

1. What is your vision for fine arts education in Alberta?

The Fine Arts are an important element of education, and should continue to be supported in Alberta's education system and in society at large. Learning is not only about counting and memorizing facts. Our children need to learn how to use their creative and expressive powers, and those with an aptitude for the arts need to have the opportunity to flourish.

There should not be any artificial limits imposed on schools in terms of how much time and capital they should be allowed to invest in the artistic education of Alberta's youth. All students should be exposed to a variety of fine arts, and those with a passion for it must be allowed to develop their ability.

2. How do you see fine arts fitting within the education system?

The Wildrose strongly believes in local decision-making and empowering individual schools to determine the character of their curriculum and method of delivery as much as possible. We support the right of parents to then have the choice of sending their children to the school they think will be best for their child.

This is essentially the model that has developed in Edmonton, and it is envied around the world. The key is that the central government does not dictate the particulars to each school across the province. Albertans know how important the nurturing of arts in the youth is, and they expect their kids to have good music, drama, and art programs at their schools.

For those parents who recognize the artistic passion and talent in their kids, there needs to be options for them to allow their children to devote more of their curriculum to the fine arts than they normally would. Schools like St. Boniface, J.H. Picard, Louis St. Laurent, and the Victoria School for the Arts in Edmonton have been very successful at developing curricula that emphasize the fine arts. This ability needs to be extended to schools across the province.

As for colleges and universities, we do not think it is the place of government to be dictating curriculum to post-secondary institutions. Our Advanced Education policy, available at www.wildrosealliance.ca/policy, promotes accessibility and affordability so students can attend the institution of their choice. Government funding of institutions should be more responsive to those choices, instead of having set numbers of spaces available in each department of each institution. Alberta has some excellent fine arts departments in our universities, and ACAD, where my stepson is pursuing a degree, is a great institution that enables thousands of Albertans to pursue higher education in a fabulous artistic environment.

3. Do you support the *Inspiring Action Initiative* that was introduced by Minister Hancock? Please explain why / why not.

Our education policy, available at www.wildrosealliance.ca/policy, was released last September. As you can see, we proposed in our policy a number of the general items that the Government 's Inspiring Action discussion paper recommends.

We believe that schools should consider moving towards models that are more inclusive and personalized. For example, we propose establishing pilot programs where schools are permitted to opt into a competency-based learning and assessment education model. We also propose reforming the ways in which school and student performances are measured to promote transparency.

Where we disagree is in terms of the degree to which the central government dictates how, what, and when schools teach material. Beyond the basics of curriculum and corresponding measures of achievement, we support schools and school boards deciding these things for themselves. The danger with the direction Inspiring Action on Education seems to be taking is that instead of inspiring actions, it will impose them across the province in a way that will not serve anyone well.

4. Do you believe the *Alberta Government* is currently providing the appropriate amount of funding for public education in kindergarten to grade 12?

Yes, in general we are satisfied with the level of funding in the Education Department. We propose ensuring that its funding is increased at the rate of inflation combined with the rate of population in Alberta.

What we don't support is the way capital and instructional funding is allocated. We believe that there should be strictly objective criteria for the building of new schools, and we believe that funding should fully follow students to whatever school their parents choose. This would help enable schools focused on fine arts training to attract the students and funding they need to enable their programs to be viable.

5. How do you propose to provide the funding required for the *Inspiring Action Initiative*, which is estimated to have a cost of at least \$1 Billion?

Please refer to answers 3, 4, and 6

6. If you were elected as the Premier of Alberta in the next provincial election, what would be your timeline to complete the *Inspiring Action Initiative*?

As I have indicated, the Wildrose believes the Inspiring Action Initiative to consist of too much centralized decision making generating too many layers of bureaucratic interference. We prefer to grant individual schools and school boards the freedom to

pursue the sensible aspects contained in the initiative in order to meet the expectations of the parents of their students. The independence granted to schools in Alberta is already generating a great deal of innovation, from which other schools are in turn learning and imitating. We prefer this more natural approach to progress. With the growth of computer-based learning, we believe the best approach is for the provincial government merely to set out the basic curriculum and expected results, and then to give schools and school boards the freedom to develop the cost-effective means of improving their methods of delivery in a way that suits their school and community, with parents being the ultimate arbiters of success.

7. What is your commitment to increasing the importance of fine arts in education and society in general?

The Wildrose seeks in a number of ways to encourage fine arts as something Albertans practice, patronize, and pursue as a profession. The education system is only one place this is done. As the wife of a television producer, sister of a playwright, and former host of a television show myself, I recognize how many people's passions and professions depend on the arts being supported in society. It is estimated that more than 3,500 Albertans work full-time in arts-related jobs, and hundreds of millions of dollars are earned and spent in Alberta's arts market.

Fortunately, Albertans are already quite supportive of the arts. The Alberta Foundation for the Arts supports 40,000 events, for which annual attendance exceeds 12 million. There are thousands of other artistic events that are entirely detached from government funding, and tens of thousands of amateur artists across the province that pursue their passion merely for the pleasure of expression.

The Wildrose believes that the answer for encouraging arts and culture in Alberta is not one where the Government dedicates more money to picking winners and losers. Artists should not have to learn first how to be good grant-proposal writers. Instead we propose to do things like return Alberta's film industry to its former level of activity by restoring a generous tax credit regime similar to those of competing North American jurisdictions. We would also increase the charitable tax credit for donations to charities (including organizations like SOFA that promote or fund arts and culture) to be at least or more generous than the tax credit given for political contributions. We would also support artists who could help present Alberta's unique identity to the world, and whose success would in turn inspire young Albertans. We also pledge to ensure that Alberta's government leaves enough money in people's pockets that they can afford to attend the events and pursue the artistic activities they want to.

Thank you for the opportunity to share the Wildrose vision for promoting Arts in Alberta.

Sincerely,

Danielle Smith
Wildrose Leader