for predictable, sustainable, and adequate funding as was promised by our government in the last provincial election. Additionally, we must look to best practices within EPSB and from other jurisdictions as well as research evidence to look for ways to do better with the funding we have. We can also consider working with community groups, city council, and non-profit organizations to support programming. However, I do not support corporate sponsorships or other forms of corporatization of our schools. While there is a role for our business community to play in supporting schools, we need to be conscious of the influences we are allowing in our classrooms.

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

We need predictability. Last-minute cuts mean we are forced to make difficult decisions quickly and result in situations we saw earlier this year such as large numbers of layoffs and the elimination of programs. We also need to see adequate and sustainable funding--education is worth the investment.

**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				X	

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harmful cuts to education programs, it should be prepared to run a deficit.

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:* I believe that deficits should be a last resort and that provincial funding needs to be increased so that deficit situations do not occur; however, boards should have the ability to run a deficit if there is no other choice and essential programs are under threat of being cut.

**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 strongly disagree with the use of P3s for school construction. If the province continues using this model for construction, contracts must be strictly scrutinized to ensure that facilities will meet our needs, and the board must have the ultimate decision making power over that facility, rather than the corporation. Responsibility for repairs and maintenance is also a critical issue; we need to ensure that the jobs of school board staff such as maintenance and custodial workers are protected and that repair and maintenance responsibility is made clear in contracts. We must also ensure that we do not experience situations such as those seen in Nova Scotia, where buildings were plagued with problems and permission was needed for any changes including hanging posters on walls. P3 construction means relinquishing considerable control over our buildings and does not demonstrably save money (and in many cases appears to cost more in the long term).

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

We need strict controls on the involvement of private firms in schools. While some forms of involvement from the business community are normal and acceptable, sponsorship of facilities (particularly including naming rights), installation of branded signage, corporate-sponsored learning materials, and other similar kinds of involvement are unacceptable, as is the contracting out of services such as custodial and maintenance work provided currently by EPSB employees.

**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:* Because of the current funding situation, many schools, students, and families are fundraising to bring in revenues. In an ideal situation where schools are properly funded, I support fundraising and fees only in limited situations; an example might be an international band trip to participate in a competition.

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

If we had a facility that was aging to the point that it was no longer sustainable and it would be better to close the facility and move to a newer, more appropriate building, I would consider closure. I would also support school consolidation in limited circumstances (for example, two small schools in close proximity where building a new facility would benefit the community and consolidation would not create a barrier for family or student participation). Otherwise, I would rarely vote for school closure--we have seen the rebound in numbers in many schools that were on the 2010 sector review and a decrease in utilization in other, newer schools as the result of neighbourhood generation cycles. Additionally, school closures in the past have not resulted in new school construction by the province. I would prefer to find ways to use spaces in alternative ways and find ways to attract families to existing schools. We do not need to set up opposition between established communities and new neighbourhoods—we need to join together to advocate for adequate funding so that families in all parts of the city can have schools in their communities.

### 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				<b>X</b>	

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provide wrap around services in schools.

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Some schools should be closed so that the province will build new schools in new neighbourhoods.

**X**

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Schools are a part of the community and should be open to other community activities.

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**X**

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Boards should advocate for changing the province's school utilization formula to account for space used in after school care and other community uses.

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**X**

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*Please comment on any of the above statements:* Historically, school closures in Edmonton have not resulted in equivalent new school construction. Closing a school offers no guarantee that we will see a replacement built.