

DATE: November 29, 2022

TO: Caucus Committee

FROM: Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Funds for the 2023-2024 Exempt Staff Professional Improvement Program

ORIGINATOR: Angela Anderson, Chief Human Resources Officer

RESOURCE STAFF: Trish Kolotyluk, Renée Thomson

ISSUE

An allocation of funds from the 2023-2024 operating budget is requested to support the Exempt Staff Professional Improvement Program. Through this program, exempt staff can access tuition and leave support for post-secondary coursework. An allocation of funds to support this program is an investment that will benefit our Division in several ways, including improving student achievement, building capacity in our exempt staff and sharing knowledge and expertise. The request for a commitment of funds is made well in advance of the distribution of the funds to accommodate application and program admission processes.

BACKGROUND

Edmonton Public Schools recognizes that professional development for staff is a critical aspect in supporting successful outcomes for students, as well as for succession planning. The Exempt Staff Professional Improvement Program is aligned with the [Division Strategic Plan](#) and is grounded in our values of accountability, collaboration, equity and integrity. The program is also in direct support of our Division's vision of "Enhancing pathways for student success", as well as our mission, which states that "Our commitment to high-quality public education serves the community and empowers each student to live a life of dignity, fulfilment, empathy and possibility."

Through this program, Division exempt staff have the opportunity to apply for tuition and leave support to participate in professional improvement activities that are aligned with Division priorities and areas of need. A comparison of successful applicants by year (Attachment I), as well as a synopsis of funds and support granted over the past few years (Attachment II) are included in this report.

RELATED FACTS

- The program ensures that exempt staff members across the Division have access to opportunities that would serve to enhance their professional capacity and allow them to stay current with industry standards and trends.
- Support for professional development assists in the attraction of exempt staff to the Division and in the retention of those employees.
- Exempt staff have the opportunity to apply for support in January for courses that take place between July 1, 2023, and August 31, 2024, or in September for courses that take place between December 1, 2023, and August 31, 2024 (Attachment III).
- The Professional Improvement Program application process is rigorous. Assessment of applications is completed by a committee of Division leadership staff who consider the alignment of applicants' proposed professional improvement plans with identified areas of need in the Division. Additional

considerations are the anticipated benefits to the Division, as well as connections to the applicants' professional growth plans and career goals.

- Successful applicants agree to a return of service to Edmonton Public Schools of one year for tuition support and three years for a full-time leave with an allowance; part-time leaves are prorated accordingly.
- For the 2022-2023 Exempt Staff Professional Improvement Program, requests for support from exempt staff varied as greatly as their roles in the Division. All ten applicants were granted the support they requested and were eligible to receive. Seven (70 per cent) were first time applicants, while three (30 per cent) submitted applications in previous years.
- It has been an administrative practice to maintain a holdback of a portion of the allocation to address potential increases to leave allowance costs and tuition fees in the next academic year, as well as potential fluctuations in the exchange rate for tuition fees paid to international post-secondary institutions.
- The Exempt Staff Professional Improvement Program is one way that professional learning is supported for Division staff. The chart below outlines sources of support for professional learning.

Funds for Professional Learning	Details
Decision Unit Budgets	Funds are allocated for staff professional learning within decision units.
Central Decision Units	Central decision units allocate funds for the delivery of targeted professional learning courses and sessions for staff. These include sessions offered through Instructional Supports, Technology and Information Management and Human Resources, among others.
Professional Improvement Program	Tuition and leave support is available to exempt staff through the Professional Improvement Program for post-secondary coursework aligned with the Division's identified areas of need.
Bursaries and Scholarships	Staff are encouraged to access support through bursary programs and to explore scholarship opportunities through their post-secondary institution and other community organizations.

RECOMMENDATION

That an allocation of \$140,000 from the 2023-2024 operating budget be approved for the Exempt Staff Professional Improvement Program for the purpose of granting professional improvement leaves and tuition support to exempt staff for the 2023-2024 school year.

OPTIONS

Based on the information provided in this report, the following options are considered most appropriate:

1. The allocation of funds for 2023-2024 remains at \$140,000.
2. The allocation of funds for 2023-2024 is decreased to \$130,000.

CONSIDERATIONS and ANALYSIS

Based on the number of applications and the types of requests we have received over the past few years, it is anticipated that maintaining the allocation of funds for this program at the current level would adequately cover the requests for support in 2023-2024. There is a relatively small pool of applicants to the Exempt Staff Professional Improvement Program. Fluctuations in the support granted each year are significantly influenced by the nature of the requests for leaves and tuition support, as

well as associated allowance and tuition costs. A decreased allocation may not adequately support anticipated fluctuations in funds required to support requests.

A selection of statements from staff members who were granted support through the Exempt Staff Professional Improvement Program has been included with this report (Attachment IV). Program participants reflected on the benefits of their professional learning and how it has been effectively integrated into their work responsibilities.

While post-secondary professional learning is critical to building staff capacity and supporting student learning, we acknowledge the current economic climate. We continue to see strong demand for support through the Exempt Staff Professional Improvement Program. For these reasons, Option 1, which would maintain the allocation of funds for this program at the current level, is considered most appropriate. In 2021-2022, the allocation of funds was reduced by \$10,000 (6.7 per cent) over the previous year (Attachment I).

