

DATE: April 22, 2022

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: ASBA Issues and Resolutions Committee; Trustee Hancock, Vice-chair Ip, Board Chair Estabrooks

SUBJECT: Proposed ASBA position statements

REFERENCE: [Trustees' Handbook](#), Section 6.2, ASBA Issues and Resolutions Committee

ISSUE

Prior to the Alberta School Boards Association (ASBA) Spring and Fall General Meetings (SGM, FGM) each year, the Board's ASBA Issues and Resolutions Committee brings forward recommendations with regard to proposed emergent position statements. Emergent position statements are due by May 2, 2022, and boards are encouraged to share their proposed statements with their respective zones. Fall position statements are those not considered emergent and are due on May 31, 2022.

BACKGROUND

The ASBA Issues and Resolutions Committee is a committee of the Edmonton Public School Board. The purpose of the Committee is to advise and assist the Board in presenting issues and resolutions to the Alberta School Boards Association Zone and General Meetings.

The Committee is proposing one emergent resolution for the ASBA SGM to be held June 5 and 6, and one position statement for consideration at the FGM.

1. Revision to Capital Planning Process - for FGM

"That the ASBA advocate to the Province for school boards to submit a disaggregated Three-Year Capital Plan, with one list for modernization/replacements and one for new construction projects."

The Province requires a Division's Three-Year Capital Plan to be approved by its Board of Trustees and submitted to Alberta Education by April 1 annually. Only one aggregated list of project priorities, combining new construction with modernization/replacement priorities, can be submitted to the Province.

The requirement to blend new construction priorities with modernization/replacement priorities in a single aggregated list creates a situation where serving new communities competes against mature areas of a school division. This competition goes against the planning principles of many school divisions, including EPSB's, that aims to provide equitable access to modern, high quality learning environments regardless of where students live.

The request to combine the two lists also presents difficulties in finding ways to adequately fund modernizations and replacement projects.

Alberta Education reviews and prioritizes the Division's school capital projects among all school divisions in the province, in accordance with their criteria as listed in the *Government of Alberta School Capital Manual – Chapter 2*: building condition, community renewal, declining demographics, enrolment pressures, education functionality and programming, health and safety, legal requirements. Their review will also include any additional information, such as regional plans or partnership opportunities.

2. A mental health professional in every school - for SGM

“That the ASBA advocate to the Provincial government for adequate funding for school divisions to hire mental health professionals to be assigned to every school in Alberta.”

“Youth ages 12 to 24 are among the most underserved population in regard to mental health and addictions in Alberta.”

- Canadian Mental Health Association

According to the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) in 2018, it was estimated that one in five people will struggle with mental health in their lifetime. In their Mental Health Impacts of COVID-19: Round 4 [survey](#) released on March 1, 2022, the CMHA reported that 37 per cent of Canadians reported a decline in their mental health since the onset of the pandemic. For young people, the decrease in reported mental wellness is even more acute. A report from [Statistics Canada \(Oct 2020\)](#) shows this age group reports the greatest decline in their mental health pre-COVID to during COVID with 60 per cent of young people reporting excellent or very good mental health - a number that dropped to 40 percent by July 2020. [According to the Child & Youth Wellbeing Review](#), The Kids Help Phone saw 38 per cent more call/text/chat interactions over a 12-months span in 2020/2021 compared with all of 2019. There was more contact from those aged 14-17 than any other group.

Research is clear: mental health impacts student learning. For students to reach their highest potential and have a positive learning experience, having readily accessible, predictable, and sustainable mental health supports is vital. Dedicated spaces in schools where mental health professionals can focus on the health of students is imperative so that educators can do the important foundational work of educating children. Including a mental health professional as a permanent part of the school community enhances the whole school approach to education, and promotes a strength-based approach to aiding recovery post-pandemic.

Having a mental health professional assigned to each school aligns with the [Child & Youth Wellbeing Review](#) recommendations released by a government panel on the topic in December 2021 [emphasis added]:

- **Recommendation #1:** Advance existing and **create new interventions and supports** where necessary to help children and youth navigate the psychological, social, educational, and physical effects of the pandemic.
- **Recommendation #3:** Create available, **streamlined and universally accessible pathways** to connect children, youth, and families with mental health services and supports.
- **Recommendation #4:** Recognize and **enhance the essential role of schools** in interdisciplinary wraparound services and supports for mental health and well-being of students.

Furthermore, rural, urban and metro school divisions have shared that students and families they serve are struggling with accessing a mental health professional in a timely manner, leaving them vulnerable for weeks and sometimes months without support. This position statement is intended to give school divisions the funding necessary to hire the professionals they deem the best fit for their individual school communities.

This position statement meets the definition of emergent in that it is timely, relevant and requires immediate attention by ASBA membership.

RELATED FACTS

- The committee is recommending a position statement on capital planning be presented for consideration at the FGM of ASBA.
- The committee is recommending that an emergent statement on advocating for funding for mental health professionals in all Alberta schools be considered for the SGM of ASBA.

RECOMMENDATION

That the position statements proposed by the Issues and Resolutions Committee be approved for consideration at the ASBA Spring and Fall General Meetings.

CONSIDERATIONS and ANALYSIS

In order for a position statement to be considered for the Spring General Meeting, it must be considered emergent or needing to be addressed by the ASBA membership in a timely manner. The committee felt that the position statement on infrastructure would not meet the emergent test and as such is recommending it come forward during the Fall Annual General Meeting.

Previous position statements related to mental health have been adopted by ASBA membership. The committee feels that the position statement being put forward enhances the following position statements already in place.

6.8. Alberta Mental Health Review Committee report and recommendations

The provincial government must implement the recommendations in the *Report of the Alberta Mental Health Review Committee 2015*. Specifically, resources for teachers, timely screening for students, and, more importantly, comprehensive interventions with trained professionals must be available to all school aged children in Alberta who may require such services and be funded by the Ministry of Health and/or other ministries providing services to children.

8.18. Mental Health Funding

Dedicated funding for accredited mental health professionals available in schools be increased to best meet students' mental health needs in a timely and accessible manner for all Alberta students through cross-ministerial collaboration between the Ministries of Health, Education, and Infrastructure. (EPSB, 2018)

NEXT STEPS

Upon approval of the recommendation, the position statements will be shared with the ASBA Zone 2/3 committee as well as with ASBA's Policy Development Advisory Committee (PDAC).

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