

August 4th, 2022 Education Forum

UCP Leadership Candidates

[00:06:31] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** right, folks, why don't we get underway here? So we'll start with a couple of introductions. How's that? So the first person to that we will talk about here would be Todd Loewen and he's been home to or Alberta has been home to him and his wife, Tina five children and eight grandchildren. And he was elected first in 2015 in peace country and reelected in 2019.

[00:07:07] So that's our first person. Our second person is Rebecca Schultz.

[00:07:18] Sorry. As I was saying, our second person is Rebecca Schultz. She's the MLA for Calgary Shaw elected in 2019, and recently the minister for children's services.

[00:07:32] So the next person, and I apologize for keeping this brief is, and Brian, he please, excuse me. One moment.

[00:07:42] Brian Jean is a legislature, a lawyer, a businessman, and a community leader from Fort Murray, where he serves as the current MLA. And I understand he's the youngest of 11 children.

[00:07:58] Danielle Smith is of course, a university of Calgary graduate with degrees in economics and English. And she, like Brian, is a former leader of Alberta's wild rose party.

[00:08:15] Last we have Mr. Travis Toews, who's been serving as our finance minister and he has a corporate family cattle operation under oil field, environmental company, and recently served as the president of the Canadian Cattlemen's association.

[cut out extraneous material]

Question #1

[00:09:52] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** We have some questions that we asked of each candidate. And while we're waiting for Danielle to log on, we're going to start with the first question and the first candidate. Now, Premier Kenney's

government was able to reduce the average per student cost of education significantly.

[00:10:18] This budget implemented a model called the weighted, moving average. Unfortunately, the WMA penalizes growing schools and limits choice. How would your administration balance the needs of different delivery models such as public education and home education to keep costs down while maximizing choice.

[00:10:38] And this question is going first to Todd.

[00:10:45] Okay.

[00:10:45] **Todd Loewen:** Thanks very much, John, I appreciate the question. As Premier I will continue to support the full array of education that we right now, it's incredibly important in order to have choice in education, to have parents have a choice and voice in their education that we need to keep the funding as full as possible as we move forward.

[00:11:05] And you know, the program that we have now that the government's implemented is you know, has done a lot of good things. It's provided a little bit more certainty. It's reduced a number of grants that that school divisions have to apply for in order to run their schools. And I think that's been helpful. It's provided some block funding for rural schools too, which keeps some of the smaller schools available to keep going so that rural students don't have to travel any farther when it comes to busing and things like that.

[00:11:34] But we have only had two years of implementation of this program. So I think it's you know, I think we need to, you know, keep going with it and see what we need to do to tweak and change it. Where, where needed. I don't think it's beneficial to throw it right out right now. And but I, but I do believe there's probably some changes that need to happen.

[00:11:50] If we, if we throw it out, then again, we're just gonna just keep going back and forth with different funding models. So I, I think there's a chance that we can make this work better than it is right now. And again, we be focused on making sure that it funds those different choices in education to make sure that they're viable and that they can continue on.

[00:12:08] And I believe that we need to fully engage all of, all of our educational partners. And we look at the homeschooling and private schools and, and the, the separate schools and the public schools. We need to engage

them as partners and make sure that they have their voice known when it comes to how education is funded moving forward

[00:12:26] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** Next on this question, will be Danielle.

[cut out extraneous material]

[00:13:21] **Danielle Smith:** I think that we were moving in such a good direction in the past when we had options for public school, Catholic school, private school charter school, homeschooling. What I've discovered in the last year, because I tried to start a charter school for skilled trades, is that one of the real barriers that we have is that we're not fairly funding each model.

[00:13:42] So public school and private school, or public and Catholic get funded at a rate of about \$11,000 per student. Charters get the full per student grant, but not the same amount for capital. So it's a huge disadvantage in trying to get the buildings set up. Private schools only get funded at 70% of the basic per student grant.

[00:13:59] And homeschooling only gets funded at a rate of \$850. So our members have talked about wanting us to move to more of a voucher style system being pioneered in Arizona. Actually they're the ones who have, I think, moved the furthest along with what they call empowerment, scholarship accounts. And the way they do it is they give \$7,000 per student and it's universal. So the child can go to the school of their choice. It's still \$4,000 less than what is in the public school system. So it's an interesting model for us to have a look at. And I think when you look at that type of approach, that would make a lot more sense in trying to create some parity across the different approaches.

[00:14:40] Homeschooling is a little bit of a different case though. I've talked to homeschooling families and they think that the \$850 is too lean, but have suggested that maybe a, a doubling of that might be in order to allow for the cost of additional curriculum. But the main thing is we've got to get back to the approach of funding following the student. That the, the, the dollars should be related to the, the particular cost of educating that child, because otherwise we're not going to expand the number of choices, because the model works only for those schools with declining enrollment.

[00:15:15] So maybe we keep that weighted average model in areas to create some stability, if they're having difficulty attracting students. And that would allow for a period of time where they're not penalized for low enrollment and

they have a period of time that they would be able to, to to correct course, but it doesn't work at all for growing schools.

[00:15:33] So perhaps a hybrid model might be in order so that we protect the declining school enrollments as they figure out ways to turn things around. But I really wanna make sure that we have an incentive based model in place because there's all sorts of new fabulous ideas coming up from parents.

[00:15:48] Parents are asking for more choice. They're looking around the world, they're seeing more choice. They have the experience with homeschooling. And I think that there's a real appetite for us to move in the direction. At least in baby steps towards what we're seeing in Arizona, which I'll be watching over the next couple of years.

[00:16:05] Thanks, John.

[00:16:09] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** Thank you very much, Danielle. The next person to speak will be Rebecca Schultz.

[00:16:20] **Rebecca Schulz:** Hi. Well, thank you so much. And, you know, I would actually echo a lot of what Todd said. He really articulated you know, some of the things specifically that we're seeing with the education budget and how that really works. I mean, ultimately at the time when we came into government in 2019 funding and expenses were, were ballooning and there needed to be some effort to address some of the gaps we were seeing in the system.

[00:16:46] I do recognize challenges with the weighted moving average. And I certainly have heard that across the province. I know that one of the biggest things that I hear is that it doesn't really address growth. And, and that's not just in one setting, that's in all. I hear it in charter schools or independent, but also in some of the growing schools in public and Catholic as well depending on the area.

[00:17:07] So, I think that we need to look for more ways to, yes, have that predictability in the funding and certainty within the system. We did simplify the system in terms of reducing the number of grants. I think that's important.

[00:17:19] Flexibility is important when it comes to school division autonomy, but I think what we've seen is still some issues with class size, complexity and dollars following students. Now, I do know that there have been some changes made, especially when it comes to some of the startup funding. For charter

schools, I had met with a number of charter schools, especially over the last couple of years. I know some of the significant challenges with capital funding and equitable funding that we've been able to work on and address.

[00:17:47] I do recognize the choice in education is so important, whether that's independent charter, private homeschooling public or separate. And I know that we've made that commitment to maintain that system.

[00:17:59] I think. You know, while I've heard one candidate talk a little bit about a, about a voucher system. And I know some party members have raised that. One of the concerns is that it does oversimplify a complicated system, and we still have to make sure that we're able to meet the unique needs of children who have specific learning needs, whether that be disabilities or complex needs, and also address things like transportation.

[00:18:22] There really isn't an easy fix. So, you know, I would just say, we, we do have to look at that. I think you're right in identifying the weighted, moving average and the importance of a funding growth as well, but we still have to make sure that the system works in all areas of the province and for all choices that parents are making across the province.

[00:18:50] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** Thank you very much, Rebecca. The next person to speak on this issue will be Brian.

[00:19:00] **Brian Jean:** Thanks, John. And thank you for everybody listening today. As a general rule, I actually think the Kenney government did a pretty good job on the money side of education. I am reluctant to change funding models for public institutions that rely so heavily on the budgets. Obviously, they can't do the work they need if they don't have predictability.

[00:19:23] And that's very important, especially when you, it comes to discrepancy and funding between the different education models. And I'm a big believer in choice in education. So my desire would be to be along the hybrid voucher model would be something I would see a move towards the opportunity there.

[00:19:40] And yes, the weighted moving average model is not as good for growing schools. Being from Fort McMurray I understand that because I stayed in a lot of trailers over the years when I was doing my primary school and it, and my elementary school. But, you know, I think that growing schools are the minority right now in Alberta.

[00:19:59] I think that the opportunity exists to find a way to do an outside the funding model supplement of some kind especially for obviously growing schools that need that. They need to find money somewhere and I think that opportunity needs to exist for them.

[00:20:14] But you know what? My mind always comes back to the Alberta's economy and I'm reluctant to, and I need to remind everybody that what goes up must come down and during times of great economic boom, we have to make sure that we don't live outside our means so that when we can't afford those expensive government opportunities, we don't get saddled with a whole bunch of debt from bad government decisions. Because bad decisions, it's not just about talk. It's about bad decision making that will lead us to a situation where our families don't have the quality of life. Don't have the education and don't have the choice in education, cuz we simply can't afford it.

