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February 23, 2023

Honourable Adriana LaGrange
Minister of Education
228 Legislature Building
10800 – 97 Ave
Edmonton AB T5K 2B6

Dear Minister LaGrange:

Re: Mandate Letter for Education regarding Educational Assistants and PBCO constraints.

In November, the Honorable Premier, Danielle Smith, highlighted several priorities for education in her mandate letter, including the need to explore short- and long-term solutions that will address the shortage of educational assistants in classrooms to help address learning loss and the increasing complexity of learning needs.

On behalf of the Foothills School Division Board of Trustees, I offer gratitude for the recognition of these needs and for the actions you are undertaking to help us support all students, including our most vulnerable and at-risk students.

Continuing to respond to this increasing need is of the utmost importance and critical to this is a school division's ability to retaining highly valued employees who are doing this important work. This is where we need your support.

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 twofold:

- 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 FSD, 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 neighboring 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 have had over 20 resignations from our para-

professional group since January of 2022 and we are struggling to attract new employees for Educational Assistant positions within the current labour environment.

Being open and accountable about our limitations is really the best way for boards to proceed but the PBCO restrictions make this impossible. We respectfully ask that you advocate to your colleagues in the Treasury Board to revisit how mandates are, and can be, communicated and how they 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. 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.

Thank you for your consideration and response.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Theresa Letendre." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Theresa Letendre

Board Chair, Foothills School Division

Cc:

Foothills School Division Board of Trustees
Dr. Christopher Fuzessy, Superintendent of Schools
MLA R.J. Sigurdson
MLA Roger Reid
MLA Miranda Rosin