NEXT STEPS

Upon approval of this recommendation, the program timelines for both the January and September application intakes will be implemented (Attachment III).

ATTACHMENTS

ATTACHMENT I	Total Number of Applicants and Number of Successful Applicants
ATTACHMENT II	Exempt Staff Professional Improvement Program History
ATTACHMENT III	Exempt Staff Professional Improvement Program Timelines
ATTACHMENT IV	Selection of Reflective Statements: Benefits of Program Participation

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EXEMPT STAFF PROFESSIONAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

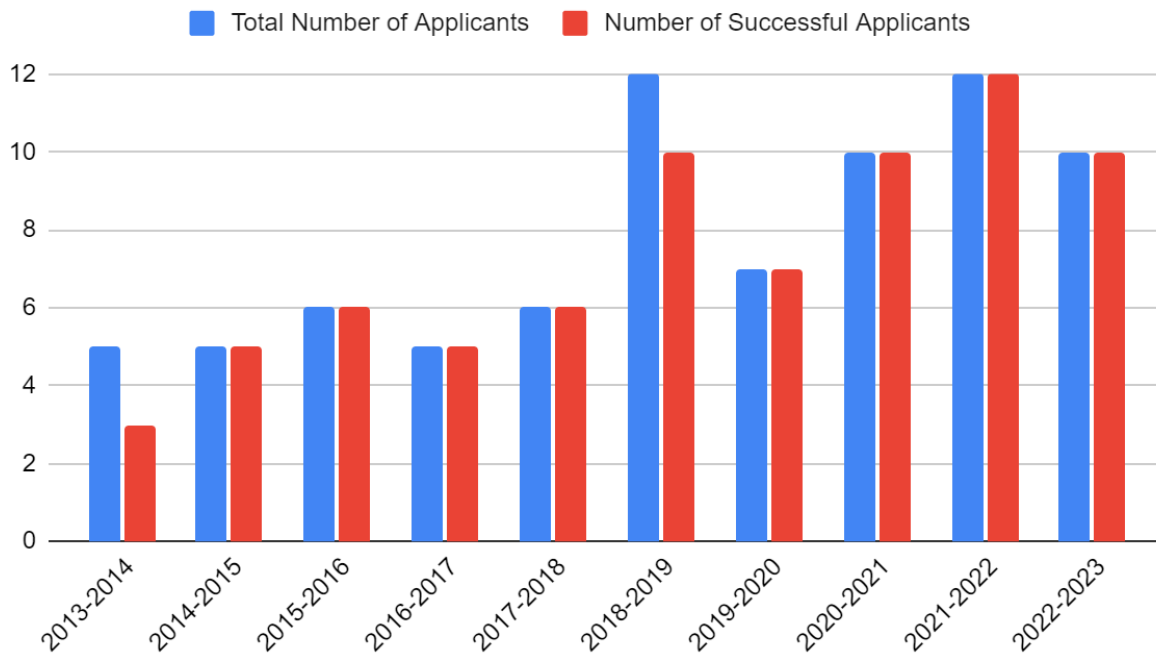
Total Number of Applicants and Number of Successful Applicants

Year	Total Number of Applicants	Number Successful
2013-2014 ¹	5	3
2014-2015 ¹	5	5
2015-2016 ¹	6	6
2016-2017 ²	5	5
2017-2018	6	6
2018-2019	12	10
2019-2020	7	7
2020-2021	10	10
2021-2022	12	12
2022-2023	10	10

¹ Applications from exempt staff were assessed using processes outlined in the Teachers' Collective Agreement.

² The Exempt Staff Professional Improvement Program was established.

Total Number of Applicants and Number of Successful Applicants



EXEMPT STAFF PROFESSIONAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM HISTORY

YEAR	APPROVED ALLOCATION	APPROVED TOTAL LEAVE FTE	ACTUAL GRANTED FOR LEAVES	ACTUAL GRANTED FOR TUITION	TOTAL ACTUAL GRANTED FOR LEAVES & TUITION
2016-2017	\$150,000	1.467	\$106,861	\$35,585	\$142,446
2017-2018	\$150,000	0.644	\$47,129	\$39,304	\$86,433
2018-2019	\$150,000	0.600	\$47,147	\$52,902	\$100,049
2019-2020	\$150,000	0.440	\$32,699	\$37,730	\$70,429
2020-2021	\$150,000	1.000	\$67,572	\$30,450	\$98,022
2021-2022	\$140,000	0.216	\$19,564	\$58,327	\$77,891
2022-2023	\$140,000	0.00	\$0	\$77,065	\$77,065

2023-2024 PROFESSIONAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM TIMELINE

JANUARY 2023 APPLICATION INTAKE

(for courses that take place between July 1, 2023 and August 31, 2024)

