

Adam McArthur's Response to Parkland Teachers' Local Questions

Q: What are your top priorities for improving student achievement and well-being across the division, and how do you plan to address them?

Answer: I would like to prioritize improving the percentage of high school students that graduate while spending 3 years in high school. As of 2023-24, 76% of students were finishing in 3 years. I think it is an important priority as the 4th and 5th year that a student is in high school has a base funding decrease to 50% and then 25% respectively when compared to the first 3 years. If PSD was able to improve on this priority, it would make for smaller high school class sizes and more resources per student, all else being equal. While I think that if a student needs an extra year to complete high school, so be it. I appreciate their commitment. I think this would fit into a SMART goal framework, can make a positive impact across the district and resonate with parents and community members.

I think we accomplish this by bringing more awareness to this issue throughout our school division, bringing attention to the measurable detrimental impacts from not finishing high school, (which happens to a significant number of students that do not finish in 3 years and the vast majority that do not finish after 4 years) empowering our schools to make broader and deeper connections in the community to expose more students to a variety of options available after high school (university, college, trades and entrepreneurship) and increased communication to students and parents when leading indicators are detected of such an event start to emerge in previous grades.

With respect to well-being, I would prioritize a commitment to increase the number of students whom when surveyed report that students at their school respect each other. Although stable, I think these responses for students in Grade 7 to 9 and Grades 10 to 12 can certainly improve and I think that is important as I do not know anyone that would be satisfied with their own well-being or that of the people around them in a space where so many individuals report not feeling respected by their peers. I think these measures would also lead to improved responses from parents as well around similar questions put forward by PSD.

To improve this metric around well-being, I think we have to bring light to the current responses, have administration communicate the ways that mutual respect can create benefits for those involved and take additional steps to highlight the type of examples of respect among peers that models the type of behavior that can create a more respectful space.

Q: How will you ensure that financial decisions and budget allocations remain transparent and focused on supporting classrooms and student learning?

Answer: I do think that there are scenarios where there can be increased transparency and I often see this in the use of 'averages' to convey information so I would always look for more transparency in that regard. With respect to presentation of Financial Statements, I think that they often can leave the reader with some uncertainty based on presentation choices and I would always encourage those involved with the audit process to seek to be clear in what contributes to a given line item which is often a summary of a significant amount of data. I have been a part of and adjacent to many audits in my career and volunteer experience and I think I consistently add value to the process by being well prepared and asking questions that seek transparency.

I expect that the vast majority of spending supports classrooms and learning and any Trustee needs to also hold a wide view of the financial health of the entity for which we have been entrusted. The entirety of PSD has to be accounted for. I

think my experience with finance over my career helps to inform an appropriate understanding of costs, benefits, trade offs and return on investment of financial decisions that are made.

Q: What is your approach to engaging with parents, staff, and community members to ensure their voices are meaningfully included in board decisions?

Answer: I appreciate the significant list of engagement opportunities listed in the Annual Education Results Report:

- Daily, through the commitment of our Trustees in engaging our students, staff and community;
- Daily, through the conversations and engagement that our staff has with students, staff, parents and the community;
- Monthly, through meetings established by leadership teams;
- Monthly, through School Council meetings and representation at our Council of School Councils;
- Monthly, through public Board Meetings; and
- Quarterly through Teacher – Board Advisory Committee meetings.

I think these examples hopefully provide adequate feedback for people with a role within PSD to be meaningfully included. It is my experience that sometimes staff would like more opportunities to be heard and finding the right balance is a consistent work in progress. I think the primary risk of insufficient engagement with people outside of PSD (students, school staff, division staff). The number of community members engaged through school council and Board meetings is limited.

I think it is valuable to collect and document input from these respective groups named in the question and make reasonable assurance that there are adequate and appropriate channels for such feedback. I would want to make sure that input that is gathered comes from a wide cross section of these groups. As an example, the 2023/24 PSD Education Report has an excellent response rate from teachers in the survey sections but far less from parents (given there are so many more parents compared to teachers) even if that count of parents is still statistically significant. I would be concerned by any method that provides outsized influence from a very limited number of people, even if I can appreciate their passion and engagement.

I think for Board decisions, but more specifically how I vote as part of the Board, it is important to be able to present what data, including the voices of the groups identified, was used to help support a choice and what data was available, including voices from the groups identified, that I found to not be persuasive enough on the merits to make a different decision.

Q: Given the growing push for private and charter schools, how will you advocate for strong, well-funded public education that serves all students equitably?

Answer: At a community level, I think we need to build a greater awareness of such an issue with a multi year approach to communication to the general public that provides clear and understandable information. From my experience with advocacy during the last 9 years on the Spruce Grove Public Library Board, consistency of a message to both the public and decision makers and a demonstrated willingness to hold leaders accountable is an effective tool to building allies and helping to get decision makers to better align with priorities. I think we were able to open a 2nd library in Spruce Grove in no small part due to our commitment to advocacy. This type of commitment I'm describing would be a significant change from what I have observed in our community during the last decade.

At provincial level, the Alberta School Board Association can serve to help coordinate common priorities such as well funded public education however I cannot at this time be confident that without a more engaged and passionate general population that the ASBA is going to struggle to generate results. For what it's worth, I feel similar concerns about the model of how municipalities advocate to the Government of Alberta.

Q: In light of current challenges in education (*class sizes, support and complexity*), what steps will you take to ensure public schools have high standards of learning, safety, and inclusivity?

Answer: My good faith answer, and If I am wrong and this is done and I cannot locate the data, so be it but I think that PSD should take steps to track class sizes across PSD and communicate it to our community. It's important to measure things year over year for continuity but on occasion we should also develop new key points to measure and consider how this changes the lens through which we look at other existing data.

I would support the Board to empower administration to develop measures for incidents impacting safety, both actual and near misses. If this already exists, again, perhaps I have missed it but I have not come across it to this point in time I think it is valuable to measure things if we are asking people to manage them and for the purposes of the community to understand the scale of safety issues, we need to bring light to such a concern.

I think if it is deemed useful from staff across the division, the work of the *Wellness and Community Partnership* team should be highlighted and explore what further supports are helpful as trends emerge over time.

With respect to inclusivity, I do think that we put it at risk in a number of ways over the years including by not having modernized buildings and learning spaces there within and I think the advocacy toward improving our capital assets if not successful, threatens inclusivity right along side inadequate human resources in the classroom and an absence of learning tools that support students needs.