



29 May 2024

Office of the Minister
Honourable Demetrios Nicolaides
228 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 2B6

Via email: education.minister@gov.ab.ca

Dear Minister Nicolaides:

First, the Board of Education wants to thank you for the openness and thoughtfulness you have displayed as Minister of Education. It has been quite some time since a Minister of Education has been so accessible to school boards. Your time commitment and earnest engagement with school boards has not gone unnoticed.

I write today, on behalf of the Board of Trustees of Medicine Hat Public School Division, to express concern about the misalignment between the grants provided to support instruction and the rising costs associated with the employment of paraprofessionals and others covered by our collective agreement with CUPE. Rapidly rising costs of benefits, coupled with recent and anticipated wage increases contained in collective agreements with CUPE, are placing strain on our ability to maintain an acceptable level of service to the students we serve. For Medicine Hat Public School Division, the impact of these variables is amplified by the stagnation of instructional grants and dramatic reduction in funding (\$322k) tied to socioeconomic data.

All of this would be challenging enough without the additional complication of PBCO bargaining directives that anticipate wage/cost increases that have not, to date, been supported by Alberta Education, as is the case with teacher collective agreements.

The already challenging work of our support staff could become unbearable due to staff reductions, and, because we are forced to stand against any wage increases, staff may be driven away.

The Board respectfully asks that the cost of CUPE collective agreement settlements be directly supported, as is the case with teacher settlements. As these settlements are as close to "cost certain" as possible, due to PBCO directives, Treasury Board would be able to budget for these

costs. Understanding that not all employees are members of public sector unions, we ask that the role of inflation and anticipated growth in wages be considered when drafting the grant structure in subsequent budget years.

We know that Alberta's education system is large and complex, and we respect the work that you and your staff do to support our work. It is our hope that you will be able to support public education by addressing this issue. We are, as stated earlier, deeply concerned about the erosion of our ability to maintain optimal learning environments for all should funding continue to fall behind the cost of service.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "C. Wilson".

Ms. Catherine Wilson, Board Chair
Medicine Hat Public School Division

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