

# Why I Joined the School Board

*Shôn Ellerton, June 21, 2021*

*Are you concerned what your children are being taught at school? Volunteering to take part in the school board is a good start.*



Not long ago, I put my hand up to be part of my son's school's governing board in South Australia. A grand total of five vacant positions were up for grabs and, considering the importance of educating our children, I expressed an immediate interest. A couple of weeks later, I was somewhat struck to find that I was elected a position on the board, but the euphoria dissipated as quickly as it came when I discovered that only five put up their hands in the first place.

Although I am pleased to be part of the board, I am also disappointed, and surprised that so few wanted to volunteer for the role. I wanted to be involved because, in addition to assisting the board on policy measures and strategic development, want to keep abreast on what our kids are being taught at in school. Sure, there's a little homework involved, and you don't get paid for it, but is it not worth it?

Not being a public school, there is considerably more leverage as to what should be taught and what should not, although, there are minimum government guidelines on defining the contents of the school syllabus. However, the role of the board is not to dictate what should or should not be taught, but rather to govern policies, define budgets and manage the general well-being of the school. However, there are 'grey areas' where management and policy *do* overlap, and the board certainly has influence in the school's teachings.

Being both, perhaps paradoxically, a traditionalist and a free thinker at heart, I espouse the tenets of teaching our children the important tools required of them by passing the basic knowledge required to be successful in life and be more useful to mankind. As for some of the popular narratives of the day generated by mob mentality without established merit, many have no place in our educational system in my opinion. Basic morals and virtues such as learning to share, be respectful *and* tolerant of others, not to pick fights, steal and so on, should certainly be encouraged by our educational institutions; however, children tend to adopt most of these values through their families and shared experiences with other children, such as in team sports, hobbyist groups and the Scouts or other similar organisations.

I have always been concerned about the teachings of such subjects which are either perpetuated by political narrative or through religious doctrine. For example, the teaching of Creation rather than Darwinian evolution or the practice of *not* teaching evolution at all seems totally out of place in our modern times. Especially considering that there is an abundance of living evidence in modern recorded history that evolution is occurring in nature. In more recent times, particularly so in some areas of the United States, critical race theory has raised its ugly head in some school districts. It utterly astonishes me how anyone can view critical race theory as being a beacon of virtue and a mechanism to eradicate racism. Having delved into it myself, I can only find it deeply divisive, outright racist, and demoralising to anyone who is not deemed a 'victim'. Not surprisingly, critical race theory seems to only thrive in those countries in which racism is *relatively* low in global terms—there will always be cases of true racism in any country. To be honest, critical race theory would be a laughable matter in countries which do not have an historically white settler past like some countries of western Europe, United States, Canada, and Australia. It just would not work. And finally, in *no way* should *any* educational institution make any suggestions or offer advice to children regarding their sexual orientation or gender. If such practices are occurring in public educational institutions, they should be challenged as such subjects are deeply personal. Public institutions, school bodies and other governmental bodies are committing grand acts of overreach when they meddle into these most personal of affairs. They should still; however, preserve and maintain the values of free speech; at least in those nations where free speech is protected.

But who challenges such unwholesome practices? If one's school board announces that critical race theory or creationism is to be taught, or furthermore, draconian policies are enacted to enforce neutral pronouns or ban words which have recently been put in the spotlight as having newly found politically incorrect connotations without proper reasoning and debate. Who has the courage to challenge or open a conversation about it? Very few, and understandably so. Many parents have been heavily ostracised for doing so in some communities and there have been many reports of teachers who voice objection only to find that they have been fired from their jobs, although, many get re-instated and recompensed by the justice system in those countries where free speech is protected if proceedings are carried out by the defendant, much to the frustration of the institution. Perhaps, a lesson is to be learnt here that, in future, such institutions need to exercise better tolerance than carry out their own bizarre acts of 'fair game', an obnoxious tactic used by the strange cult of Scientology to destroy their 'enemies' through intimidation, doxing and rumour-spreading.

As a parent, I take as much time to teach my child on such subjects which will be of benefit, have an immediate interest to both of us, and unlikely that the school will teach until more advanced years. For example, in my case of teaching a six-year-old about basic accounting because he wants to run a lemonade stand or studying Set Theory and Venn diagrams with his most interesting topics such as dangerous sea creatures and black holes and studying the history of WWI and WWII because he recently laid a wreath at our local community Anzac Day event held earlier this year, and wanted to know more about it. Naturally, I expect any respectable institution of education to teach history as fairly and objectively as possibly with least bias. There are some schools, purportedly, that express an interest to teach bizarre notions that the Holocaust never existed or that, the United States, was founded in 1619. Which, of course, is utterly incorrect. The teachings of mathematics, science and English offer less latitude with respect to distortions of the truth; however, these subjects are not immune to corruption either.

During 2020, a wacky idea was put forward in one of Seattle's school districts that English and mathematics should be taught 'differently' to be more inclusive of people of colour; code-named ebonics and ethnomathematics. In ebonics, the idea of accepting colloquial jargon and general meanings through lived experience is more important than correct grammar and understandability. As

for mathematics, one would think, in no way, could this be affected by all this zaniness; however, such attributes like independent practice, getting the right answer and being taught in a linear fashion without knowledge of prerequisite skills are signs of white supremacy according to the Stride pdf downloads on the [Pathway to Equitable Math Instruction](#) website. I am not disagreeing with modernising our ways of teaching to make them less rigid; however, would this not benefit ALL students regardless of race, creed and colour?

Getting back to the topic of school boards, I hope that any parent who reads this take note of the importance of being involved with your child's school. Many of those who put up their hands for being a representative of the board tend to be less busy, and without throwing stereotypes, most tend to be those parents who have fewer working hours and less commitments. Another observation I made is that there are far fewer volunteers who have careers as scientists, engineers, doctors, and mathematics. I can, in a way, understand this. For example, both my late grandfathers were scientists, brilliant in their own laser-focussed ways; however, they also had the *trust* that, surely, the school system will take care of itself without their support. That, I believe, is a mistake. I am; however, lucky to be in a school board with a relatively wide-ranging profile of skills and expertise. But this is often not the case.

In summary, we can grumble and express our disappointment with our education system. We switch on the news and we hear of some outlandish way of teaching. We learn that students of a similar age are far more advanced in mathematics in Switzerland than they are in Australia. We discover that some schools are putting more emphasis on social sciences rather than core subjects. And so on. However, the best way to overcome this is to be involved. *Not* putting one's hand up for a position in the school board seems to be an opportunity missed. An opportunity missed for the children.