[00:20:47] I think for the timing we have to stay with the current funding model and explore ways as much as possible that we could put more weight on choice and education, more weight on parents who should be in charge of their education. But never forget in huge parts of rural Alberta. There is no choice in education.

[00:21:02] We have the education we have and we have to explore the opportunities for rural Albertans to not have to depend on infrastructure for choice and education. And that means homeschooling and other models, charter schools that are available as much as possible. So school choice is more of an issue for the big to medium size cities centers, but I would like to see it right across the province.

[00:21:23] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** Thank you very much, Brian. So the last person to speak will of course be Travis.

[00:21:32] **Travis Toews:** Well, well, thanks, John. It's great to be here this evening. Maybe I'll get started by noting that my wife, Kim and I have three children and 11 grandchildren. My wife's a teacher by profession taught for a number of years before joining our businesses. And so I think like all of us leadership, hopefuls a solid sound education system an education system of excellence is, is critically important to me. And I believe school choice is a big part of that equation. In fact, I believe our, our school system or education system is much stronger because we have a significant school choice available to, to our students and, and to their families.

[00:22:10] You know, you, you raise a very good issue around the weighted moving average formula, the new funding model. And I will say at the outset that we have certainly brought some fiscal discipline to our education program over the last three years, we've not reduced education funding, but we held it flat for the first three years in our budget process.

[00:22:32] This last budget year, we increased it by 1.7%. So, you know, a material increase, but over the years we held it flat and we were able to deliver well because of the new funding, a model. Now I agree this weighted moving average model does not work well for rapidly growing schools. And so I would suggest there would need to be a grant to you know, the, the cost pressures for rapidly growing enrollments. And again, that's gonna be some specific schools, you know, and certainly some independent schools would fit into that category. And the formula, I think, will require tweaking as we work to get it right. So it works well. So it's well calibrated providing that predictability, but also ensuring that growing schools have adequate funding.

[00:23:18] You know, one thing we did last year, we included funding for independent schools grant funding to support those schools for additional supports for children with disabilities additional supports for learning loss. Historically independent schools wouldn't have been included in those types of grants.

[00:23:40] Last year, we included that grant funding for all schools. I think that's very important because, you know, parents who send their kids to an independent school also need additional support. I would absolutely continue that trend to ensure that we have a level playing field on, on specialized program and programming and supports for families, perhaps with kids, with learning disabilities.

[00:24:02] Now, the other thing that I would do right now, Danielle was right to raise it, we have a funding system that doesn't treat all types of school choice equally. One thing, independent schools have received no transportation funding today. I rolled out an announcement that if I have the, the privilege of serving Albertan's as premier, I would include transportation funding support to independent schools or two families that send their children to independent schools.

[00:24:31] I would calibrate that on a consistent basis with the instructional funding at 70%, and there would be some details to work. But we need, we do need to work to level the playing field so that parents have legitimate school

choice. You know, if you can't afford to get your kids to school, that's not really school choice.

[00:24:50] We also, in Budget 2022, included some additional capital funding for charter schools. I think that's critically important. And and again, in budget 2022, we also included specific funding for homeschoolers, again, for support for parents, with children, with, with learning disabilities. And I would want to continue that and, and likely increase it.

[00:25:14] So again, regardless of which school choice a parent chooses for their children, they're adequately supported.

[00:25:24] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** Thank you very much, Travis. So I'd just like to pause for a moment between questions to properly. Thank each of our panelists for coming to attend this event. Technical glitches as we have, it's quite a sacrifice to spend an hour or more answering questions for folks, and it can be quite difficult.

[00:25:48] And this is clearly a group of people who have put a lot of thought into the questions that we're asking. So thank you very much each of you.

Question #2

[00:25:59] Here's our second question. Premier Kenny's government attempted a meaningful reform of curriculum by switching to a knowledge based curriculum. Starting with K to six, the reform was hampered by mistakes in development and implementation as well as opposition by the Alberta's Teacher's Association. Do you agree with the idea of a knowledge based curriculum and what steps would you take towards making successful curriculum reforms?

[00:26:32] So the first person we will be asking to answer here is Brian Jean.

[00:26:58] **Brian Jean:** Technology is wonderful. And thank you very much for that question. First of all, I find it very odd that the probability of two people on the same panelist, having a wife named Kim that was trained as a teacher, but we have it. So my wife was also a teacher and I have a 38 year old, a 33 year old and now a three and a half year old and I'm very concerned about education, where it's going in Alberta.

[00:27:19] Let's face it, Albertans were angry when the NDP started politicizing our curriculum. They don't Albertans do not want us to have politics hidden in, in K six curriculum. And the truth is we can't do that. We should stay away from that completely.

[00:27:36] In the 1990s, Alberta was a world leader. We were the best in the world. And today we were not anywhere near that and we need to get back to where we were 25 years ago, internationally at the top of our game. And we need to stay at that game. There's some good and bad in the draft curriculum.

[00:27:51] Some teachers have indicated that. And I think the truth is that is the situation with anything. Lots of teachers have suggested that the math section for instance, is not bad and, and it's better than it used to be. We also have had English language arts curriculum get some good reviews and I've been watching that closely, but some stuff that's there is not age appropriate.

[00:28:12] And for instance, the grade six, physical education and wellness items do not seem to be age appropriate. The concepts are too advanced in my mind, based upon what I've heard from teachers from professionals. And of course the grade five and six drama curriculum is filled with some odd things that I would suggest most parents would find well advanced where they are.

[00:28:32] So we should listen to the concerns of teachers, make sure parents remain in charge as they must be in education. And I would suggest that we should break out the curriculum into chunks and roll it out a lot more slowly. We should make sure that we listen to teachers while we do that. And now we are starting some of the parts of the curriculum in September, and there's a lot of excitement with, with the educators.

[00:28:55] And I think we have to listen to those educators and if elected leader and premier, I will declare that those new elements of the curriculum - mandatory proposed- program that's coming into September, specifically, language arts, math and physical ed wellness will become an optional pilot for the year.

[00:29:13] And that means that these items will be up to teacher's discretion as they teach them. And they will be able to integrate them as they see fit. And they will be able to give feedback in the spring on how we need to change them and how we need to finesse it. Because let's, let's face facts folks, no, one's gonna be more passive than people that don't have children involved in the, in the education system and nobody's gonna be more aggressive than people that expect to put their kids in education. And we need to make sure that we listen to

parents because they're passionate and they want the best results for their children. I will encourage and allow teachers to try out pieces. They think that are necessary.

[00:29:49] I know the teachers, like I mentioned, like most of the language arts and the math parts, so this would be a pilot program. And at the end of the, the school year, we would make sure that we get the proper feedback and institute the parts that work and refine the parts that don't and eliminate the parts that just can't.

[00:30:09] And that that's what I would do.

[00:30:10] So the goal would be to release a properly done revised version and implement it in September 2023. We can slow this down. Listen to parents, listen to teachers, listen to administrators and get it right. We just have to do so. And I think it was rushed. Sometimes things that are rushed are just simply not going right.

[00:30:27] No matter happens.

[00:30:31] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** Thank you very much Brian.

[00:30:36] So next person to speak on. This will be Rebecca.

[00:30:48] **Rebecca Schulz:** Well, thank you. So taking it back to when I first decided to run in both the nomination and the general election in 2019, I heard loud and clear parents saying that they wanted to get the ideology out of the classroom. They wanted to see a change in course, from the curriculum that the NDP government was putting into place.

[00:31:06] And so I am proud that we were able to listen to parents and to change course in fact, to get ideology out of the classroom. And as Brian said, you know, there have been concerns raised about a variety of issues. Although there's some areas that we did get, right. A lot of the feedback that I hear is in math and reading English language, arts literacy, numeracy, the feedback on that is good.

[00:31:28] There, there was really a desire to get back to that knowledge based curriculum. You know, I worked in the ministry of education, a number of years back for three years, and there was a lot of talk back then about new math, that

discussion I still heard about at the doors a couple years ago. So in some areas we did a good job on that.

[00:31:46] Financial literacy as well was something that a lot of parents across Alberta thought was really important and, you know, good, good feedback on that from teachers as well.

[00:31:54] We didn't get everything right. In fact, even on the financial literacy, some, some teachers have already said, you know, we really like the content. Down the road, we may wanna move it into a different subject or, or somewhere where it may fit better with how schools work and, and how a classroom is set up and that's feedback that I would absolutely take.

[00:32:12] I do think that we missed the mark in some areas. Social studies was one of those areas. Again, teaching children about history and having a good base in knowledge is important. But again, it was the age appropriateness, as, as Brian said, that was often raised. And as a parent of two young kids seven and four, I can see where that feedback is coming from. I respect it.

[00:32:34] And I think, you know, while we wanna move forward and we've gotta make sure that our curriculum is in fact modern up to date that it isn't full of ideology, but in, in terms of really being based on the knowledge that kids need to have to succeed in, in their future we do have to make sure it's age appropriate, culturally appropriate. We wanna make sure, you know, even right now the discussions we've been having around the province with what's happening at the federal government the importance of making sure that kids know where their food comes from and their energy comes from. That's important.

