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WARD B Marsha Nelson
WARD C Marcia Hole
WARD D Trisha Estabrooks
WARD E Dawn Hancock
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June 29, 2022

Rebecca Schulz, MLA
Former Minister of Children's Services
Calgary - Shaw
Legislative Branch
Suite 230, 251 Midpark Blvd SE
Calgary, AB T2X 1S3

Dear MLA Schulz:

Dedicated, funded childcare space needed in schools

Thank you for meeting with Trustee Kusiek, Mr. Wright and me on June 8 to discuss childcare in schools and the Lansdowne Child Care and Family Centre in particular. It was a great discussion so I want to capture the main points for reference as we move forward.

It was heartening to hear you agree that schools are ideal places for childcare and that they help create strong communities. Our Division values partnerships with childcare organizations and currently lease space to approximately 100 childcare providers. This is an arrangement that is highly valued by families and creates comfort for children as they gain familiarity with a school setting prior to entering their formal education journey.

Unfortunately, however, the provincial Education funding model does not support childcare in schools, particularly in growing divisions such as Edmonton Public Schools. The *Education Act* stipulates that our mandate is Kindergarten to Grade 12; that is what we are funded for and thus what we must prioritize, both through spending and space allocation. Our utilization rate increased from 69 percent to 80 per cent in about a decade. Note that 80 per cent utilization means that all classroom space is full and further growth requires that non-traditional space, such as learning commons and gymnasiums, be used and lease space be reclaimed for instructional purposes. Neither are we funded to convert space for non-education purposes, so retrofitting or repurposing courtyards or atriums is not an option available to us.

Rapid growth in new neighbourhoods, no new school announcements for two years, and delays in modular delivery is increasing growth pressures for our Division leading, in some situations, to the difficult decision to reclaim space from childcare providers.

We, like you, are seeking and are supportive of creative solutions that can help create more childcare spaces in our schools and are open to future conversations with the Children's Services, Infrastructure and Education ministries about how that can happen. We see a great opportunity to create additional childcare spaces in our schools with the help of the recently announced federal childcare funding, particularly if that funding can be used for dedicated childcare capital investments right in new schools and as a part of modernizations of existing schools. We were pleased to confirm that we share the view that dedicated funding and dedicated space for childcare providers in schools is essential. Dedicated space would provide greater certainty for childcare providers and for families.

As is apparent with the Lansdowne Child Care and Family Centre, despite all parties wanting to have childcare provided in a school, the legislative restriction of a year-to-year lease and lack of dedicated funding for childcare space in schools works against the best intentions and desires of all parties. Our Division staff will continue to work with the Lansdowne Child Care and Family Centre, but please know that this is only one of many of these difficult conversations we are forced to have as we outgrow our school space. Your advocacy for dedicated childcare space in schools and funding for the same would benefit school divisions, childcare providers and families.

Sincerely,



Trisha Estabrooks
Board Chair

- c. Honourable Adriana LaGrange, Minister of Education
Honourable Matt Jones, Minister of Children's Services
Honourable Nicholas Milliken, Minister of Infrastructure
Darrel Robertson, Superintendent, Edmonton Public Schools
Marilyn Dennis, President, Alberta School Boards Association
Vivian Abboud, Chief Executive Officer, Alberta School Boards Association