

January 14, 2015

AR87682

Dr. Grant Henderson
Superintendent of Schools
Medicine Hat School District
601 - 1 Avenue SW
Medicine Hat AB T1A 4Y7

Dear Dr. Henderson:

The Minister of Education has recently had an opportunity to review your board's submission under Education's 2015/2016 Modular Classroom Program. I am pleased to inform you that the following modular classrooms are approved for your board:

- 4 modular classrooms for Dr. Roy Wilson Learning Centre School.

I trust that this added infrastructure will be welcome news to your students, parents, teachers and support staff.

For 2014/2015, the Government of Alberta is not requiring school jurisdictions to contribute their own funds toward the delivery and setup of the modular classrooms. Your board will receive the fully funded modular classrooms and the ministry will pay for 100 per cent of the reasonable costs to deliver and set up each classroom. Please contact your Capital Planning manager if you have questions regarding the reasonableness of your proposed setup costs. The construction of any link, if required, remains the responsibility of your jurisdiction.

Your board will receive 90 per cent of the provincial funding upon receipt of your completed prep sheets. Once your Statement of Final Costs has been submitted, the provincial portion of the actual expenditures up to the remaining 10 per cent will be forwarded to your board.

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Dr. Grant Henderson
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It will be necessary to submit your request very soon so that orders can be placed in time to have your units set up for fall 2015. Please advise your jurisdiction staff to access the necessary prep sheets at www.education.alberta.ca/departments/ipr/capitalplanning/infrastructureresources.aspx for submission and completion as soon as possible.

Should your jurisdiction staff have any questions, please have them contact Avi Habinski, Director, Capital Planning South, at avi.habinski@gov.ab.ca or 780-427-2272 (dial 310-0000 first for toll-free access).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Rosen'.

Lorna Rosen
Deputy Minister

cc: Barry Day
Deputy Minister, Infrastructure



Medicine Hat School District No. 76

601 – 1st Avenue S.W., Medicine Hat, Alberta T1A 4Y7 Fax: (403) 529-5339 Phone: (403) 528-6701

January 26, 2015

Hon. Heather Klimchuk
Minister of Human Services
224 Legislature Building
10800 – 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Dear Minister Klimchuk:

My Board has asked me to express to you our gratitude for your support for the Mental Health initiatives we have pioneered in this District. We are also in complete accord with the objectives of the government. We agree that a comprehensive, all inclusive approach is needed.

However, we note that funding for our "Help Us Grow" (HUG) and funding for "My Place" (junior high program) terminates on June 30, 2015.

We would request that we be provided with ongoing funding and grow in accordance with the needs of students. We believe that such ongoing funding has the following advantages:

- 1) Personnel whom we have hired and trained can be retained and thereby enhance the success of the programs.
- 2) It takes a year or two to get parents and students accustomed to and accepting of the programs. To terminate our existing programs while waiting for a comprehensive plan to be in place would require us to start this process again, losing the advantage the work has already done.

I enclose for your information a clipping from the Medicine Hat News on January 21, 2015.

Sincerely,



Terry Riley
Chair

cc. Minister of Education, Hon. Gordon Dirks
Minister of Health, Hon. Stephen Mandel



Medicine Hat School District No. 76

601 – 1st Avenue S.W., Medicine Hat, Alberta T1A 4Y7 Fax: (403) 529-5339 Phone: (403) 528-6701

January 29, 2015

MEDICINE HAT SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 76

RESPONSE TO THE EDUCATION ACT AND REGULATORY REVIEW

We note that the overall procedural change is the removal from legislation of many of the rules and procedures which govern the operation of local school boards. This has the benefit of allowing the Minister to make timely decisions required to meet rapidly changing circumstances. However, our one reservation about this overall change is that it may result with changes being made without the requisite consultation with school boards and other stakeholder groups affected by such change. However, if there is sufficient consultation with locally elected school boards then this reservation should be mute. In part, this concern resulted from the recommendations not reflecting the input from the External Working Group which included both the Public School Boards Association (PSBA) and the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) with regard to home schooling and private schools. It is our intent to review each recommendation in turn and to do so as concisely as possible.