[00:33:04] But we do need to make sure we're rolling this out in a way that makes sense for teachers. That they're able to have the supports that they need to roll this out in the classroom. We have to rebuild some trust in the process. And I absolutely do want to hear from teachers and expand those feedback groups and those advisory groups that we can get that feedback as we move you know, especially as they roll it out in the classroom. But I think slowing it down was a good idea to make sure that we can take that feedback, but especially as we're coming out of the last two years and we wanna make sure that kids are getting caught up on things like reading and math that that's our focus right now. And I do wanna say thank you to all of the parents and the teachers out there who gave their feedback throughout the curriculum process, your voice mattered, it was heard. And that feedback is really appreciated by those like

myself who are in these positions and making these decisions and, and trying to push this forward. So thank you.

[00:33:58] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** Thank you very much for Rebecca. The next person to speak on. This will be Danielle.

[00:34:10] **Danielle Smith:** Thanks, John. So I have heard a lot of feedback from parents and from teachers that is very mixed. And I think perhaps the real problem that we face is just that the rollout was so controversial that I think parents and teachers are a little bit confused about where we stand with what is being rolled out.

[00:34:30] And when there was a, good external validation of the approach that we're taking from David Staples, who's an excellent educational writer. And the thing that he has said is the K to Three language arts and math program really incorporates in a lot of what parents were concerned about in making sure we've got foundational literacy and phonetics, as well as the math, the way we used to learn it so that we can get those basic skills up as well.

[00:34:54] When we're going into this next couple of years, especially since we have two years of learning loss and learning disruption, making sure that those two core foundations are brought up to the level where kids don't fall behind is really important. I've I've, I've been saying that one of the things we need to do is make sure that we have at least some baseline testing.

[00:35:14] I think we have to acknowledge that there has been some learning loss. And if we have social promotion that moves kids along from one grade to the next, without correcting some of these problems, we're going to have bigger problems down the road. So it looks to me like the curriculum addresses that in the K to Three, but we must also realize that there's probably been some learning loss at some of the other levels.

[00:35:36] And that to me would be the priority is identifying where those losses are ensuring that there's additional tutoring so that we can bring the kids up to grade level. I think we probably also should, should talk about the, the testing around learning disabilities and other type of learning needs. There's multiple different types of reasons why kids might be delayed, whether it's dyslexia or some of the other learning disabilities.

[00:36:00] And I'm concerned that we may have lost some ground in identifying those early. Also kids need to see adults mouths move in order to know how to properly make words. And I mean, I'm concerned that there may be some kids

who fallen behind and might need some specialized speech pathology. So my concern going into this year is less about the knowledge base and cramming kids with a bunch of facts than just making sure they've got foundation.

[00:36:26] I think we also need to really acknowledge that our frontline has had a heck of a time over these last two years, and they're gonna need extra help too. A few years ago, Stephen Mandel campaigned with the Alberta Party saying that we needed to have education assistance in every classroom. And I think that that is a very wise idea, especially as we recognize that these additional needs are going to take a couple of hands on deck.

[00:36:50] If kids especially need to have that remedial learning and, I would just also say that in, in future, when we do these kind of rollouts, there has to be better engagement with the Alberta Teachers' Association and frontline teachers. I think that as we're learning a little bit more about it, there's a couple of problems here and there, but that the main problem is that they felt excluded and in feeling excluded and feeling like they were being asked to do too much too soon, we ended up creating a lot of unnecessary pushback that could have been avoided with just some simple relationship building and allowing us to avoid problems along the way.

[00:37:26] So I think that there really is more of a process issue that we've gotta deal with for future, but the way we landed with K to Three focus on language arts and math, I think generally speaking, we're, we're, we'll very likely get a lot of buy in from both parents and teachers on that

[00:37:43] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** thank you very much, Danielle.

[00:37:45] So the next person to speak to this will be Travis, Mr. Toews.

[00:37:52] **Travis Toews:** Well, thanks, John. And you know, I think this is again, one topic where we're gonna, you're gonna see a lot of agreement or hear a lot of agreement from us leadership hopefuls, that's probably a good thing. Look, getting the NDP bias out of our curriculum was one of the reasons why I ran in 2019. And you know, I love to point to the fiscal progress we've made - the economic progress- the last three years, but really you know, the most durable and lasting thing we can do for the next generation is to ensure that we have a very sound education system. It certainly works hand in hand with everything else. So I'm very supportive of the general direction of curriculum reform.

[00:38:31] Like the others I'm very much in favor of ensuring that the next generation is strong in the core disciplines of literacy and numeracy you know, historical literacy. And I have to add financial literacy in that one. I've worked with Minister LaGrange, adding that element to the curriculum and look forward to perhaps expanding it.

[00:38:49] In the future, is that such an important part of education? For the next generation? I would also be in favor of, you know, as we, as we move forward with curriculum reform, ensuring that there is some flexibility in the curriculum. I would be very much in favor of ensuring that we have definitive outcomes that we can measure, you know, ultimately, the knowledge of our students along the way, and I'm supportive of the PAT exams at grade six and grade nine. And departmentals in grade 12. But I would be in favor of ensuring, especially independent schools, but other school choice options have some flexibility in how they deliver their education.

[00:39:32] And to ultimately again, arrive at those core competencies, but perhaps do it in different and creative and nuanced ways, I would be very supportive of that. Look, I don't think we should be entirely surprised by the ATA opposition to the curriculum roll out. The rollout was imperfect. Absolutely. But you know, I'm not sure the teacher's union is going to be our fan in, in this process.

[00:39:56] I did support Minister LaGrange and continue to, in terms of pausing the social study curriculum rollout there, you know, and, I think as others, Rebecca and others, have appropriately mentioned, there were some issues in terms of sequencing, age, appropriateness of material. And look, we can't rush a curriculum and ultimately put in a curriculum that's not gonna serve Alberta's well. We need to be wise and hold parts of it back when required.

[00:40:23] And so I'm in favor of that, but look at the, at the end of the day, this is what I think we would all agree on. And that is what we cannot do is give our education system back to the NDP in 2023. I think that's fundamentally important to me and I suspect fundamentally important to all the other leadership candidates here tonight.

[00:40:44] And we need to ensure that we're positioning our movement and our party, and even our, the leader that we elect us to win and be successful in 2023.

[00:41:19] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** Thank you very much, Travis. The last person to speak on this will of course be Todd Loewen.

[00:41:27] **Todd Loewen:** Okay, thank you very much, John. And I appreciate the question and, and yes, you know, I'm in favor of the knowledge base curriculum, like, like what we have now. I agree that we've had some issues with rollout in my discussions with the ATA upper management, we talked about this and that seem to be the greatest concern.

[00:41:44] But again, I don't think we need to throw this out. We think we can do some work on this curriculum. We need to be focused on I guess building the relationships with our education partners, including parents, and so we can establish the trust that's needed to focus on student learning. And we also need to go back maybe and look at again, the evergreening process where each subject and the curriculum is, is brought up to date in a systematic way, instead of doing everything all at once.

[00:42:12] I think when we look at a new curriculum, we need to ensure that our children aren't being used as Guinea pigs in this process or political footballs being kicked back and forth. We need to make sure that it's focused on student learning and on the basics of education. And we can even include fiscal responsibility and knowledge into that.

[00:42:29] So I think that we need to have a review assessments on the curriculum as an ongoing process. And we can review the standardized testing and see how that can affect the curriculum moving forward too. And one thing that I think we're, you know, when we look at what we've done in the past and who are kind of our traditional education partners, we've had parents, superintendents, elected school boards school board managers, teachers, and universities.

[00:42:55] But I think we have an opportunity to bring in the homeschool education folks here. And also ASCA, the independent school association. So we can actually have a fulsome discussion on curriculum moving ahead and how it's implemented. And so I think there's a lot of opportunity to move forward to do this good work on curriculum.

[00:43:17] But again, I think's an opportunity to improve this process even more. And again, we can't be throwing this out and then having this be this political football going back and forth between political parties, where each one throws the other curriculum. Well, we need to be able to work on this. We need to be able to focus on students and parents involvement in the education of children instead of using curriculum to fight the battle and the media with between political parties.

Question #3

[00:43:46] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** Thank you very much, Todd. So we'll turn to the next question in line, which is this. Do you support mandatory standardized testing in K to 12 schools? If so, for which subjects? At what grade levels and what style of testing would there be any exceptions? Hopefully this is a relatively easy question to answer, but we'll start by asking Travis.

[00:44:22] **Travis Toews:** All right, John. Well, it's an easy question. I hope I get the answer, right. Again, I expect there's gonna be some uniformity to our response. Look, standardized testing is always imperfect. I get that. And yet standardized testing I think is really important, does provide accountability in the school system.

