

# The Metro School Boards Group

Fall 2014



Calgary Board  
of Education



CALGARY CATHOLIC  
SCHOOL DISTRICT



EDMONTON  
CATHOLIC SCHOOLS



EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## Provincial Leadership Race Issue – Part Two

**P**art one focused on the Progressive Conservative Party of Alberta (PC) leadership race. With the election of Jim Prentice as PC party leader, we shift our attention to the race for the leadership of the New Democratic Party (NDP). These contests are occurring at a critical time, with a provincial election expected within a year.

The thoughts, values and priorities of those who would lead Alberta are of great importance to the Metro School Boards Group—we need to know that our provincial leaders have a passion for, and understanding of, educational issues in Alberta, and for metro jurisdictions in particular.

The Metro School Boards Group sought interviews from, and provided surveys to candidates for the NDP party leadership in Alberta. The summarized responses below reflect the content of both sources. We are very appreciative of the efforts made by the candidates to share their thoughts with us during a very busy campaign period.

Candidates were supplied with the following survey questions.

1. Metropolitan school districts serve a very unique demographic. Tell us how you plan to enhance learning opportunities for these students. Please comment specifically on students with special needs and our English Language Learner demographic.
2. With enrollment expected to increase by over 5,000 students per year for the foreseeable future in Calgary and similar increases in Edmonton, please tell us how you plan to meet the need for infrastructure in metro areas.
3. Please tell us if/how you might modify the funding framework to enhance learning opportunities.
4. Please share your thoughts on the role of school boards and, specifically, on the value of local autonomy.
5. Please share your views on choice in education in Alberta; specifically charter, private and public schools.
6. Please share your thoughts on Inspiring Education. What opportunities do you see for Alberta's students within this initiative, and how can we work to make them a reality?

**David Eggen** - website: [davideggen.ca](http://davideggen.ca)

David Eggen received his bachelor degree in Education from the University of Alberta in 1984. From 1990 to 2004, Eggen taught with the Edmonton Public School Board. He was elected as MLA for Edmonton Calder in 2004. From 2008 to 2012, he served as Executive Director for the Friends of Medicare. In 2012, he was again elected to serve as MLA for Edmonton Calder.

### **...On meeting the needs of metro jurisdictions**

Eggen states that publicly funded education in Alberta is a success story. However, he recognized two concerns specific to metro jurisdictions: student demographics - in particular, higher than average populations of English Language Learners (ELL) and special needs students, and infrastructure. Eggen states that Alberta benefits from immigration; this diversity is a strength. To meet the needs of the metro demographic, however, teaching staff must have the supports needed. The lack of classroom space secondary to the lack of schools has resulted in larger class sizes, which then places a burden on teaching staff, who are trying to provide quality learning to larger, more complex groups of learners. Eggen states that ensuring that teaching and support staff have both the physical space to create appropriate class sizes, as well as relevant professional development specific to teaching complex demographics is essential, and would be a priority.

### **...On infrastructure**

Eggen states that a long term solution is needed, and that this solution must contain a buffer which would protect publicly funded entities from the lack of predictability of the non-renewable resource sector. He also states that Alberta is a wealthy province, with the means to support the infrastructure needs of our students. Tying funding for infrastructure to a degree, to non-renewable resources revenue creates a volatility that is counterproductive to a strong public education system. As such, other revenue streams will be necessary.

### **...On the funding framework**

Eggen believes that there must be more flexibility for boards to address the needs of their community, and that this may not be completely achievable through current funding structures such as the funding framework. He would support returning taxation powers to local boards in an effort to enhance local control over budgets and fiscal decision making. He recognizes that this is a partial solution, and that revisiting the funding framework is needed to ensure that funding fairly supports an Albertan demographic that has changed over time.

### **...On school boards and local autonomy**

Eggen states that those closest to the local reality should be empowered to make decisions that impact their community. He believes that local school boards are very well positioned to do this. He believes that trustees are uniquely positioned to represent their constituents provincially, but that they must seize the opportunity to do so. He stated that trustees have been somewhat defensive to too long, and that they must be bold in their defense of publicly funded education in Alberta.

### **...On choice in education**

Eggen believes that public dollars should support public education. While he sees value in choice relative to education, he believes that the cornerstone of education in the province is that of a strong, inclusive, publicly funded system. He does believe that the choice that currently exists within the publicly funded spectrum allows for a healthy competition that creates great provincial results. He states specifically that he is not supportive of public dollars supporting private education and would revisit this.

### **...On Inspiring Education**

Eggen stated that, 'Inspiring Education', the Task Force on Teaching Excellence and other initiatives specific to education have merit. He did express concern, though that, without proper consultation, initiatives such as these have the potential to damage relationships, in particular with employee groups such as the ATA. Ensuring that the ATA and other employee groups have an authentic voice at the table of such discussions will be critical, according to Eggen, who states that the maintenance of such relationships is central to a strong system.