School Foundation Fund Regulation

“Inspiring Education” clearly set out the need for funding reform which was geared to meeting the needs of students, rather than reflecting antiquated formulas. The department has made a start at reworking the Fund Regulations to this end, but more needs to be done. There are many factors affecting these needs and we commend the department for working to this objective. We also note that the extension of the age from 20 to 22 will give many students a “second chance” which will enhance their opportunity to be more productive for the society in which they live.

1. With the extension of the age for school eligibility to age 22, three issues should be noted:
 - a. A disproportionate number of those who will extend their use of the public education will be students with special needs. Will the funding be there to meet these extended needs?
 - b. Having “adult” students sharing a facility with much younger students in some schools (K-12, or 7-12) may present social problems. (It may be possible for these to be alleviated by having distinct facilities for “adult” students, or working co-operatively with junior colleges to meet some of these needs.)
2. Some concern and uncertainty regarding “communication with guardians” was expressed. Clarification and simplification on this issue would be helpful.

Board Procedures

1. Our Board commends the move to update and modernize certain procedures. These include:
 - a. The change from 7 days of notice for special meetings to 5 days of notice.
 - b. The use of e-mail as a means to give notice of special meetings.
 - c. The clarification of using electronic means for one to participate in meetings.
2. We have some concern about the possibility that the regulations on Board Procedures may restrict the ability of boards to use alternative procedures to run local meetings.
3. As a Board we have ongoing steps in place to review our policies to govern procedures, but we are unsure as to how those might be evaluated by the Department.
4. The term of “Organizational” meetings (i.e. length of term of chairperson of the board) should be left to the decision of the board itself, which could extend up to the end of term for that board.

Borrowing

1. We commend the government for the direction it has set in easing some of the restrictions on borrowing. We believe, however, that even more latitude is needed in this regard.

Charter Schools

Our Board notes that the original intent of charter schools was to provide a restricted number of such schools with a view to do “pilot” programs to explore alternative educational theories or practices, to provide empirical data on the results of these practices, and to share this data for peer review. What has happened is quite different. Charter Schools have in essence become fully funded private schools – or even “mini” school boards, which have full access to property taxes as well as funds from the general public purse, but are not held accountable by the local electorate, and whose teachers are not held accountable to the Code of Professional Conduct of the teaching professional organization. Our concerns regarding the new regulations include:

1. No evidence of research on the “educational innovations” which justified these schools.
2. No peer review of supposed empirical research being done.
3. The expansion of the number of charter schools, and the number of students in any one school, despite this lack of research, public accountability, or accountability to the profession.
4. One “charter school” operating multiple sites.
5. The costs per student of charter schools in many cases far exceeds the per student costs for public school students, despite the money coming from the public.

Disposition of Property

Our Board commends the government for easing the restrictions on the disposal of real estate, including the use of real estate agents to help in this process when needed. It is our first choice to try to transition these properties to other public service organizations when possible. For example, we have transferred the ownership of the Georges P. Vanier School to the CORE Association which has since been converted to a residence for people with developmental disabilities who have dementia. We are providing “Central Park” School to the Southern Alberta Francophone District for no rent, and have sought the advice of the Minister and the Department on how we could transfer ownership of this property to that district at virtually no cost. Although we offered the Earl Kitchener property to public groups at minimal cost, there were no such agencies which expressed an interest in availing themselves of this offer. We appreciated the Minister allowing us subsequently to use a real estate agent to dispose of this property.

Early Childhood Services

We wish to commend the government and the department for its expansion of pre-school programs for children of need. Helping these students prepare for school is the best way to ensure these students will vastly enhance their ability to be productive contributors to our society and lead a more contented life.

Although not part of the regulation review, we would like to commend the government for two other programs that also vastly improve the chances of students at risk to achieve success now and throughout their adult life. These include:

1. The mental health programs offered in schools (in MHSD#76 the “HUGS” and “MY PLACE” programs).
2. The Regional Collaborative Service Delivery Program (RCSD).

We believe it is appropriate to have a common entry date for students starting Kindergarten or grade 1, and agree to the proposed change in date.

