

Dear Save Our Fine Arts Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your questions about education and the fine arts. Please find my responses below:

1. All young Albertans should be exposed to fine arts as part of their education. Schools and specialised teachers are best positioned to introduce a strong program which will excite young people about what fine arts has to offer and to best meet this core learning outcome of our curriculum, and. In addition, Alberta's education system, at the K-12 and post-secondary levels, should provide opportunities for those with passion or exceptional talents in these disciplines to pursue an education that best serves their potential and ambition.
2. Education is intended to be a well-rounded endeavour, one which includes a solid introduction to many critical fields including physical education, fine arts, life skills training, literacy and numeracy, and many other areas that set up our children to have a fulfilling life. K-12 curriculum should be designed to ensure this wide-spread exposure.
3. Any initiatives that focus on improving the learning system for students should be applauded, and, in particular, a process which engages parents, teachers, and the community in setting priorities and making improvements. Unfortunately, the proof will be in the government's willingness to listen to people who may see a different vision than that held by government – an area on which history does not reflect favourably. I remain hopeful however.
4. Challenges in education funding have too often been a unnecessary consequence of poor fiscal planning at the provincial level. At times, when the economy is strong, envelope funding has been available, and some school boards and schools have initiated new programs or reinvested in core services. Frequently, including more recently, downturns in the economy have led to cuts and attempts to reduce program support in the system. Our central focus should be to clearly define the needs of a strong education system, and fund it on an ongoing basis.
5. A solid plan to manage our natural resource wealth more effectively would address the potential shortfalls in more difficult times, including funds necessary to implement necessary changes and improvements to the education system. Also, continuing work with individuals on the front line – teachers, aids, administrators – to find efficiencies in the system is critical so that we can ensure money is being reinvested in those areas that are greatest benefit to our students.
6. Learning is about continuous improvement, so is the education system. It's unfortunate we feel the need to stop sometimes and lay down a marker to study what's right and what needs help. I'd keep rolling with the initiative, however, I would look at responsible ways in which we can shift these one-time reviews, often more politically-motivated than about the actual service, into ongoing dialogue with the community and front-line workers.

7. The arts have long been a valued – and a successful society has it at the heart of daily life. That philosophy would be integrated across public policy that impacts Albertans.

Sincerely,

Lee Easton, Candidate for Alberta Party Leadership