Activity	Date
Exempt Professional Improvement Program announced on Division Staff News and application package available on Connect	October 31
Information meeting for interested staff (4:00 - 6:00 p.m., Google Meet)	December 1
Due date for applications	January 13
Processing of applications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Receipt of applications confirmed • Background information compiled (previous leaves, degrees, grid placement, years of service, summary of request, projected costs) • Applications prepared for review by committee of leadership staff 	January 16 - February 3
Review of applications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Application packages prepared for committee review • Committee workshop conducted • Review of applications completed 	January 16 - February 8 February 9 February 16
Compile background information with input from assessors	February 16 - March 3
Recommendation submitted for approval	March 10
Approval of leaves and tuition support	March 17
Communication of support granted <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicants notified; letters and agreements sent to successful applicants • TM to Board • Division Staff News announcement 	March 20 - 24 April 3 April 6

2023-2024 PROFESSIONAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM TIMELINE

SEPTEMBER 2023 APPLICATION INTAKE

(for courses that take place between December 1, 2022 and August 31, 2023)

Activity	Date
Due date for applications	September 22
Processing of applications	September 25 - 29
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Receipt of applications confirmed• Background information compiled (previous leaves, degrees, grid placement, years of service, summary of request, projected costs)• Applications prepared for review by committee of leadership staff	
Review of applications	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Application packages prepared for committee review• Review of applications completed	October 2 - 6 October 13
Compile background information with input from assessors	October 2 - 6
Recommendation submitted for approval	October 20
Approval of leaves and tuition support	October 27
Communication of support granted	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Applicants notified; letters and agreements sent to successful applicants• TM to Board• Division Staff News announcement	October 30 – November 3 November 8 November 10

**Selection of Reflective Statements: Benefits of Program Participation
2021-2022 Exempt Staff Professional Improvement Program**

Lisa Casillas – School Based Wellness Coach, M. E. LaZerte School

University of Calgary - Combined Bachelor and Master degree in Social Work with a specialization in Clinical, Trauma-Informed Practice

“The Professional Improvement Program has provided great benefits already and will continue to do so as I complete my Masters in Clinical Social Work. This program has allowed me to support the mental health of students in our school through a very difficult couple of years of the pandemic. Because of this funding, I have been able to invest more time into my education, ensuring I have the time to learn the most up to date research and strategies on how to most effectively support our students from a trauma-informed lens. Along with this, I plan to use my graduate education to benefit the district for years to come. We all know that the mental health of our students is critical to their success in school and I am confident I will be able to increase my capacity to support their mental health because of my education. I appreciate your investment in my education and will continue to work hard at my studies knowing the district is invested in my education as well.”

Ellen MacGregor - Social Worker, Alberta School for the Deaf

University of Calgary - Master of Social Work with a clinical specialization in Child and Adolescent Mental Health

“The educational experiences I had during the program provided me the knowledge and skills to begin clinical work ... and until then, share my awareness of varying services and interventions that best support student and family mental health. I learned about my own power, privilege, and personal framework and how I can work with others to create empowering, authentic change and connection. I hope to further utilize my clinical skills if/when a position becomes available in the Division and continue to support the wellbeing of students within the school setting. I am very grateful for the support I received from the Professional Improvement Program ...”

Jennifer Lesko - Supervisor, Staff Relations, Human Resources

University of Alberta – Master of Education in Educational Policy Studies with a specialization in Educational Administration and Leadership

“The tuition support that I have received through the Professional Improvement Program has afforded me the opportunity to engage in meaningful learning relevant to my current leadership role as Supervisor, Staff Relations ... This advanced learning in school leadership, system operations, and the capacities outlined in the Leadership Quality Standard further extended my understanding in these areas, and the research, literature review, and collaborative discussions embedded in each provided me with an even greater ability to apply and share the foundational principles of school leadership with school leaders as they work through challenges with staff performance, evaluation, and conduct. Within schools, leaders play a crucial role in providing staff with the resources, knowledge, and support necessary to meet Division priorities and student needs, and the knowledge I have attained through these educational experiences has greatly enhanced my ability to support leaders in this crucial Division work.”

Shaminder Parmar - Planner, Infrastructure Planning

Thompson Rivers University – Master of Business Administration

“There are significant benefits that will be derived from the business-related courses I have been taking and the ones I am planning to take. I am currently involved in a graduation project that explores how Canadian organizations are adapting and persevering through pandemic conditions. This will be

important for the Division because we are constantly working to adapt to changing political, economic, and social conditions. My research shows that organizations that are slow to adapt, reap the fewest benefits and it is important that I use my learnings to ensure the Division leads rather than reacts. I ... will continue to engage regarding pandemic and crisis-related issues that the Division must navigate through.”

Danielle Pawliuk - Mental Health Nurse, Hospital School Campuses

Douglas College - Bachelor of Science in Psychiatric Nursing

“Being supported by the Professional Improvement Program is beneficial in both short and long term. Short term, I am able to take courses which help me to build capacity in nursing knowledge. These courses can be applied directly in the work I do with the mental health transition team. In the long term, support by this program will help me achieve my goal of having a BSPN, which will then allow me to apply to master of nursing programs. My overall goal is to become better and more knowledgeable at my job working with students, teachers and families.”