

Alberta United Conservative Party (UCP) Leadership Candidate Questionnaire On Education



Dear UCP Leadership Candidates Jeff Callaway, Brian Jean, Jason Kenney and Doug Schweitzer:

Parents for Choice in Education (PCE) believes all legislation and policies impacting the education of children in the province should uphold the authority of parents as the primary caregivers and educators of their children.

Parental involvement and authority must be respected at every level – from procedures at local schools, to school board policies and administrative regulations, as well as provincial legislation.

As a candidate for the upcoming UCP leadership, PCE asks that you complete this candidacy survey so our membership can gain an understanding of your commitment to actively defend school choice, school autonomy, and parental primacy as caregivers and educators to Alberta students.

Please rate these statements from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Candidates who do not respond will be given an automatic 5, as no answer is a statement that these education issues are not a priority.

PCE and our grassroots membership want to support leaders who will defend parent choice in education going forward. The responses to this PC Leadership Candidate survey on education will be distributed to our membership through our newsletter list, posted to our website at parentchoice.ca and shared via social media networks to reach 10,000+ citizens who are highly engaged in education issues.

We will also be sharing the UCP membership form, a schedule of the upcoming leadership debates and any other details so that our members know how to engage, if they so chose.

The deadline to submit your responses is **Monday September 18th at 9:00 a.m.**

All responses will be posted publicly shortly thereafter.

Donna Trimble
Executive Director
Parents for Choice in Education
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Question #1 - RESPONSES

The Alberta Government should enhance parental choice in education by supporting the full diversity of differing schools and programs, and by rejecting a “one-size-fits-all” approach to curriculum, teaching methods, school culture, student clubs and other aspects of education.

Jeff Callaway

1 - I believe that diversity in education makes the Alberta education system stronger. We should always seek to find ways to support students and parents find the school and system that helps them learn most effectively.

Brian Jean

1 - As my education platform makes clear at brianjean.ca, diversity and choice in education is absolutely essential to Alberta's past and future success. There needs to be a core curriculum that gives our students the essentials in math, English, science, and social studies, but I absolutely want there to be room for boards, schools, and teachers to decide what else their priorities are. I've committed to reversing any ideological changes

Jason Kenney

1 - As a strong supporter of school choice, I believe that parents are the key decision-makers for their children's education. One of the greatest legacies of PC governments is Alberta's tradition of pluralism in the education system. In cases where a child's safety is at risk, schools have a legal and ethical obligation to ensure the safety and well-being of their students.

Doug Schweitzer

No response. Questionnaire not returned.

Question #2 - RESPONSES

Schools should engage parents and guardians as the mandatory first point of contact for all aspects of a child's education, care and well-being, during both instructional and non-instructional time.

Jeff Callaway

2 - I will follow whatever policies the membership of the UCP decides on. However, there are far too many varied needs and exceptions to have the provincial government step in and make this a mandatory rule. Principals and teachers do need some flexibility to deal with individual family situations

Brian Jean

2 – Parents are primary, but we can't paralyze our schools. I believe going this far is impractical; the emphasis should be on giving the tools to parents to be as involved as they want, otherwise the kids with less engaged parents will always be missing out. There was a policy proposal to this effect that was voted down at a recent Wildrose Annual General Meeting, so while it is essential that parents have access to all aspects, it is too much to expect teachers to be seeking approval from them on everything.

Jason Kenney

2 - As indicated above, I strongly support the role of parents as the primary decision-makers for their children's education. Obviously, parental authority is not absolute, as schools and teachers have a responsibility to ensure the safety of students who may be facing abuse at home.

Doug Schweitzer

No response. Questionnaire not returned.

Question #3 - RESPONSES

Parental approval should be required, in the form of an opt-in, for any instruction related to sex education, sexuality and gender identity, including the distribution of any materials or resources related to these topics, regardless of the course or subject in which these materials or resources are used.

Jeff Callaway

5 - The current system seems to work just fine. If we move to an opt-in system, we force schools to chase parents to get the forms rather than today where parents can simply opt out if they are concerned about the topics being taught.

Brian Jean

2 – I support the current legislation that mandates parental rights to opt-out of any sexual or religious education.

Jason Kenney

2 - I believe that parents have a right to be kept informed on the subject matter being presented in classrooms, particularly when that subject matter addresses subjects such as sex education. However, I believe that opt-out provisions, rather than opt-in, provide an appropriate level of parental control for their children.

Doug Schweitzer

No response. Questionnaire not returned.

Question #4 - RESPONSES

Parental consent should be mandatory for a child's participation in any and all extra-curricular activities operating at a school, including student organizations, clubs and field trips. This should include a current, publicly accessible list on the school's website of all extra-curricular activities and clubs available to students.

Jeff Callaway

5 - Parental consent is necessary for most activities today, particularly field trips. Again, I will defer to the UCP members in this area but I see this as overly prescriptive and will actually cost more money to administer. Principals and teachers need flexibility to deal with situations that arise with the students in their schools and occasionally there are kids who need to be able to have someone to talk to.

Brian Jean

3 – I believe this first part is impractical, and relates to the policy proposal mentioned above that was voted down at the last Wildrose Annual General Meeting. I do agree though that making parents aware of all the activities and clubs available for students would be a fantastic way to initiate discussions between kids and their parents on how best to round out their academic pursuits.

Jason Kenney

2 - The role of parents in making decisions regarding their children's education, both in terms of instructive and non-instructive programming, is critical. Schools have a responsibility to ensure the safety and well-being of their students. I do not believe that the province should dictate how to inform or involve parents, but should leave the details up to principals, teachers, school boards, etc.

Doug Schweitzer

No response. Questionnaire not returned.

Question #5 - RESPONSES

As parents are the most important advocates for their children, parents must be notified when their child is referred to school based counselling.

