

DATE: November 26, 2024

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Funds for 2025-2026 Exempt Staff Professional Improvement Program

ORIGINATOR: Angela Anderson, Chief Human Resources Officer

RESOURCE STAFF: Trish Kolotyluk, Renée Thomson

REFERENCE [Division Strategic Plan](#)

ISSUE

An allocation of funds from the 2025-2026 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, fulfillment, 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 evidence-based research.
- 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, 2025, and August 31, 2026, or in September for courses that take place between December 1, 2025, and August 31, 2026 (Attachment III).

- The application process for this program 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 the Strategic Plan and 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 2024-2025 Exempt Staff Professional Improvement Program, requests for support from exempt staff varied as greatly as their roles in the Division. All 19 applicants were granted leave and/or tuition support. Eleven (58 per cent) were first time applicants, while eight (42 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 exempt staff in the Division. 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 Curriculum and Learning Supports, Specialized Learning 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 2025-2026 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 2025-2026 school year.

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 2025-2026. There is a relatively small but growing 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 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.

Post-secondary professional learning, grounded in evidence-based research, is critical to building staff capacity and supporting student learning. We continue to see strong demand for support through the Exempt Staff Professional Improvement Program. For these reasons, this option, which would maintain the allocation of funds for this program at the current level, is considered most appropriate.

NEXT STEPS

Upon approval of this recommendation, the program timelines for the 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

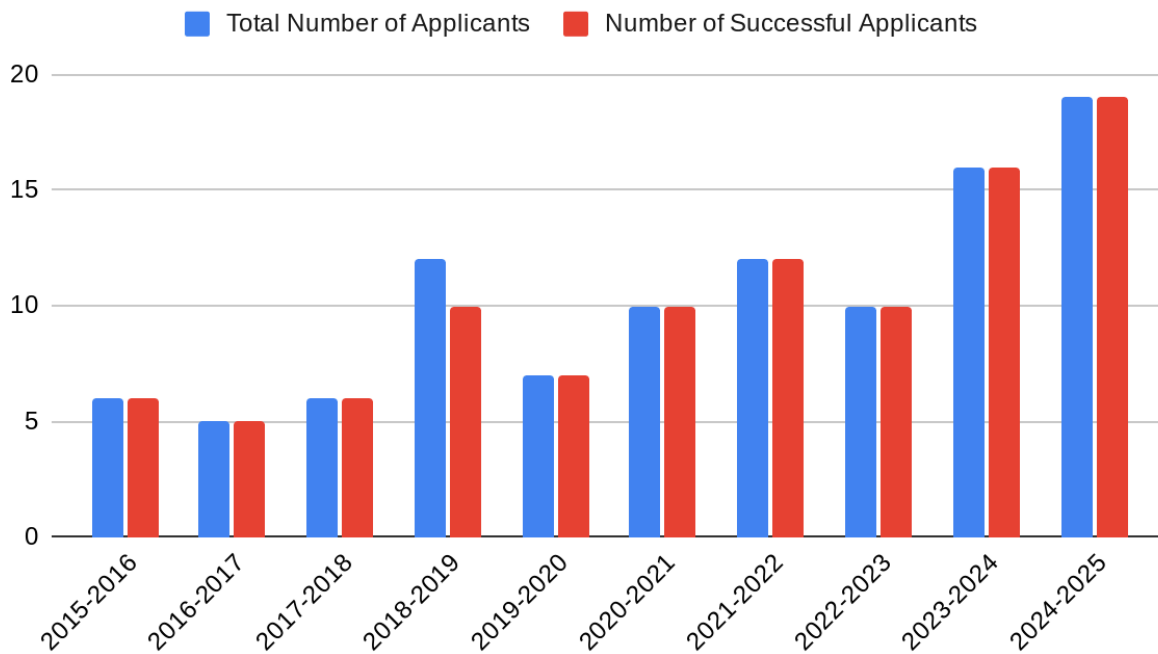
Total Number of Applicants and Number of Successful Applicants

Year	Total Number of Applicants	Number Successful
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
2023-2024	16	16
2024-2025	19	19

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	\$140,000	0.00	\$0	\$95,859	\$95,859
2024-2025	\$140,000	0.331	\$12,800	\$109,247	\$122,047

2025-2026 PROFESSIONAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM TIMELINE

