

Election result won't be challenged, but Catholic trustee eligibility remains an issue

The Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association has closed the door on a former candidate's request to have the election results in Edmonton Catholic School District Ward 75 challenged in court.



Glen Argan

Glen Argan, who finished second to Alene Mutala in the central Edmonton ward, wanted the association to apply to have the Oct. 16th results set aside and a byelection called, on the grounds that third-place candidate Michael Brown was not Catholic.

The Alberta School Act requires that a candidate for election as a Catholic school trustee must be Catholic, but who qualifies as a Catholic is not currently defined, and there is no legal requirement that a candidate provide proof of their faith. Brown has said he is studying to become Catholic and designates his tax support to the Catholic school district.



Dean Sarnecki, ACSTA

Dean Sarnecki, executive director of the ACSTA, noted that under the Local Authorities Election Act, only individuals – not organizations – can challenge an election, so the ACSTA has no legal standing to challenge the results.

Argan had suggested that under current rules, “any malcontent or mischief maker” could run for trustee by claiming to be Catholic and getting 25 others to sign their nomination papers.

“I don't think there's a mass effort of those who are non-Catholic who claim to be Catholic just to get elected,” said Sarnecki. “I don't think that's a big issue. However, I don't disagree with Glen that somehow we have to find a way to ensure the catholicity moving forward.”

Argan said he will not be pursuing the issue any further.

"I am trying to deflect attention away from myself on this issue and would rather have the ACSTA do the talking," he said in an email. "That keeps the issue where it belongs – on the right of Catholics to control their own school boards, rather than on any supposed attempt of Glen Argan to get a seat on the Edmonton board."

Sarnecki agrees that the qualifications of a Catholic school board candidate need to be more explicit.

"I do believe that ACSTA in particular as an organization needs to dialogue with the government and look at strengthening that section that outlines who is a Catholic and who can run for trustee in a Catholic district," he said.

"We need to find a way to make clear the eligibility around running for trustee."

In Ward 75, Alene Mutala won with 2,722 votes, followed by Argan with 2,377 and Brown with 2,343.

More information on qualifying as a Catholic school board candidate is available at: www.acsta.ab.ca/publications/legally-speaking/spring-2010.

Read Glen Argan's Oct. 24 blog post: glenargan.com/2017/10/24/irregular-catholic-school-board-election-will-go-unchallenged/