**Rod Loyola** - website: [rodloyola.ca](http://rodloyola.ca)

Rod Loyola arrived in Canada from Chile in 1976, and has lived in Edmonton Millwoods for over 30 years. He graduated from the University of Alberta in 1999 with a Bachelor of Arts in Cultural and Economic Anthropology and History. He serves as President of the Non-Academic Staff Association at the University of Alberta. He serves as the current Vice President for Edmonton for the Alberta NDP. He is Chair of the Public Interest Alberta Post Secondary Task Force, as well as Executive Board Member of the Friends of Medicare.

### **...On meeting the needs of metro jurisdictions**

Loyola believes that investment in education is the very important for any society. He would make investing in education the highest priority provincially, ensuring that Alberta establishes communities of learning that are complimenting the academic, cultural, and economic growth of communities across Alberta.

Loyola believes that children with special needs are the most vulnerable, and that parents of special needs children often do not have the support needed to ensure that their children have the opportunity to be successful. He believes that boards should provide funding formulas that jurisdictions may use as a guide not only for in-classroom aides and adapted learning materials, but also counseling and informational support for the families with special needs students. He would make sure that funding is available to make sure that there are enough trained professionals to assist children with special needs in the classroom as well as making sure that there are post-secondary programs to fill the need. Lastly, he believes that it is important to have educational professionals and support staff work together to share best practices with one another.

Loyola believes that, regarding the English Language Learner demographic, a holistic approach is also necessary. He states that it is not only the children in this demographic that require attention, but that the parents of these children are also experiencing challenges in



the process of adjusting to their new life in Canada. By incorporating professionals to support these children and identify areas of concern, he believes that the administrators are better able to help children in the long run.

#### **...On infrastructure**

Loyola would implement a progressive income tax and increased royalty regime to pay for much needed infrastructure. He would complement this approach by working with stakeholders to identify ways to innovate current programs to meet student's and parent's needs. Loyola would also support a review of projected infrastructure needs over the next five, 10, and 15 years based on past trends, economic forecasts and projected industry development as well as immigration forecasts, stating that collaboration with other ministries is important to ensure that accurate information is accessible. He would make sure that we are accurately forecasting provincial demographic trends so that we may be able to meet the needs as they surface rather than being reactive and trying to meet the need after it has been created. Loyola states that long term planning is required in order to make sure that needs are met strategically.

#### **...On the funding framework**

Loyola states that current thinking makes the student the “consumer” of provincial spending money, believing that this is a financial view, not an educational one. He states that an alternative would be to view the school as an educational community that supports, challenges, inspires, and encourages the child as he/she grows toward adulthood. Loyola describes this alternative view as suggesting a base funding for each school according to the type of school i.e. K-3, K-6, K-9, K-12, 5-8, 7-9, 7-12, 10-12, charter. Elaborating, he states that, ‘One could determine the smallest existing school in each category in the province, round the enrollment up to the nearest fifty students, and determine the operational funding needed to make such a school fully functional in providing a quality education (this includes adequate student-teacher ratio for appropriate class sizes).’ In this manner, Loyola believes that every school in the province would be guaranteed this base funding in the school, and that when enrollment exceeded the base number for the school, additional funding would be provided on a per-student basis. Loyola believes that such a modification would provide for non-classroom support such as library, counseling, parental liaison, and administration up front rather than drawing from classroom funding. It would also shift the pressure on school boards from determining the fate of schools based on financial restraints to assessing the continued existence of a school on its educational merits. Loyola states that viewing the school as a community of learning would help to set the foundation and culture by creating a sense of inclusiveness and belonging.

#### **...On school boards and local autonomy**

Loyola believes in the principle of subsidiarity, that those closest to the challenges are the ones that can identify the solutions. He states that boards must also be bound by guiding principles and values, believing in the value of the autonomy of boards to make decisions as essential, as long as they comply with the guiding principles and values so that a universal standard towards a publicly funded and publicly delivered education system is attained.



### **...On choice in education**

Loyola supports freedom of choice when it comes to education. He does have an immediate concern, however, that the publicly funded and administered educational system is seen as inferior. He states that he would ensure that the public education system is held to the highest standard in the province and that parents feel that the public system is meeting their child's needs when it comes to their basic education. Loyola believes that public and charter schools serve specific communities and fit into the philosophy of a community of learning that compliments a geographical community. He does not feel the same, however, about private schools stating that, 'with the inclusion of private schools, we have created a two tiered education system in Alberta'. He states that he believes that private schools should not receive public dollars.