[00:44:39] It does ensure that, you know, our students do have core competencies that they're going to require to be successful in the future. And, you know, I really think standardized testing -perhaps even more important when there is significant school choice in a system- it ensures that, you know, all our school choices are again, are delivering core competencies.

[00:44:59] So, you know, again, I think consistent with my previous statement, I do support the PTAs at grade six and grade nine. I think those are important and I support the diploma exams in grade 12.

[00:45:12] I would actually look at maybe at like encouraging an increase in weighting in our diploma exams. They were at 50% and then they've, you know, dropped, I think, I think now it's 30. I maybe fifty's too much, but perhaps 40 is the right number. I do think there's real merit in ensuring that we have some standardized testing throughout the system. I think that it's ultimately going to ensure that our education system remains strong, focused on, again, those core disciplines.

[00:45:40] Secondly, it will ensure that the next generation. Is well prepared for, you know, to pursue their passions, dreams, whatever career choices, education choices they would want to choose. Now. I do think that it's fair and realistic, and we need to have some exceptions. I mean, obviously, you know, our youth with learning disabilities need to be, you know, given some exceptions through the system and I'm not a professional educator. I wouldn't know how to calibrate that well. But I would know that there absolutely should be some exceptions in the system, particularly again, for students with learning disabilities, but, bottom line, just to pass kids through the grades without, you

know, requiring you know a minimum core level of competency, I think would be irresponsible for an education system.

[00:46:32] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** Thank you very much, Travis. So we're going to go on to the next person to answer this question. Which will be Rebecca.

[00:46:48] **Rebecca Schulz:** Excellent. You know, this has obviously been a topic over the last number of years, and I know that there some value in testing. Obviously the standardized testing, the PATs in terms of knowing where Alberta is at especially also in comparing to other jurisdictions. I, as a parent, do wanna know how my child is doing and that they're learning what they're supposed to be.

[00:47:10] I do recognize though that it is only one moment in time and it is only one way to ensure that kids are learning what they're supposed to be learning. It is an important piece. I do support the PATs in grade six and nine. I know there's been a lot of discussions as Travis just said, around departmentals at grade 12 and what percent that looks like. While that was rolled back to 30% and, you know, I've had some, some parents and some students suggest that it is important. It's important to learn how to take a test, especially if kids are going into post secondary. Some have raised 10%. I mean, that's something that I would want to do a little bit more discussion and consultation on in terms of what that looks like.

[00:47:49] But then aside from standardized testing and, you know, I know Danielle had brought up in the last question about student assessment and I think assessment is really important, especially in literacy and numeracy more so about how to target interventions and additional support for kids who need additional help.

[00:48:07] That was really part of the 45 million that was rolled out last spring or, you know, last year to help address some of the learning loss that was seen during COVID. That assessment is needed to see where kids are at in terms of. Their reading level and their math level and how teachers and team of supports can then help them get caught back up.

[00:48:28] So, you know, that's really important. I think we sometimes talk about testing as though it's a negative thing, and I think those assessments are really helpful and helpful for teachers in the classroom. I do know that again, as Danielle brought up EAs.

[00:48:40] EAs in every classroom is not something that I necessarily hear about. It depends on the complexity and the makeup of the classroom, the size of the classroom what the needs of the young people, the students, are in the classroom. But it certainly can help, especially when those assessments are being done in literacy, to pull a, you know, a group of kids out and, and see where they're at. Now, that said, I do also think that that's important beyond grades one to three especially with what we've seen in the last couple of years and, and knowing that kids need to get caught up. And I do think that that's an important part of that as well.

[00:49:13] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** Thank you very much, Rebecca. So for our, our next speaker on this will be Ms. Smith, Danielle, the floor is yours.

[00:49:26] **Danielle Smith:** Okay, thank you. I support Canadian basic skills testing from create from kindergarten to grade six. I remember when I was writing on that Herald editorial board about the Fraser Institute assessment using the provincial achievement test, I got called into a large Shawnessey school, which was a school for remedial education.

[00:49:47] And there was a young girl I met there who had shown up in grade 10 with a grade one learning level. And the teachers there did fabulous work. Brought her up to a grade nine learning level. So it wasn't that she couldn't read. It's just that no one had done the testing on her and done the intensive work with her to make sure she can be brought up to grade level.

[00:50:05] So I am far more interested in doing annual testing of basic skills from kindergarten through to grade six, to make sure that kids are reading at grade level comprehending at grade level, doing math at grade level and problem solving at grade level. Because once you've gotten to grade six with those foundational skills, I think you can feel pretty confident that going on to the higher grades that they're going to be able to move towards what I think a lot of the education profession wants is that kind of self-directed learning.

[00:50:34] I I support the grade 12 exams because I think if you're going to be going on to university, you have to have a pretty good idea of the kind of testing that is going to be available at university. There are some courses I remember taking that at a 50% final, some that had a 40% final. So just making sure that kids understand the purpose of that is to prepare them for grade 12.

[00:50:57] I'm less certain about the grade nine exam. Like I'm open to being persuaded on it, but it does seem to me that having a test every three years doesn't really capture if a child is falling behind in grade seven or grade eight.

We only then test them in grade nine. So I wonder if we actually should try to find an appropriate level of annual testing that we can get the, the teachers to agree to. Because parents wanna know precisely where their kids, their own individual child, is doing, and they don't wanna wait for three years to find out that they might be falling behind.

[00:51:29] The other thing I think is really important is that we've done such great work in the trades area in the post-secondary. I think Demetrios Nicolaides, our post-secondary minister, has done a terrific job, but I think we haven't connected that to our K to 12 education system. I know that the premier feels really passionately about this. When he was citizenship and immigration minister, he went and did a whole tour of Germany in the UK to find out how they managed to get kids into those programs.

[00:51:57] There's over 300 different trades programs that kids are connected to right in the K to 12 education system. So when I think about the fact that when I was on the school board, 70% of kids didn't go on to post-secondary. They went right into the workforce. I think perhaps as we get into junior high and high school, I'd prefer to see a little bit more emphasis on programming, on trades, on careers so that kids can really start thinking that there's two tracks in life, but there is an academic track, definitely, but there's also a practical track and great careers that that are at the end of it too.

[00:52:34] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** Thank you very much, Danielle. So from here, we will move on.

[00:52:43] Todd. The floor is yours on standardized testing.

[00:52:47] **Todd Loewen:** Thank you very much, John. Appreciate that. And yes, I do support the standardized testing, but I also, you know, understand that there's, that we need the teacher testing and standardized testing to because they provide different information and they can be used at different times for different reasons.

[00:53:03] Both types assessments have, you know, provide good information and both kinds have the limitation. But I believe that teachers, our school system, parents and students, they need both kinds of information. You know, there's kind of questions that come with this kind of testing and these kind of questions on the testing process.

[00:53:20] You know, how are the results published and used?

[00:53:23] How does post secondary programs use these, test results? How well these tests are aligned to our curriculum, especially when our curriculum's changing and other accommodations allow students to participate in like, even those with [indistinct] and emotional, physical challenges. You know, I have a grandson that's a little special needs and I see him moving through the school system. And it's good to be able to accommodate all the different children and all in all the different needs.

[00:53:49] So, I do support the use of standardized tests. It's one, you know, component in our, in student learning. But I believe we need to be able to look at that and see, you know, how that information is used. You know, we have the PAT tests. We have the diploma tests and everything. And again, we need to look at these and see where, how they're used.

[00:54:12] And, you know, Danielle mentioned about having tests each year to try to get an idea how the students are progressing. And I think that's very important. And one of the reasons that we would have these tests is to be able to make sure that we don't have students getting left behind. And I think that's one of the main concerns that parents have is they want to be able to be assured that their student, their child, is not, is not being left behind and that their student, that child, needs anything that those needs are provided and worked on before it becomes too late.

[00:54:43] And we can see a lot of frustration with students as they move through the school system. If they start getting behind, they get frustrated and they tend to even do worse and maybe wanna leave the school system altogether. And we don't want that to happen. We want those students to feel comfortable.

[00:54:57] We want feel confident and be able to enjoy the school education and you'd be able to be successful at that too. So again, with the standardized education testing, I believe is very important and that's again, part of a complete assessment tools that can be used to assess students as they progress through school.

[00:55:21] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** Thank you very much, Todd. And with that, we'll move to the last speaker on this, which will be Mr. Jean.

[00:55:31] **Brian Jean:** Thanks. I will let you know that I've thought a lot about this because I think education is the solution to a lot of our issues right now that we're dealing with. I would've been happy in, in high school, in Fort McMurray to be a C average student.

[00:55:45] I will tell you I did a bachelor of science degree, an MBA, in finance, got to a law degree, went on to starting a master of the law and environmental law, three classes away and I ran outta money. I would still be going to university if I could afford it. So I've thought a lot about this.

[00:56:02] I love education. I think it's extremely important. I do support standardized testing in grades three, six and nine. I think in grade six, though, it's different than grade nine, grade 12 and grade three. And grade three in particular, it should be limited to basic reading and arithmetic skills. I would trust the experts to get this right.

