

# Online trustee forums ignore voters' concerns

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Re: "Going to school on web debates," Opinion, Sept. 28.

The administration of the Edmonton Public School Board should be applauded for trying to better inform Edmonton citizens about potential trustee candidates.

Rather than hold trustee debates, they are going to ask candidates to respond to four questions which will be videotaped and then posted on their website.

At first blush, this seems a highly innovative approach to increasing voter participation in the upcoming school board elections.

However, the decidedly undemocratic fly in this ointment is that the administration is determining the questions which will be asked of the candidates, rather than Edmonton citizens.

This usurps the role of the engaged citizen and makes one uneasy about who will be driving the board agenda once the election is over -- the administration or the board of trustees?

Given that EPSB is in the process of reviewing approximately 70 schools for possible closure, one would think at least one of the questions asked of the candidates would be about the sector reviews and the potential closure of many small schools in mature neighbourhoods.

Sadly, this is not the case. Instead the candidates are being asked how they intend to work as a single member of a nine-member board.

Does this not reflect more of a concern about whether the trustee will "co-operate" with other members of the board, rather than advocate on behalf of the citizens the trustee was elected to serve?

As it now stands, if a candidate does not choose to address this issue during their interview, the citizen is no better informed.

EPSB could improve upon their new approach by asking a citizens panel to develop the candidate questions and by continuing to hold the trustee debates, which could then be videotaped and posted on the website, too.

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