Establishment of Separate School Districts

We believe that the changes made to the ability to form “4X4” Separate School Districts will serve the interests of rural communities which are already experiencing difficulties due to population decline. It is particularly important to involve the broader community in assessing the impact of such districts.

Home Schooling

Our Board recognizes that the government must balance the rights of parents with the rights of children. We also acknowledge that there are some parents who do a great job of providing a quality education for their children in their home. However, we note that there is extensive abuse of the provisions of the old act and the new regulations. We believe that when such abuses

put the future of children at risk, the government has an obligation to error on the side of providing for the right of the child to have a quality education. We see some abuses that may very well amount to fraud of the provincial tax payer. Our position would be one of support for the position taken by CASS, PSBA, and the Extended Working Group, which has provided an extensive response to this recommendation. In particular, CASS has put forward an extensive response to these regulations and we would support the provisions therein.

Investment

We commend the government for being willing to review this provision. However, we believe that school boards should be able to invest any “cash on hand” on the same basis as “a prudent investor” as defined in the “Trustee Act” of Alberta.

Petitions and Public Notices

Our Board is concerned that these regulations may become an excessive burden on our executive officers in the verification processes as outlined. Who is an elector for a school board may be far more difficult than the verification of an elector for a city or a province. In Medicine Hat we have both a Public Board and a Separate Board, and determining for which board a particular citizen has voted may be next to impossible to determine.

The concerns of our Board about private schools financing, the accountability to the local taxpayers about the use of public money, and the meeting professional standards would be similar to our concerns about charter schools. Our concerns about the quality of education some students get in some private schools would be similar to our concerns expressed about home schooling. We acknowledge that some private schools maintain very high standards, but the opportunity for abuse and exploitation of students is extensive. Public education is too important to provide for such schools receiving public money, but not holding them to the same standard of accountability. We are particularly fearful of a blurring of the line between “accredited” private schools and “non-accredited” private schools, and the new regulations do nothing to alleviate these fears.

We are in support of, and currently run, very active School Councils. The one issue that may need some review is the regulation concerning the operation of “bingos” or participation in casinos. Several school councils operate as a school council, but the same individuals set up a “society” for the purpose of raising funds for school activities. There may be need to make clear which group does what, and what is the responsibility of the District in this regard.

School Fees

Our District currently has a policy on this issue and makes information available on our web site. Our policy is very flexible. If a parent feels that they cannot afford school fees, they can make their case to the school principal to waive such fees. The parent is free to appeal any decision from the principal to the Board. In addition, we have not denied any student the right to participate in school if the fees have not been paid. We are concerned that the implementation of

a centralized set of rules on this topic would diminish our District of our current flexible and compassionate policy at some future date.

Special School Tax Levy Plebiscite

Our District notes that the requirement not to hold a plebiscite was one of the recommendations of the Learning Commission.

Student Record

We note that the requirement to retain information about the suspension of a student was required to be kept for 3 years and could be removed after this three year period. This requirement is absent from the regulations. Was this absence intended or was it an oversight?

Student Transportation

The absence of the 2.4 km regulation was noted. We currently provide transportation at no cost to students to his or her designated school. In addition, we allow students to attend schools other than their designated school. We allow them to ride school buses to their alternate school at no charge if there is space available on such buses not required for students designated to that alternate school. We are hopeful that the absence of the 2.4 km rule will not result in a reduction of our ability to provide for our flexible student transportation policy, and that such transportation funds will still be used by the Board as it deems best meets the needs of its students.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Terry Riley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping underline.

Terry Riley
Board Chair
Medicine Hat School District No. 76

(and the Canadian Parents for
French)

To the Board of Trustees, ↓

Thank you for your donation of \$100
for 'Best allaround student in French
Immersion'. I am very ~~privileged~~ privileged
to have been able to learn in French and
I greatly enjoyed it.

Merci beaucoup!

Sarah Regier

Thank You

Thank-you so much! I'm very proud to have earned first class honors in grade 7+8 and am ~~even~~ proud to have been recognized for it!

- Abigail Junge