[00:56:19] I believe the grade three testing actually prevents kids from falling through the cracks, but also it's a way to help. Kids and schools are that are at risk of falling behind the rest of the schools in those grades. So it does different purposes of grade three and grade six in grade six. I think we should do reading comprehension and mathematics and basic science and social studies.

[00:56:41] This gets us a sense of the performance of the kids and the teachers and the schools. And I think that would be very helpful for us as we go forward with our education system and understand what it needs again, though, it needs to be emphasized that these tests should not be pushed at students as something measuring the student's performance per se, but actually measuring the performance of the system itself.

[00:57:02] And I think that would be helpful to take the pressure off kids, because we get a ton of pressure. And for grade nine, we should have our test: [indistinct], the international PISA, standards that would make sense.

[00:57:12] And for grade 12, I would return to the departmental exams. And I'm not sure if 50% is the right place. I'm not sure if 30% is the right place. I would have to hear the experts on that. And especially parents because I remember doing law school. And I remember the 50%, a hundred percent exams, and it was extremely stressful on kids. The mental health pressures on our students from a 50% test might be counterproductive from what we actually need given the other stresses that kids are under right now.

[00:57:39] So I think we need to listen to the experts and parents. The only exceptions I would make is in relation to mental health and in, in particular, in grades three, six and nine that said, I'm sure we can find a way to do grade three and grade six exams in a manner that is less stress inducing.

[00:57:54] But I would say this as far as stress goes, I've seen that a lot. And I think we're, we have homelessness issues, we have a lot of issues and where we need to solve this is not on the streets of Calgary or Edmonton or Fort McMurray. Where we need to solve those is in our schools.

[00:58:07] And I think if I was premier, if I get that privilege, the leader of this party, premier, I will introduce funding to confirm a 30 minutes a week, mental health education system for grade six and up to grade 12. Particularly for the opportunity for kids to understand that they can reach into a toolbox, they can pull out the tool they need for a separation or an ex-girlfriend or boyfriend, or for somebody dying in their life. I don't think we do that enough at that level.

[00:58:36] And I'm very concerned about that. Cause I think we are facing right now a mental health epidemic. And I, and I really truly think that we can solve the future by working on our education system today and giving our kids those tools on a year to year basis, that they understand that that's part of life. It's coming to them, but how do they deal with that?

[00:58:52] And what tools can they use to deal with that? And there's so many opportunities today. There's so many experts that can give us those tools. So I would commit to that funding.

[00:59:00] I think, you know, depression, drug, overdoses suicides, all of those things would go way, way down. If we started introducing that at an early age and made them part of the equation. I'm very excited about my daughter going into school, but I wanna make sure she gets the right education.

[00:59:13] She gets all the tools she needs. Thank you.

Question #4

[00:59:18] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** Thank you, Brian. So we're going to go to our last question here. And it's this: Classroom approaches to sexuality, gender, race, and religion are controversial. Should parents be made aware of when their K to 12 child will be provided with supports, presentations, or information regarding these issues? And are there any exceptions? How will your administration ensure school staff respect the diverse perspectives of Alberta families?

[00:59:55] So the first person we're going to call on will be Danielle.

[01:00:03] **Danielle Smith:** Thanks so much for this. And, John, thanks for accommodating me. I've got a room full of people, so I'm going to have to leave after this question and I appreciate you having me on, on today. I would say that I would split these up a bit because I think that they are different problems.

[01:00:19] Let me deal with sexuality and gender first, because what I'm hearing from parents is they really do feel like kids are being introduced to very adult conversations much earlier than the parents feel comfortable. My personal view is that at K to six, you do need to have some kind of sex ed education. Kids need to be told about bad touching.

[01:00:40] I think that's really important so that we can make sure that there aren't sexual predators and that kids are protected. In grade seven to nine that's when kids start becoming sexually mature, they need to know how babies are made. And so we have to have, I think, a very clinical discussion with kids.

[01:00:55] I think the issue is about attraction and some of the issues around gender identity. Those I think are better concepts introduced in high school. And when I look at the GSA conversation that we had years ago, it really was about trying to create a safe space for kids to be able to come out to their peers and get support.

[01:01:15] And I'm not quite sure how it is that we ended up seeing so much of this curriculum push down through teachers into the lower grades. I don't think that's what anybody intended. And so I think we need to take a closer look at that. We used to have a provision in the school act. I'm not sure if it's been stripped out where parents would be able to be told in advance, if your kids are being taught items of around sexuality and be able to opt their kids outta that classroom.

[01:01:41] I think we have to go back to allowing that kind of opt out and informed provision when it comes to race and religion. I would probably take a different view. I have met with many, many diverse communities over the last number of months when I was on the air as well. We used to very regularly do a gender, a diversity inclusion and equity report for the CRTC as a demonstration that we were making sure that we were in touch with all of the different cultural communities and cultural groups.

[01:02:07] And so I think we have to be mindful that in this last while, especially as we've seen division and we haven't had the building of a community that has normally happened in classrooms, I think we have to be mindful that there is an increase in bullying. That that bullying is often on the

basis of some of the characteristics that people have from different minority groups. I think a lot of kids are really being harmed by that.

[01:02:31] And having a discussion about all the religions of the world. I think the Hindu community is delighted that that we wanna bring Hindu discussion of the Hindu religion into other the classroom. Alberta has distinguished itself as really being the safe Haven of the world.

[01:02:48] Every cultural community looks at us as a place to escape to so that they can be. Live their lives the way they want. To practice the religion, the way they want. To build businesses the way they want to, and be able to succeed on merit. I'd look at our approach. Contrasted with Quebec, which seems to be going out of its way to target religious minorities and English speaking minorities.

[01:03:09] I think that this is one of the ways that we really distinguish ourselves by being so open and inclusive. So I would maybe take a bit of a different approach on that issue. I think that race issues are always very complicated. I think that kids need to be taught from a very young age, that words hurt and that bullying hurts.

[01:03:27] And so I don't have as much of a problem with some of the race and religion discussion. I like the fact that the religion discussion has now been broadened out to include all of the religions of the world. I think that was a great improvement. And I think as we go on, we just have to be mindful that we're going to have to deal with a, a lot of legacy issues from the last couple of years.

[01:03:48] And the more we can do to make sure that those communities feel supported and make sure that we're addressing these issues in an open way. I think that those are positive discussions to have.

[01:03:58] Thanks, John. Thank you.

[01:03:59] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** Thank you very much, Danielle, Danielle, since you have to go right away, would you like a minute to give us a last word.

Danielle's rebuttal

[01:04:08] **Danielle Smith:** Absolutely. I think, I think that that the, the work that you're doing on advocating for choice and education is really important.

Alberta has done, I think, better than any other province in being able to provide different choices. I think it's really a matter of just building on that great work and making sure that we're reducing barriers.

[01:04:25] I think there's probably an opportunity for more options. Maybe there's an opportunity for us to look at more support for different funding models. So the parents really do feel like they have all of the different options available to them. But we also have to be mindful. And I think other candidates have mentioned this as well, that the real reason parents look for choice is when they feel like their kids are learning things that are contrary to their values and principles.

[01:04:49] And I hope we can have a constructive conversation with the ATA about how we can embed critical thinking. Not critical theory, but critical thinking into the curriculum so that kids are taught all sides of every issues. Cuz that that is what is really going to build confidence again in the public system.

[01:05:08] I'm looking forward to having that conversation.

[01:05:11] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** Thank you very much for joining us. Danielle. Thanks. Safe travels. So the next person to speak on this issue will be Ms. Schultz. Rebecca, would you please take the floor?

[01:05:29] **Rebecca Schulz:** Sure. You know what I heard loud and clear, you know, way back in 2019. It feels like a long time ago when I first decided to run here and it was only three years, but you know, parents felt really strongly. That they know best and better than the government in terms of what's best for their kids.

[01:05:46] And that's why I think, you know, we see such passion about school choice here in Alberta. It's not I actually disagree with what Danielle just said that it's not necessarily because parents disagree with what their kids are being taught. It, it might just be that different kids have different needs.

[01:06:00] You know, I know families where they have three kids or four kids and they're all in different types of education. And that's, I think the beauty of school choice is what works best for the family and works best for each individual child. Parents are the first educators and the main decision makers for their children.

[01:06:17] Their voices absolutely need to be heard and respected when it comes to their child's education. You know, within the act though the education

act, obviously the safety and wellbeing of students matter and formerly as the minister of children's services, I can tell you that. Kids do need to be safe and supported where they learn that matters.

[01:06:34] But you know, parent choice is absolutely unequivocal. And I think, you know, right now, obviously there are requirements within the education act. Certainly when it comes to parents being notified and can opt their children out of, of different topics and discussions. I think it's important when we looked at the curriculum.

[01:06:52] And I know we were just talking about that a couple of questions ago. One of the things that people did feel strongly about was including consent in the curriculum. And as a parent, I understand that that is important as well. You know, I also heard from the Hindu community who it was excited about the opportunity for their beliefs to be included, to see different types of faith included in, in the curriculum.