JANUARY 2024 APPLICATION INTAKE (for courses that take place between July 1, 2025 and August 31, 2026)	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 2
Due date for applications	January 10
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 	November 1 - February 19
Review of applications	February 4 - 14
Compile background information with input from assessors	February 18 - March 7
Recommendation submitted for approval	March 12
Approval of leaves and tuition support	March 19
Communication of support granted <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Applicants notified; letters and agreements sent to successful applicants ● Posted on Connect 	March 20 - 31

SEPTEMBER 2025 APPLICATION INTAKE (for courses that take place between December 1, 2025 and August 31, 2026)	Date
Due date for applications	September 19
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 	September 19 – October 3
Review of applications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Application packages prepared for committee review ● Review of applications completed 	October 6 - 15
Compile background information with input from assessors	October 16 – 20
Recommendation submitted for approval	October 24
Approval of leaves and tuition support	October 31
Communication of support granted <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Applicants notified; letters and agreements sent to successful applicants ● Posted on Connect 	November 4 - 12

**Selection of Reflective Statements: Benefits of Program Participation
2023-2024 Exempt Staff Professional Improvement Program**

Navdeep Aulakh - Techno-Functional Analyst, Financial Services

Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT), Project Management Certificate

The training has significantly enhanced my skills in organizing, planning and executing projects efficiently. I have gained a deeper understanding of best practices in resource allocation, risk management and stakeholder communication, which has positively impacted my day to day work. I am confident that applying these new skills will lead to even better project outcomes, ultimately benefiting the team and organization.

Lisa Casillas - Social Worker, M. E. LaZerte School

University of Calgary - Combined Bachelor/Master of Social Work with a specialization in Trauma-informed Practice

I have already applied my advanced knowledge and skills in supporting our students to address barriers they are facing to completing their high school education. By applying my social work skills, I am working to address systemic barriers and inequalities and level the playing field for all students, regardless of their circumstances. By investing in my education, I am paying it forward through supporting students in their school and wellness goals. Thank you for creating such a program and investing in exempt staff.

Danielle McLennan - Human Resources Consultant, Human Resources

University of Calgary - Advanced Project Management Diploma

I am extremely grateful for the Division's ongoing commitment to enhancing the professional capacity of staff. Through the program, I was able to further my understanding and acquire new skills related to project management. Project management is a key aspect of my role, this opportunity to learn and grow has already enhanced my skill set and will directly impact operational objectives and ultimately support those I serve.

Nicole Hnatiuk - Occupational Therapy Consultant, Specialized Learning Supports

Boston University, Post-Professional Doctor of Occupational Therapy

In the short term, I expect to enhance my service delivery and broaden my knowledge, directly improving student outcomes and engagement. My studies will strengthen my leadership abilities and clinical skills long-term, enabling me to contribute more effectively to educational goals. Additionally, the new insights and skills I acquire will foster a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement within the Division. Ultimately, my studies will elevate the quality of care and education I provide, benefiting students, colleagues, and the broader school communities.

Jill Oliver - Internal Auditor, Financial Services

Association of Certified Fraud Examiners - Certified Fraud Examiner courses

Through a self-guided program of intense modules and certification exams, I attained the professional certification of a Certified Fraud Examiner (CFE) in December 2024. By completing this internationally recognized program, I have been equipped with the skills to bring a unique lens to my colleagues and my direct work with Division schools in the areas of fraud detection, education, and mitigation. I want to thank the Trustees, Superintendent, and Assistant Superintendents for this unique training and learning opportunity, which benefits my position in the Division as an Internal Auditor now and in the long term.

Alex Tonsi - Athletic Trainer, Ross Sheppard School

West Virginia University, Master of Science in Sport Coaching

My coursework thus far has enriched my understanding of how Positive Youth Development and Long Term Development frameworks influence sustained physical activity and overall well-being. I've learned about research-based recommendations on improving physical literacy and promoting physical activity, as well as evidence-based methods to help co-create environments that promote competence, confidence, and connection that can aid in lifelong pursuits in various forms of physical activity. Additionally, I've acquired a scientific approach to analyzing and improving movement mechanics and learned to apply an evidence-based approach to support safe and effective recovery from injury. Through completing my coursework, I hope to share my acquired expertise with other schools in the Division while communicating best practices and helping to deliver developmentally appropriate training principles that enhance students' and staff's health and well-being.