Jeff Callaway

2 - I will defer to the membership of the UCP and any counsellor ethics plans but I see that counsellors are in schools to help the students. Why would we legislate away the one person that a student can talk to privately. Any serious situation will involve parents very quickly.

Brian Jean

2 - Yes parents need to be at the fore for these discussions, but I would consider exceptions for cases where students are older and have requested privacy, or when suspicion of abuse has been reported to the authorities.

Jason Kenney

2 - In the vast majority of circumstances, parents play a key role in addressing problems and challenges being faced by students. In a limited number of circumstances, the safety and wellbeing of the student might require a measure of confidentiality in terms of accessing counselling services to ensure the student's safety and well-being. The interests of the child must be paramount.

Doug Schweitzer

No response. Questionnaire not returned.

Question #6 - RESPONSES

Express parental permission should be required when any outside facilitator or program is invited to offer any activity, presentation or instruction to their child, at any time, during school hours.

Jeff Callaway

5 - Parents are usually notified when presenters come to schools, that gives them the option to opt out if they so choose. I see no need to change the current system.

Brian Jean

2 – I believe notification makes sense, so that parents can follow up at home, but it is absolutely impractical to have to ask kids to leave a class every single time their parents haven't given express permission to take part in an in-class presentation.

Jason Kenney

2- I believe that parents should be kept fully apprised of the subject matter being presented in classrooms, including when delivered by external presenters. Adequate opt-out provisions should be in place when those presenters are presenting subject matter dealing primarily with matters such as sex education.

Doug Schweitzer

No response. Questionnaire not returned.

Question #7 - RESPONSES

Materials and resources which are made available to students during instructional time, as well as during extra-curricular activities, should be fully accessible to parents online, or upon request if there are valid reasons for not posting curriculum online.

Jeff Callaway

3 - The curriculum is available online via the provincial government. Let local school boards, principals and teachers focus on teaching.

Brian Jean

1 – Yes this would help parents stay engaged.

Jason Kenney

2 - As indicated previously, I believe that parents should be kept fully apprised of the subject matter being presented in classrooms, including both instructional and non-instructional materials.

Doug Schweitzer

No response. Questionnaire not returned.

Question #8- RESPONSES

The Alberta government should provide equitable funding for a wide range of educational choices, including public, Catholic, independent and public faith-based schools, charter schools, alternative schools, and all forms of home education including online, aligned, blended and parent directed. Education dollars should follow each student into whichever school setting parents may choose.

Jeff Callaway

1 - Again I would defer to UCP members if they choose to advocate for changes but I see the current system as being very good at ensuring choice in education and that parent's tax dollars follow their children. I would ensure that this system is maintained.

Brian Jean

1 - I feel that most Albertans consider the current funding of schools, including independent ones, is fair and I will protect it.

Jason Kenney

1 - I believe that Alberta has struck the right balance in providing funding for a wide range of educational options for parents and students, and that this funding flexibility has both improved student achievement outcomes and improved the overall quality of Alberta's education system. I would ensure that funding for school choice is maintained.

Doug Schweitzer

No response. Questionnaire not returned.

Question #9 - RESPONSES

The Alberta Government should allow all schools to use the methodology (whether direct instruction or problem-based) they feel best suits the needs of their students. Stated outcomes should be objective, clear and concise, without prescribing a singular teaching methodology, and established in such a way that students can be clearly tested for proficiency.

Jeff Callaway

Chose not to respond to this question.

Brian Jean

1 - Yes, I oppose for example the education department pushing discovery math fads on teachers.

Jason Kenney

1 – I believe that student achievement testing is critical both to ensure student achievement and to measure the effectiveness of instructional practices. Parents have rightly expressed concerns about curriculum changes that have led to declining levels of student achievement and student learning, particularly with respect to math. Parents must have access to student achievement testing results which impartially indicate whether or not their children are mastering the curriculum. The provincial government’s focus should be on outcomes, not dictating particular pedagogical approaches.

Doug Schweitzer

No response. Questionnaire not returned.

Question #10 - RESPONSES

Standardized assessments and grade 12 Diploma Exams help to maintain consistent standards between schools, and provide a level playing field for postsecondary entry and the awarding of scholarships. The Alberta Government should reintroduce standardized testing for grades 3,6 and 9 and maintain the usage of the High School diploma exams.

Jeff Callaway

3 - UCP members are free to look at changes to this system. However my view is that we currently test at Grades 6, 9 and 12 today, no need for changes to the system.

Brian Jean

1 Absolutely and my education policy goes one step further in calling for diploma exams to be raised back to 50% of the final mark to fight grade inflation.

Jason Kenney

1 - I strongly support the use of standardized testing to assess student achievement, and I would want to strengthen standardized testing to the greatest extent possible. This is especially important for empirical subjects such as math. Effective testing ensures that problems and challenges students are encountering can be identified at an early enough opportunity so that they can be resolved before they impact the long-term academic career of the student. Standardized testing should be performed in grades 3, 6, 9, 12. High school diploma exams should have also their 50% weighting restored.

Doug Schweitzer

No response. Questionnaire not returned.

Question #11 - RESPONSES

Alberta's education laws and policies should comply with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ("Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children") and with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ("respect for the liberty of parents to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions").

Jeff Callaway

3 - All education laws and policies should follow Canadian Human Rights legislation.

Brian Jean

1 - Yes parents need to choose the kind of education their children have, including a religious one.

Jason Kenney

1 - I am a strong champion of these rights as enumerated in the Universal Declaration and International Covenant. I believe that Alberta's tradition of school choice and pluralism in the education system respects these enumerated rights. I would protect and defend that proud tradition, and the rights on which it is based.

Doug Schweitzer

No response. Questionnaire not returned.