[01:07:16] You know, I think we have to be very careful cause I've also heard from, from different teachers that say, you know, it's great to, to teach about different types of religion and beliefs. It's important to show that there's diversity. But also, you know a lot of teachers said, you know, I like to you know, involve students in that students with different beliefs and, and different values and different religions talking a little bit and sharing in the classroom about what that looks like.

[01:07:38] And so, you know, I think again, it comes back to parent choice and, and that really is. What was at the heart of the choice in education act as well? That we introduced, I know there was a lot of misinformation out there about what that act did, but it really just solidified that parents have the main role in decision making in terms of what's best for, for their kids.

[01:07:56] And we'll maintain that.

[01:08:00] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** Thank you very much, Rebecca. The next person to speak will be Mr. Loewen. Todd, please take the floor.

[01:08:10] **Todd Loewen:** Okay. Yes. Thank very much, John. Appreciate the question. And yes, I believe parents should be informed of the discussions sensitive discussions that they place in the classroom.

[01:08:20] And, but I also believe that safety is there paramount in our classrooms and our schools. And also have to believe that again, that the parents

are the primary educators of their children, therefore need to be included in these matters as the, that are taught in the schools parents and guardians, they need the choice and voice and these matters and they need to be heard and respected.

[01:08:40] I don't believe that keeping secret in parents or guardians about their children's activities and learning activities in school is, is the best way to go forward. And this is, is supported by the school act also. And the pre school act it's states that parents and guardians have the right and responsibility to make inform decisions, respecting the education of the children.

[01:08:57] The only way they can make informed decisions is to have information. And if we look at section 197, it states that those school principal should provide a welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe living environment that, that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging. So if we look at that too, then that that becomes the principal's responsibility to make sure that this is this place.

[01:09:19] We need to empower teachers and administrators, parent councils, and student groups to shape the culture of their schools. And now I include students as active partners in this, because section 31 says that the students Responsibility of students with respect to contributing, to a welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe learning environment.

[01:09:39] So I think that's, that's important too, to make sure we have students include in this too. But again, that, you know, these, some, some of these matters are very sensitive. These are issues that people feel very strongly about and families are, should be paramount and parents should be paramount in these discussions and what takes place in these schools.

[01:09:56] Again, we need to trust parents in the school system, and the only way to build trust is have open communication with have inform, and have like they have input of direction on what happens in the school to children.

[01:10:18] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** Next up, we will have Travis to speak. Mr. Toews, please take the floor.

[01:10:27] **Travis Toews:** Good. Thanks, John. I, you know, these issues are sensitive because they're important. And so we need to handle them. Well, we need to handle them wisely. Look, my overarching premise is this that ultimately parents are fundamentally responsible for their children's education.

[01:10:45] And I think that's, that's an overriding Princip. And I think that principal should really inform so, so many of these decisions, and that's why I'm a, a great believer in school choice. So right now our education act, the updated education act does require parent notification. Particularly if, if you know, the, the topics of sexuality and religion are going to be explicitly taught and, you know, I, and I think that's appropriate to two sensitive issues.

[01:11:15] I, you know, I would add my voice to those that stated that broadly at a high level you know, our curriculum and, and our education system to, you know, point out the various religions and to point out the diversity. Of worship in our province is healthy. And I would certainly add my voice to that.

[01:11:35] I think that is, that is very healthy, but certainly when there's gonna be explicit teaching in those areas are, are education act is clear that parents need to be notified and, and I'm very supportive of that. Absolutely. Now, now look, it's it is getting harder as the, you know, the progressives in our, you know, Education faculties and administrations.

[01:11:57] Think we need to look at everything through a race, gender, and sexuality lens. It gets more difficult to, to go forward, I think wisely, but again, I just want to point to, I think you know, really a foundational principle and, and that is parents are ultimately responsible for their children's education and, and that should inform our approach.

[01:12:18] It certainly informs mine.

[01:12:22] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** Thank you.

[01:12:30] thank you very much, Travis. And it's time for Mr. Jean to take the floor.

[01:12:37] **Brian Jean:** Brian. Thanks, John. And let me be clear with everybody. There's nothing more important than my little three and a half year old daughter. And as she goes to school, I have to put her into the care of other people. So this issue is a big issue relating to trust and parents need to trust educators to get this right.

[01:12:53] And in fact, we need to be able to trust educators and administrators, because it's so important. I wanna remind everybody that the Alberta bill of rights protects the rights of parents to make informed decisions regarding the education of their children. I think that any formal classroom discussion of any

controversial subject should be things that parents are informed of if they wish to be.

[01:13:13] And that includes issues of sexuality, gender, race, religion they should be prepared from standard curriculum. And parents should have the right to ask, to see a copy of that. At any time, if parents ask, they should get a complete package, not just part of the package and that package should cover all the things that are gonna be taught.

[01:13:30] If the schools are doing a good job sticking to the curriculum, then this shouldn't be an issue. And it shouldn't be controversial at all. If the schools are going beyond the curriculum, parents who want to be informed, have the right to be informed,

[01:13:45] They have the right to be informed and they have the right to make good decisions from that information on how their kids are educated.

[01:13:51] Now, parents should in particular be informed when groups outside schools come in to make presentations, especially when those issues are controversial, they should be informed well before. So they can make decisions on what their children do about that. If these policies are made clear to school boards, to principals and to teachers, I don't foresee a big issue in a big issue for this at all.

[01:14:13] This type of policy has been on the books for a long time. And, you know, I come from a place where parents. Should in my opinion, introduce these concepts to their children themselves. And that should be their role and their, their right to do so. And I think that's what I would stick with.

Rebuttals

[01:14:34] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** Thank you very much, Brian. Let's see here. So we're now going to take some time for wrap up and rebuttal. So each candidate will have two minutes to wrap up and to rebut the positions taken by any other candidate. So on this line, our first speaker will be MRTS. Travis. Please take the floor.

[01:15:07] **Travis Toews:** Oh, good. Thanks John.

[01:15:09] I you know, again, I think on this issue there's a fair bit of bit of agreement amongst the leadership candidates. Certainly some nuanced

positions, but again, I will say that I like the other candidates believe that it's absolutely critical to have an excellent education system in the province of Alberta to prepare the next generation to go on for further education or to prepare them for their career of choice, whether that be in the trades or, or some other occupation and school choice, I believe raises the water level of our entire education system.

[01:15:44] I really believe. That it improves it right across the board. And that's why one reason why I'm an absolute believer in maintaining and expanding school choice for Alberta families and Alberta parents. I will also like, I would also like to reiterate the position that I made public today. And that is if I have the privilege of serving Albertan's premier, I will include transportation support for families who send their children to independent schools.

[01:16:11] Again school choice. Isn't the thing. If you can't get your, it gets your students and get your children to, to a school. So I will certainly in include that level of support if I have the privilege of serving Albertans as premier, I want to draw our attention though, to what I think is, is the most critical issue.

[01:16:29] And that is this. What we cannot do is hand our education system back to the NDP in 2023, that would be a travesty. I believe that would. Undermine the foundational principle again, that parents are ultimately responsible for their children's education. And I believe it would also unwind so much of the important progress that we're making on curriculum reform.

[01:16:55] And so I would suggest there's a, there are a couple of things that are incredibly important in order to be successful in 2023 as a party and a movement. Number one I believe we need to ensure that we're not taking positions as leadership hopefuls that leave this party and movement unelectable in 2023.

[01:17:12] Secondly I believe right now is a time for strong stable principled and proven leadership. And I believe I'm uniquely positioned to offer that type of leadership to this party, this movement, and this province in 2023, if we elect that kind of leadership, I believe we'll be successful in 23 and we'll ensure that we can advance and, and defend.

[01:17:36] This education system to ensure that's working for Alberta families and for the next generation of Albertans.

[01:17:41] Thank you.

[01:17:45] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** Thank you, Travis. And the next person to speak will be Todd.

[01:17:55] **Todd Loewen:** Thank you, John. Appreciate that. And yeah, just to wrap up you know, if I'm chosen as Premier of Alberta, leader of the UCP, then you know, I'm committed to, as I've stated already, to include all partners in education and decision making, moving forward and including homeschoolers and independent schools.

[01:18:14] I think it's important that we have that broad based input in any decisions we make for education of our children and that, you know, not one of 'em has all the answers and I don't have all the answers myself either, but by bringing people together and being able to work collaborative, I believe that we can get the answers and we can get our develop an education system that that is responsive to the students needs and actually is responsible to responsive to parents and what they desire too.

[01:18:40] And so there's, there's, we just have to be able to work together to get this done. We need to have a world class education. There's no reason why we don't have a world class education here in Alberta. There's other countries around the world that we can look to for, for ideas. We see countries like Finland at a typical top of the, the world and education for, for years now.

[01:19:00] And, and at one time we were close to that too, and we need to get back there too. We know we can do that. So we need to be focused on the basics of education. I like the idea of having more trade opportunities in our, in our schools and our K12 schools. I think that's important too, to, to prepare our children and our students for, for the real world once to get past this part of the education system.