### **...On Inspiring Education**

Loyola believes that it is essential that we shift focus and begin educating children to become critical thinkers and the entrepreneurs of tomorrow. He states that, 'The key messages shared as part of the Inspiring Education mandate state that we are shifting focus towards putting students first, expanding on traditional methods of teaching, and investing in students by giving educators license to be more creative and inspire innovation and excellence. While believing these to be excellent goals, Loyola questions the direction that we are going. He believes that the actions of the current minister and others in the PC government demonstrate that they want people to work in the industries that already exist, not in the industries of tomorrow. This is exemplified by the invitation by Minister Johnson to include the Petroleum industry in influencing the K - 3 educational curriculums.' Loyola states that he would work together with administrators, educators and front line support staff to focus on making critical thinking and collaborative problem solving the absolute focus of future education.

**Rachel Notley** - website: [readyforrachel.ca](http://readyforrachel.ca)

Rachel Notley was raised in Fairview, Alberta, and currently resides in Edmonton's Old Strathcona neighbourhood. Notley holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science degree from the University of Alberta, as well as a law degree from Osgoode Hall Law School. In 2008, Notley was elected as MLA for Edmonton-Strathcona. She was subsequently re-elected in 2012.

### **...On meeting the needs of metro jurisdictions**

Notley states that, overall, Alberta's publicly funded education system serves students well. Notley also states, though, that metro jurisdictions support a unique demographic, with both ELL learners and special needs in particular, needing support in increasingly large numbers. She states that this is very important to the future of the province, as Alberta needs the influx of immigrants to support the province. Notley states that she would adjust benchmarks within the funding framework to support a changing demographic. Notley also states that, 'Setting the Direction' has not been successful at improving special education within the system, and that the quality of special needs education is suffering, and that greater resources and training for both teachers and educational assistants is a priority. She stated that developing provincial standards for class size which includes the complexities of ELL and special needs students would be important if supporting this demographic adequately is to be realized.

### **...On infrastructure**

Notley states that Alberta is a wealthy province with the means to support needed infrastructure. She states that this is critical if we are to support all learners in the province. She has suggested that implementing a progressive tax system in Alberta would be an effective means of supporting critical infrastructure needs. Notley believes that maintaining community schools is an important consideration, as students are facing unacceptable transportation times in many cases because of the lack of a community school. She is committed to bringing the three levels of government together in an effort to coordinate infrastructure funding for current and future schools based on community need, urban planning that links sustainable development principles, community building needs and learner needs, and school placement decision making that benefits from collaborative funding and urban planning decisions while representing learner needs.

### **...On the funding framework**

Notley states that the funding framework must be revisited to ensure that it meets the needs of a rapidly changing demographic. It must be developed on a multi-year basis that guarantees predictability. She also stated that any formula, going forward, must be indexed to inflation to ensure that funds continue to adequately serve our students.

### **...On school boards and local autonomy**

Notley states that locally elected school boards are critical in preserving and promoting publicly funded education. She also believes that locally elected boards are best positioned to meet the needs of the local community. She states that boards have an ability to influence that has not been fully tapped. She would like to see boards not being afraid to call out the provincial government when the needs of Alberta's students have not been met. She believes that much can be accomplished if boards push the envelope to a greater degree than has been done in the past. She believes that boards should, 'educate, agitate and analyze' in an effort to ensure that Alberta's student needs are met.

### **...On choice in education**

Notley believes that public dollars should support public education. As such, she favours the elimination of funding for private schools with the exception of that funding for private schools created to serve those with special needs would be phased out over a longer period of time (i.e. five years) in order to ensure that the public system has been improved adequately to ensure that those needs can be accommodated appropriately.

### **...On Inspiring Education**

Notley believes that the, 'Inspiring Education' process was a good one in that it involved comprehensive consultation but that the outcomes were vague and therefore difficult to track for accountability purposes. She is concerned that the process was used in part to depart from the worthwhile conclusions of the 2003 Learning Commission report that included guidelines on class size. She voices concerns that the end product requires further discussion. Of particular importance to Notley is a concern regarding processes used for, initiatives such as, 'Action on Inclusion' and the Task Force on teaching Excellence. While she states that such



consultations are valuable, supports for implementation of recommendations are lacking. She states that the province has not supported teachers through adequate staffing or professional development in order to make the recommendations arrived at successful. She expressed concern that staff are currently overburdened and that this has not been adequately addressed in recommendations in a number of provincial initiatives.

**The Metro School Boards Group would like to express its deepest appreciation to all candidates for sharing their perspectives with us—we wish you the best of luck.**

**Joy Bowen-Eyre**  
Chair, Board of Trustees  
Calgary Board of Education

**Mary Martin**  
Chair, Board of Trustees  
Calgary Catholic School District

**Cindy Olsen**  
Chair, Board of Trustees  
Edmonton Catholic Schools

**Sarah Hoffman**  
Chair, Board of Trustees  
Edmonton Public Schools

