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March 31, 2025

The Honourable Demetrios Nicolaides
Minister of Education
Office of the Minister
Alberta Education
Edmonton, AB
education.minister@gov.ab.ca

Re: Federal Changes to Jordan’s Principle and Implications for Alberta’s Education System

Dear Minister Nicolaides,

I am writing on behalf of the Board of Trustees of Foothills School Division as a follow-up to our conversation during the March 27th ASBA Board Chair Engagement. At that meeting, I raised a concern regarding the recent changes to Jordan’s Principle—specifically, the decision by Indigenous Services Canada (ISC) to redirect support for off-reserve school boards to provincial or other existing programs.

In your response, you emphasized that the funding in question is a federal responsibility and assured us that Alberta Education would be bringing this issue back to the federal government. I appreciated your candor and your stated commitment to advocacy, and I write now to provide additional context about what this shift could mean for Alberta school divisions.

Foothills School Division currently operates under a Divisional Contribution Agreement with ISC, which has enabled us to provide timely, coordinated supports for First Nations and Inuit students. In the 2024–2025 school year, this agreement has provided over \$675,000 in funding for educational assistants, psychoeducational assessments, allied health services, and cultural learning experiences. These supports are critical to equitable access and student success.

However, under ISC’s revised implementation plan (February 2025), group-based funding for off-reserve school boards is now being restricted and, in many cases, referred to provincial systems. In essence, the federal government is redirecting responsibility for First Nations students who live or attend school off-reserve—without a corresponding provincial funding mechanism in place.

This move reintroduces the very issue that **Jordan’s Principle was created to resolve**: jurisdictional ambiguity. The principle was established to ensure that First Nations children receive the services they need *first*—without delay—while governments sort out which level is responsible. Directing off-reserve school boards to “other programs” creates the risk of bureaucratic back-and-forth, administrative hurdles, and inconsistent service delivery. For children with complex educational and wellness needs, those delays are not simply inconvenient—they are inequitable and irresponsible.

Importantly, Alberta Education’s own Funding Manual (2024–25) makes it clear that school authorities are expected to support **systemic improvements for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit student success**. As outlined in the *Education Plan Requirements for School Authorities*, school divisions must address improving outcomes through program and instructional supports, closing systemic education gaps, and supporting the implementation of the **Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action**. It is

difficult to imagine how these goals can be met if the Province is not resourced—or prepared—to step in when federal support is restricted.

We know Alberta Education’s Business Plan (Outcome 2) commits to improving educational outcomes for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FNMI) students. But this must go beyond aspiration—it requires resourcing and coordination across jurisdictions. The current provincial investment in FNMI education, while appreciated, remains modest when compared with targeted funding in other areas such as literacy and numeracy. If supports are now being redirected to the Province, clarity is urgently needed on whether and how Alberta Education and the Government of Canada will respond.

As a school division, we are proud of the growth we have seen in our support for Indigenous learners. We have welcomed more students from on-reserve communities into our schools and worked closely with Nations to respond to students’ needs in culturally meaningful ways. We remain committed to this work. We are concerned that the changes to Jordan’s Principle may compromise the consistency and responsiveness of support available to some of our most vulnerable learners.

We respectfully ask for your support in:

- **Advocating federally**, as you committed, for continued Jordan’s Principle funding to off-reserve students through school divisions;
- **Preparing a provincial response** to potential service gaps if redirected funding is not restored;
- **Exploring opportunities to strengthen provincial investments** in FNMI education in alignment with Alberta’s stated commitments;
- **Reinstating the Innovation in First Nations Education (IFNE) Grant Program**, which previously supported collaborative, three-year projects between First Nations and provincial school jurisdictions in areas such as Early Childhood Education, Student-Centered Supports, and Indigenous Languages. Reviving this program would provide targeted support to address emerging needs and reinforce Alberta’s commitment to Indigenous education.

We remain eager to work in partnership with Alberta Education to ensure that no First Nations student is left without access to the services and supports they need to thrive—regardless of where they live or attend school.



Theresa Letendre
Board Chair, Board of Trustees | Ward 3
Foothills School Division

cc:

- Dr. Christopher Fuzessy, Superintendent of Schools
- Minister Rick Wilson, Indigenous Relations Alberta
- Premier Danielle Smith, Government of Alberta
- President Marilyn Dennis, Alberta School Boards Association
- Minister R.J. Sigurdson, Agriculture and Irrigation, MLA - Highwood
- Chelsea Petrovic, Parliamentary Secretary Health Workforce Engagement, MLA - Livingstone-Macleod
- Sara Elmeligi, Official Opposition Critic for Tourism, Sports & Recreation MLA - Banff-Kananaskis
- Board Chairs, Alberta School Boards