[01:19:20] I just wanted to mention too, Brian mentioned about not having much choice in rural Alberta. Again, that is the situation that we have most of all Alberta, mainly we have a, a public system, maybe public and Catholic system, but choice has gone there and hard find other than we do have home Alberta.

[01:19:36] So that is something that we need to, to understand choice and education is different in different parts of Alberta. And, and I believe choice and education is paramount. That's something that we need to protect and we need to make sure that we have that, that gives parents an opportunity to, to choose the, the direction for their children moving forward.

[01:19:55] And that is, I think, paramount to our education. And just wanna say thanks again for your, the opportunity to be here and thank you parents for choice and education for the work that you do. Thanks. Appreciate it.

[01:20:08] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** Thank you very much, Todd. The next person to speak would be Danielle, but she has already had a minute and has had to move on.

[01:20:19] So Ms. Schultz, it is your turn for a last word and rebut.

[01:20:25] **Rebecca Schulz:** Well, thank you again. And thanks for hosting this tonight. I really do appreciate the opportunity. As I said before, education is something that is so important to me, not just given my time working in the education sector, but also because I'm the parent of two young kids and like Todd, I do believe that, you know, part of my vision for the future of this province is having a world class education system.

[01:20:47] I think it matters for all Albertans. And you know, in that school choice does matter. That is something that I hear all across the province every single day, whether it's independent, homeschool, charter school, separate public, we need to support the choices that parents are making. I would say after the last two years we've been through a lot and I'm the first to say our government didn't make all the right decisions.

[01:21:10] As we were dealing with something that was unprecedented, but one of the things we have learned to see importance of prioritizing normalcy and for kids to be in school you know, both for their learning and also for their mental health and wellbeing. And I do wanna take a minute to thank teachers and administrators and those parents who are homeschooling for the exceptional work that you do because education does absolutely matter.

[01:21:35] And, you know, as, as my counterpart, Travis, had said a couple minutes ago, we do need to make sure that we protect, you know, we often talk about protecting the economy from the NDP government. I do believe that we need to protect education and the strides we've made, especially you know, given what we were hearing in 2019 and the concerns around education under the NDP government, we are on the right path and we do need the best leader who can in fact, beat Rachel Notley and the NDP in 2023.

[01:22:03] And I do believe that that leader is me. I think we're looking for some fresh perspective and somebody who understands the complexity of the education system and is willing to solve some of the greatest challenges that

we're seeing right now. Whether that be class complexity, class size funding, EAs, transportation, these are not simple, simple challenges, and we have to work together to fix them.

[01:22:25] Thank you.

[01:22:28] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** Thank you very much, Rebecca. And the last word goes to Brian Jean.

[01:22:39] **Brian Jean:** Thanks, John. Thanks for listening tonight. There are many good people on this virtual stage who want to lead our party, but I'm the only one that's actually talking about renewing our party and returning it to what it was meant to be a party that represents the vast majority of Albertans who want good government and respects their autonomy.

[01:23:00] I have lived school choice. I am an Alberta that has strived to serve my community neighbors. Whether it's a businessman and owner of businesses, a lawyer, a community volunteer, a member of parliament for 10 years, a partying leader or an MLA. I want to make Albertans happier that involves changing the way that we treat other Albertans.

[01:23:23] It means a return to civility. Civility has been missing in education debates, and I think we can improve the relationship between government and all stakeholders in the education system it's necessary. And it's important cuz it's for our children and our future. I wanna make Alberta's health healthier.

[01:23:39] That means working with our wonderful doctors and nurses and, and fixing our healthcare system, make it the best in the world. We can do it. We just have to focus on it and look at opportunities to do it. And it means introducing health and mental health resources into education. I've mentioned that, and this is an area that has been ignored for far too long and highest creamer will do.

[01:24:01] What's necessary to restore funding to that area, to get that to our children. And I Alberta's freer. This means that we need to correct mistakes the last couple years and making sure that our rights are actually protected. A big part of that is protecting our kids' rights to a strong in-person education.

[01:24:21] And kids were never at a significant risk for COVID. We got a lot of things wrong by not finding a way to make in-person learning and schooling work, to extend protections, to worried or vulnerable teachers. I think we can do

it better. And I also wanted to make Alberta's prosperous education is a long term solution to prosperity.

[01:24:40] I've talked about how important it is and its, if you get education, right, everything gets better in the future. But if you get it wrong, everything becomes harder and more complicated. If we do these things, we can renew our party and win the next election against the MVP. Thank you very much for joining us today.

Question from the floor #1

[01:25:04] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** Thank you very much, Brian. So at this point, we're going to turn to having some questions from the floor. So. One moment. I'm just going to roll a guy with a, an oddly large number of sides to decide which question to take first. Let's see. So here's a question that comes to us from the Alberta homeschooling association.

[01:25:37] And it's this, would you commit to consultation with stakeholders before making worded changes to legislation such as the education act? Unlike how the government did with the home education regulations in June of 2020? So the first person to get on the hot seat for that one will be Todd. If he's still here, Todd may have had to ring off.

[01:26:06] He did mention he had a prior event. So in that case, it goes to Ms. Schultz.

[01:26:17] Rebecca. Can you answer that question for us please?

[01:26:21] **Rebecca Schulz:** Yeah, absolutely. And I do have a record even in my former role as the minister of children's services of consulting before decisions are made. And I think that's important. I mean, you know, even earlier in this panel when folks were talking about homeschooling in different types of supports and different levels of supports, I can tell you that in meeting with parents and homeschooling organizations or those affiliated with those organizations, sometimes the feedback and the ideas are different and not everybody feels the same way.

[01:26:49] And so I think it is important of course, to consult. And, and absolutely, I would commit to that.

[01:26:56] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** Thank you very much.

[01:27:00] And Brian, you are up next.

[01:27:05] **Brian Jean:** I absolutely would consult. And I would make sure that my track record of consultation was seen by Albertans. I did that during the, my leadership as well, rose, but more important than that, I've seen firsthand that this government has not been consulting for the last three years.

[01:27:19] And I know that that has not happened at the teaching level. It has not happened at many, many levels because I keep hearing it from everyone. And I would not only confirm to consult, but I would confirm that I would change the parliamentary system in Alberta to reflect more what's happening in Ottawa, because you may know that many people on the call may know that in Ottawa, they actually listen to experts before they pass legislation.

[01:27:41] They invite them to the committee table and they listen to them. Experts from right across the country come and we should have experts from right across Alberta, come to provide information to the legislators that pass the laws before they pass the laws. And I really think that's extremely important. I also think that the Premier's office should be open to these groups and to Albertans that need to talk to the premier.

[01:28:03] We shouldn't have a lobby of situation where our universities and our school systems have to hire a lobbyist in order to get the attention of the minister or the premier. These things have been going on here for the last three years and they have to stop. They need to stop because the Alberta government and the premier are here for Albertans.

[01:28:20] It's not the other way around.

[01:28:22] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** Thank you very much. And of course, last but not least is Travis.

[01:28:30] **Travis Toews:** Great. Thanks, John. I, you know, we're gonna be consistent here. Consultation is absolutely gonna be critical to any, you know, types of act changes, legislative changes, even reg changes. And you know, if here's, here's the reality.

[01:28:44] When I take a look at, at our government's missteps and we had, we've had a few of them the last few years. And typically when there's been missteps it's because there's been a lack of consultation. So consultation is critical. Look, I'm still fresh off the private sector. I know that you know, government rarely knows best.

[01:29:02] We will only make wise decisions with wise council, and that would be my approach going forward.

Question from the floor #2

[01:29:10] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** Thank you very much, Mr. Toews. So here's the next question. And. It's this, you know, many school boards still have policies that say notification, if any of certain clubs and activities should be limited to mere existence of such clubs and parents should not be notified that their children are taking part.

[01:29:35] This first came up, I think, with gay, straight alliances, but is broadened in scope sense. Do you think that school boards should be directed to remove such policies if they still have them? So we will direct this question first to Todd.

[01:29:58] Oh, sorry. We don't have a Todd. We have this goes back to you, Travis.

[01:30:05] **Travis Toews:** All right. Good. Well, I'm gonna speak at a high level on, on this topic. I, again, I'm informed by the, I think foundational principle that parents are ultimately responsible for their children's education. And I don't believe that's healthy to, you know, even to, to isolate children further from their parents.

[01:30:26] I, fundamentally believe the vast majority of parents deeply love their children and want what's best for them. Now, you know, there's, there, there will be some exceptional cases where we will have, you know, vulnerable children that may not come from, you know, that type of home. And, and in those kinds of cases, you know, we, we need to depend on our professional educators and principals.

[01:30:49] And hopefully in fact, I would suggest that, you know, our educators would wanna bring in a second set of eyes in those cases to again, to determine if in fact you know, we do, they do have vulnerable children in their classroom that may take additional intervention. You know, whether it's intervention from social services or further counseling, or even you know, intervention from enforcement.

