



Division Office

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October 15, 2020

Honourable Travis Toews
President of Treasury Board and Minister of Finance,
Office of the Minister
Treasury Board and Finance
208 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB., T5K 2B6

Dear Minister Toews:

Re: PBCO Concerns

As we all continue to adjust to the ramifications and effects of Covid-19, and particularly the economic impact that it will have on the Province and economy we realize that expectations must be tempered. The Foothills School Division has long been a proponent of Provincial strategies on bargaining and the sharing of information between boards and between boards and government. We do, however, have some concerns as to how the Provincial Bargaining Coordinating Office's (PBCO) mandate is structured and the position it puts boards in as we bargain with our various unions.

Our concern is really two fold: 1) we are to be given a strict mandate from which we then must translate into new agreements with our unions without the flexibility of being able to meet local needs or sharing our inability to vary from the mandate and 2) the concern that boards, such as Foothills, who have unions, are required to strictly adhere to PBCO mandates while those boards without unions are under no such obligations and have the ability to give raises or increase compensation. This second issue severely constrains boards such as ours when neighbouring jurisdictions are able to compensate staff at higher rates due to being unconstrained by PBCO restrictions – thereby putting FSD at a disadvantage in recruitment and hiring.

We value relationships with our unions and staff and have concerns about how that may be impacted when we are asked to go to the bargaining table with these restraints. Again, we recognize the fiscal realities, and moving forward, as we have in the past, with an open and honest dialogue with our many employee partners as to what we can and can't do regarding changes to

collective agreements seems to us as the best way forward. We believe that being open and accountable about our limitations is really the best way for boards to proceed. As well putting restrictions on boards with unions and not on boards without is simply tilting the playing field wildly in one direction.

We ask that you please revisit how mandates are, and can be, communicated and how it can be made equitable between boards with and without union contracts. We appreciate the many efforts of those within PBCO and the level of support and feedback we have received in our work with local unions and circumstances. We believe now more than ever that government and boards must work together to maximize resources available for our children, but it must be in a manner that is open and equitable to all.

Thanks for your consideration and response.

Respectfully,

Larry Albrecht, Board Chair Foothills School Division

Cc: Minister of Education
MLA's
Board Chairs
Lorrie Jess, ASBA President