



The following are the responses to the Parents for Choice Education Trustee Candidate Questionnaire provided by **Susan Vukadinovic, candidate for Calgary School Division, Sub-jurisdiction Ward 8 and Ward 9**, submitted at 9/26/2021 15:39:42

The long form answers are on the last page of this pdf.

**The candidate's responses, including name and comments, are presented below precisely as the candidate entered them on the questionnaire form. If you have questions about these responses, please mail them to Susan Vukadinovic at susanvukadinovic@gmail.com*

The response was “**Yes**” to the following question:

1. Do you agree that all education laws, school board policies and best practices in Alberta should comply with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the Family Law Act when it comes to the right of parents to direct, and be fully informed about, all aspects of their children's education?

The response was “**Yes**” to the following question:

2. Do you support subsidiarity - the idea that distant levels of government should not make decisions that are best understood and resolved at the local level?

The response was “**Yes**” to the following question:

3. Do you agree parents should be permitted to choose the location, type and style of education (i.e. home-based, language, interest, faith-based, etc.) that best suits their child, free of bureaucratic, union or government coercion?

The response was “**Yes**” to the following question:

4. Do you agree that the Alberta government should provide equitable funding to all education settings, whether public, Catholic, francophone, independent, faith-based, charter, alternative and supervised home education?

The response was “**Yes**” to the following question:

5. Do you agree that the Alberta curriculum should leave room for chosen educational interests - such as history, faith, the arts, sport, language, or STEM for example - and refrain from prescribing excessive content which unduly crowds out local thematic interests?

The response was “**No**” to the following question:

6. Do you agree that curriculum development must be transparent and focused on clearly defined and foundational basic skill and knowledge outcomes in core subject areas?

The response was “**Somewhat**” to the following question:

7. Do you agree with providing a system of high-quality standardized testing based on specific scholastic skills and knowledge outcomes, created by independent testing organizations? Examples might include the Canadian Test for Basic Skills or international tests such as the PISA.

The response was “**Yes**” to the following question:

8. When it comes to communicating student progress for Grades 7-12, would you agree that an objective and clear reporting system of percentages and class averages (as opposed to descriptive terms only) is important?

The response was “**Somewhat**” to the following question:

9. Do you agree that any school board policy that forces teachers to keep secrets from parents is unacceptable, and if elected would you move to repeal any such policies? For example, the NDP government in 2017 forced boards to pass a policy regarding certain student clubs that said “notification, if any, respecting a voluntary student organization [...] is limited to the fact of the establishment of the organization or the holding of the activity.”

The response was “**Somewhat**” to the following question:

10. Currently, provincial legislation requires that parents be provided notice when a program of study includes subject-matter that deals primarily and explicitly with religion or human sexuality (Education Act - Section 58.1). Do you agree that this notice and opt-out opportunity should continue to be provided?

The response was “**No**” to the following question:

11. Do you agree that a parent’s legislated right to be informed of and allowed to opt out of material primarily and explicitly of a sexual or religious nature should be construed by the Board to extend to the use of sexual or religious instructional resources and online portals used across subject areas, such as the Prism toolkit?

The response was “**No**” to the following question:

12. Do you agree that every school board should establish a procedure for vetting and obtaining parental consent when it comes to individual external facilitators accessing students during both instructional and non-instructional time?

Susan Vukadinovic’s added comments:

Additional comments on Question #7 from Susan Vukadinovic:

Assessment is used to find out what students know about the subjects they study.

Ongoing (also known as formative) assessment includes when teachers gather data via anecdotal notes, observations, conversations, and perhaps mini quizzes and tests. Some of the ways it can be collected is through writing samples, and conversations with students. This happens in the classroom all the time.

Summative assessment includes standardized tests such as Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study, (TIMSS and PIRLS), and Alberta's Provincial Achievement Tests (PATs), as well as tests administered at the end of a unit or topic of student to help the teacher gather evidence to support what has been noted during ongoing and formative assessment gathering.

Both formative and summative assessments are important in education.

Standardized testing can be beneficial in that it offers a benchmark to compare students' achievement. An example of this is looking at the results of Grade 6 Provincial Achievement Tests one year, and comparing it year by year at the same school to monitor for trends not only in grade 6 but in the grades leading up to it. When Grade 3 PATs were being used, K-6 schools would look to see where Grade 3 students performed well, as well as whether a student who performed well in Grade 3 also performed well in Grade 6.

So, what do international and national standardized tests say about Alberta?

In short, although scores remain above international averages, Alberta students' results in math and science have slipped since the tests were introduced during the past 20 years. Canada's rank has slipped, too.

In other words, two people can look at standardized test results and derive different conclusions:

- o The glass-is-half-full perspective comes from focussing in on the fact that Alberta's PISA scores remain above international averages. The latest PISA results place Alberta students third in the world in science, third in reading, and eight in math. We are near the top. There is room for improvement, yes, but these rankings fall far short of the bar needed to indicate that we need to discard our current education approach and start from scratch.
- o The glass-is-half-empty perspective comes from focussing in on the PISA trends over time. Alberta has declined in science since 2015 along with Canada as a whole, and Alberta has declined in math since 2012 along with Canada as a whole. (When it comes to reading, Alberta has stayed pretty flat since 2009, but keep in mind that since Alberta ranks near the top of the

world in reading, remaining flat is a good thing.) Furthermore, in the 2019 TIMMS for Grade 4, the average mathematics score for Alberta, Manitoba, and Newfoundland and Labrador is significantly below students in Canada overall. It has steadily fallen each testing period since 1995.