[01:31:12] But again, I would be I'm informed by the fundamental principle. You know, parents are ultimately responsible for their children's education and

the vast majority of Alberta parents deeply love their children and want what's best for them.

[01:31:33] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** and so we will now go to Rebecca,

[01:31:41] **Rebecca Schulz:** well, Thank you. Yeah, I, of course, we've been talking all night about parents' choice and involvement in education, which is important. I think when it comes to this, the education act is clear. And for kids who may be unsafe there is absolutely discretionary, as Travis said for teachers and administrators to make decisions.

[01:32:01] And so I think that that's important. That's essentially the legislation we brought in kids do need to be safe and supported, but parents also you know, we know parent involvement and choice matters. And so I will, I will stand by that and I'll stand by the legislation that we put forward. But you know, I don't think getting into It's tough to get into unique circumstances because there's so many different iterations or, or concerns that you might hear.

[01:32:26] But I think ultimately the education act is very clear and you know, I really do value as Travis said as well, parents and, and administrators. Oh, sorry. I see. I'm about to run outta time, but parents have responsibility in administrators and teachers also have discretion.

[01:32:44] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** Thank you very much. Brian, it is your turn..

[01:32:53] **Brian Jean:** Thanks, John. And you know, I think what we've missed here is that the courts have already ruled on this and it's very important. And, and parents know this and the administrators educators know this. I generally agree with Travis and Rebecca. I think Travis makes very good points, but it does depend on the child's age and maturity and, and the younger they are.

[01:33:12] More information you have to share with the parents, the older they get as they be turned into adults or young adults. That's the time then that the courts have said that there has to be the opportunity for less information given. But I think parents are, have to be in charge and they have to be notified of what's going on in the school, not just with their child, but generally these things that are controversial, they need to know they're in charge.

[01:33:31] The, the legislation in Alberta is very clear that parents are in charge and they get to make choices. And that means if they have to get, make choices, they need to be informed of those choices. So let's make sure we do that, but

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understand the law at the same time that we have to recognize maturity and age of students and what happens as they get older and turn into.

Question from the floor #3

[01:33:50] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** All right. Thank you very much for that. So we have time, I think for one last, somewhat random care question. So here's an interesting one. As a parent who heavily lobbied the current minister of education to strip the Alberta teachers association from investigating its own members. Along with the help of my MLA, will you continue to support the full fruition of bill a five, the student first act, including partnership with parents.

[01:34:30] So I believe that this is Rebecca's question first.

[01:34:44] **Rebecca Schulz:** Sorry, technology here. You know, when it comes to separating the disciplinary and the advocacy function of the teacher's association, I do support that. I heard a lot about that in my own constituency association or constituency office. And you know, the, the exact model we heard feedback on different sides of the coin in terms of what that model would look like.

[01:35:08] But Alberta was really the only province where that, that model, where both of those functions were still in one organization. And so you know, I heard loud and clear from people who supported that move. And obviously there, there is feedback on, on how different provinces do it. But you know, I think that's something that I'll continue to support.

[01:35:30] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** Thank you very much. And the next person to speak on this will be Brian.

[01:35:43] **Brian Jean:** You mean? I just wanna clarify. You mean bill 15? Not bill 85. I thought heard 85. The,

[01:35:50] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** I believe the question referenced bill 85, 1 moment. Let me just check that.

[01:35:57] Yes, it references bill 85, the student first act.

[01:36:04] And it's apparently part the person asking, puts it in the context of lobbying the current minister of education to strip the Alberta teachers association from investigating its own members.

[01:36:18] **Brian Jean:** Yeah. I think, well, I thought it was bill 15, but I think we got parts of that wrong. I think we need to go back to it and you know, parts it certainly right.

[01:36:27] But think about it this way. We need to fix this. So we don't have to force the union to defend criminal teachers. And that seems to be the long term ramifications of this. It has happened in other provinces. And I think that what might be the might be the unintended of the bill, but overall, I think it's a good policy moving forward.

[01:36:47] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** Thank you very much. Mr. Toews, this is your question now.

[01:36:52] **Travis Toews:** Sure. And, and I absolutely support bill 85 and, and moving forward with all aspects of that bill. I I do, I do believe that it will strengthen our education system further protect our students and, and really in, in a lot of ways, I think just further support the integrity of our, of our education system look, Alberta.

[01:37:13] We're, we're so fortunate to have, you know, so many excellent teachers in this province. I think we all know so many excellent teachers and I believe this bill we'll just further support the integrity of our, our, of our education system and, and ensure safety for, for our children and for our students.

[01:37:28] I do need to give a shout out to Minister LaGrange. I think, you know, she's, as she's done broadly in education, I think she's led this file very well. Very competently, and I'm thankful for her leadership,

Question from the floor #4

[01:37:41] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** You know, it's still five minutes too. I think we have room for one more question. If the candidates are amenable.

[01:37:53] So here's a question posed as a follow up to the curriculum review question. What kind of safeguards would you implement for curriculum reviews to ensure that specific ideologies are not implemented when reviews are required? And I believe the part of the thrust here is to say, not just the NDP's ideology, but a conservative ideology or any other.

[01:38:23] So I believe that this goes first to Brian.

[01:38:35] **Brian Jean:** Yes. Thank you. I'm very interested in this. I think one thing we have to do is go a little slower. We have to take it in little littler chunks and not try to do the whole thing at once. I think that puts a lot of pressure on our teachers and students and parents generally, especially if we don't know what's happening and we rushed it.

[01:38:51] I find, especially with kids that are so important to our future, we need to take our time with it. That means having round tables with parents, having an opportunity to go through the curriculum and, and not implementing it all at once. I believe that what we should do is have it so that once a year we get a new curriculum for the basic subject, such as math.

[01:39:08] We know that in five years with five subjects, we're gonna have a rewrite of that math program in five years. So we have an opportunity. Keep track of all the things that we can do better. Cause these are basic core subjects that don't change that much. And we need to make sure we get our kids educated to the highest level possible, which means that they need to know predictably what's happening next.

[01:39:28] And unless there's something dramatic happening in the education system, in the basic programs, we don't need to, you know, reinvent them everywhere. We need to reinvent them and take out ideology with parents, having the opportunity to see them over time educators, to see them over time so they can implement them.

[01:39:45] Like I'm suggesting as a pilot project, which means that there would be an opportunity to par for parents and teachers to give feedback on it. And also teachers, especially to make changes, small changes or big changes as necessary without having to implement it all at once and go through the system we're going through right now.

[01:40:03] I clearly believe that we need to be less divisive in these conversations and more cooperative, especially when parents are in charge. These are not the enemies. Parents are not the enemies of school, administrators or teachers. We're all in this together. We all want what's best for our children and that's the best education in the world.

[01:40:20] And if we work together, we can get that. We just need to make sure we don't do things on an ideological basis except theological basis of our children are the number one priority and must remain that way.

[01:40:34] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** And the very last word today goes to Mr. Toews.

[01:40:39] **Travis Toews:** All right. Well, John, thank you for hosting this tonight.

[01:40:42] You know all the directors of parents for choice and education want to thank you for the good work that you do at defending and advancing the school choice within the province of Alberta. As, you know, I really believe that it strengthens our education system broadly and you know, with respect to this particular question. I believe, you know, consultation will be important.

[01:41:05] Firstly, I'll back up. Activist ideology really has no place in the curriculum and that's, you know, leftist activist ideology as well as active activist ideology from the other side of the political spectrum from the far right.

[01:41:18] I think that needs to be removed and you know, there's gonna be a subject of nature to. To to that decision. And so it's gonna require consultation. Certainly I, you know, ultimately I trust Albertans, I think Alberta parents need to be pulled into that curriculum review. I would agree with Brian.

[01:41:35] I think, you know, sometimes speed can become an enemy. And again, I absolutely support minister Lara's pausing of the social studies curriculum so that, you know, we're able to, to get that right before it's implemented. But again, I believe consultation broadly, we have professional educators, caring educators in this, in this province that need to be consulted.

[01:41:55] We have curriculum experts, certainly school administrators and superintendents that absolutely care about education and guarantee parents need to be, be involved in that as well. Let's ensure that we don't, you know, push this through at a, at a rate of speed that ultimately undermines the credibility of the curriculum.

[01:42:14] And let's ensure that we don't have activist ideology on either the left or the right.

[01:42:20] **John Hilton-O'Brien:** Well, thank you very much for your responses. I would like to thank all of the candidates who came to speak to us this evening. And I would particularly like to thank those who have been in our discussion here as participants.

[01:42:36] It's been very good to see you here. I'm sorry that we have had some pretty grave technical difficulties today. However, we will be saving the recording of this and we will be making it available. And we also hope to have a transcription available on our website. So you'll all be able to have a good look at it.

[01:42:59] So again, thank you very much and good night from parents for choice and education.

[01:43:14] **Brian Jean:** Thank you very much, everybody. Thanks John. Good night. Good night.