

Trustee Questionnaire

Your name: Alyeska Silvester-Degen

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Brief Biographical Statement:

My name is Alyeska Silvester-Degen; I am a wife and mother of three young children. I hold a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Saskatchewan and I am a proud, practicing Catholic. As a former student and current parent of this district, I am extremely passionate about its future success and, above all, the success of its students. I believe that this can only be achieved by working closely with our staff and parents as they bring unique insight into each individual child. I believe in a board that works with its constituents - not above them.

Questions

1. What would you like to be the three priority areas of focus for the school board once elected?

Our goal is to provide a quality education in a faith based environment. In order to achieve this, we need to focus on the following:

Preserving Catholic Education: This constitutional right has already been lost in other Canadian provinces and Alberta is not immune.

Truth and Reconciliation: We must educate ourselves and our students about the injustices suffered in Residential Schools. It is time to acknowledge and honour those who were affected in order to promote healing.

Safe and Caring Environment for Students and Staff: Students are better equipped to learn and teachers better equipped to teach in this environment.

2. What are your views on education funding in Alberta and especially your view of the school board's role in making funding decisions?

As a current trustee, I have had the opportunity to attend conferences with trustees from across Canada. We are very lucky here in Alberta. Schools are not always funded by government, nor is Catholic Education. That being said, I still feel that certain areas are underfunded.

I take the role of making funding decisions very seriously. It is important that trustees remain engaged with our staff in order to better understand where the greatest needs and deficits are.

3. Our district currently has a very large surplus and growing needs in our classrooms. What would you do to ensure that education dollars are spent in the classrooms rather than accumulated as a surplus?

As a parent of a special needs child, I understand the growing need for classroom support. While I do support maintaining a surplus due to unpredictability in the economy and government, I agree that much of the current surplus should have been spent on the students.

As a result of our recent financial situation, I have become much more diligent when it comes to examining financial documents. I am not afraid to ask the hard questions or voice my concerns when it comes to the needs of our students.

4. What are your views about appropriate use of technology in school?

As a parent, I have concerns when it comes to technology. I have seen my generation become hopelessly addicted to smart phones and I see the next generation falling into the same trap.

At the same time, I recognize that technology is the future and to deprive our students of technology is to deprive them of a well rounded, quality education.

I believe that both the content and the amount of time should be limited when it comes to technology. I am open minded, but I see value in other methods as well.

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5. How can we make our schools the safest and most welcoming possible environments for all students, including sexual and gender minority students? What are your views about Gay-Straight Alliances and the issue of parent notification?

I believe in Safe and Caring environments for ALL students. As Christians, we are called not to judge, but rather to love. I believe our Catholic Schools should be a safe place for all, where students are educated in a faith based environment. I do not believe the two to be mutually exclusive.

I have no issue with Gay-Straight Alliances, provided they abide by government guidelines. As far as parent notification is concerned, I believe the decision should be made based on the safety of the student in question. Ultimately, the district is required to abide by government legislation.

6. What will you do to make Grande Prairie Catholic Schools an even better place for students to receive their education?

I am very proud of the staff we have in this district and I believe that they do an outstanding job of educating our students. The best way to improve the education received by students is to better support the teachers and staff who provide it. The number of special needs students continues to increase and there needs to be adequate classroom support to accommodate them. Teacher workload needs to decrease in order to allow for more time working directly with students. If these and other issues are acknowledged and addressed, the students and district as a whole would benefit.

7. What will you do to make Grande Prairie Catholic Schools an even better place for employees to work?

I want our staff to be passionate about the work they do and to love not just their students, but the district they work for. I want Grande Prairie Catholic to be a district that attracts and retains the best teachers in order to provide the best possible education for our students. I believe that our staff members need to be

given a voice, as they are the ones working directly with the students. We could not exist without our staff members, and I will continue to ensure that they are not overlooked in future board discussions.