To paraphrase a gem I came across in a university statistics textbook a long time ago, the competing sides can use the results of standardized tests like a drunk man uses a lamp post – for support rather than illumination.

What do provincial standardized tests say about Alberta?

- Alberta collects reams and reams of data from its own students. The result is something called "accountability pillars."
- They're not exciting. Students' results across Alberta have not swung wildly up and down in the last five years. (The comparison between divisions, and results of Indigenous students, and English language learners are other stories.)

There are limitations to how much we can learn from standardized assessments.

While both formative and summative assessments are important in education, issues can arise with standardized testing when these assessments are viewed as the ONLY way to understand student progress and achievement.

Here is a list of some of the limitations to consider when evaluating the validity and usefulness of standardized tests such as PISA, TIMSS, and Provincial Achievement Tests (PATs):

- o Two of the tests include raw scores, which people often misinterpret, because they don't realize that the raw scores are significant only to the ordinal placement of that particular exam.
- o As many Alberta schools move to be more inclusive of students with learning disabilities, behavioural problems, cognitive disabilities and other challenges, other countries are moving away from that model, leaving the systems incomparable.
- o One of the concerns critics have about standardized tests, local or international, is how well they accommodate for the test writer possibly not having English as their first language. Are schools, regions, jurisdictions, with higher ELL and immigrant populations disadvantaged in rankings?
- o There are concerns about the accuracy of scores from some countries with high-performing PISA results. Critics question whether all countries are following the rules in how they randomly select which pupils write the tests.

- o Standardized tests alone do not effectively test whether the student understands knowledge in a real way. Consider the difference in evaluating a student on the basis of a multiple-choice exam in science compared to evaluating a student on the basis of laboratory work in science – both have their place, but hardly anyone would argue that science knowledge could be adequately tested on the basis of multiple-choice tests alone.
- o Over-reliance on standardized testing results can cause a shift towards “teaching to the test”, with a shift of attention to short-term fixes designed to help a jurisdiction quickly climb the rankings, rather than developing the potential of the whole child. Critics charge that PISA has led many governments into an international competition for higher test scores. Critics also charge that countries are revamping their education systems just to improve their standings with changes that don’t benefit students, resulting in more and longer batteries of multiple-choice testing to practice for the tests, more scripted vendor-made lessons designed to ace the tests, and less autonomy for teachers.
- o By emphasising a narrow range of measurable aspects of education, standardized tests take attention away from the less measurable or immeasurable educational objectives, thereby narrowing our collective imagination regarding what education is and ought to be about.
- o The direct and indirect costs of administering PISA are substantial. The Alberta government pays around \$300,000 for a random selection of students to participate in two of the exams. In 2016, the federal government paid nearly \$7 million in fees for 22,000 students from across the country to write PISA alone. It’s fair to question whether taxpayers are getting their money’s worth.
- o The aggregated test results, released long after students write the exams, tell teachers nothing they don’t already know about their students.

Some additional, specific limitations of PATS:

We know that the results of these types of assessments have less to do with the school, and more to do with the surrounding community at large.

Students who are ill or opt out of PATs are given a mark of 0.

Some additional, specific limitations with PISA:

They do not allow for comparison at the school level because PISA is only offered to 15-year-olds, with no follow-up with the same students.

They use a random sample, rather than testing the entire population, and samples are rarely truly random.

Reading was the main focus of the 2018 test, with math and science forming only minor parts, which decreases the value of the math and science rankings for critics.

To carry out PISA and a host of follow-up services, OECD has embraced "public-private partnerships" and entered into alliances with multi-national for-profit companies, which stand to gain financially from any deficits—real or perceived—unearthed by PISA. Some of these companies provide educational services to school districts in various PISA-participating countries on a massive, for-profit basis.

Some additional, specific limitations with TIMSS:

The most recent TIMSS test only included 4% of grade 4 students in the province, and the year before that, there is a statistical note on the results from Alberta that the population was oversampled. One argument against of oversampling is that it artificially can bring down the results.

There's also no Grade 8 TIMSS test to compare to.

Additional comments on Question #9 from Susan Vukadinovic:

The way this question is worded, "forcing teachers to keep secrets from parents" is quite alarmist, but it is utterly divorced from what is actually happening at CBE schools. I have spent a decade deeply involved with school issues at various grade levels, and I have not once heard this issue come up. This is simply not an issue that parents are talking about. Are you proposing that you would like more bureaucracy and red tape at schools? That is not something I support. How much notification do we want teachers to give parents and where does it end? Would we like teachers to update parents on whether kids have finished eating their lunch? Do we want schools to report to parents about what books they have checked out of the library? Do we want video cameras monitoring everything and daily logs sent home? Do we want our children so supervised and mollycoddled and reported on that they are unprepared to function successfully when they reach adulthood? No thank you! That is not what the vast majority of parents are looking for when they send their kids to school.

Additional comments on Question #10 from Susan Vukadinovic:

Questions #9, #10, #11 and #12 seem like a red-tape nightmare. Parents would be very angry if we were to try to replace real learning in the classroom with endless reams of bureaucracy and paperwork. I respect parent choice and what I hear from parents is that parents want teachers to teach -- and not engage in procedural minutiae and bureaucracy. Questions #9, #10, #11 and #12 are calling for items that would greatly increase the size of government and lead to more

taxes, in order to accommodate all of the extra paperwork. This would not be a popular move with parents.