

April 28, 2022

Honourable Rebecca Schulz
Minister of Children's Services
403 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Dear Minister Schulz:

Lansdowne Child Care and Family Centre

Thank you for the letter of April 5, 2022, regarding the Lansdowne Childcare and Family Centre. You have touched on a very important matter for our Board of Trustees which has been the focus of many of our recent discussions. Our clear need for instructional space has had a profound impact on a number of issues our Division is currently grappling with.

The Board of Trustees values choice in education and our Division is committed to providing families with educational opportunities close to home. In addition to our mandate of Kindergarten to Grade 12 education, the Division also values lease tenants that provide critical supports to the community, such as child care. Because of the lack of space in our existing schools and the absence of funding for new schools, it is becoming increasingly difficult to accommodate our growing student enrolment, let alone leaseholders.

In recent years, Edmonton Public Schools has experienced the fastest growth of any Metro jurisdiction in the province. Our space pressures have become evident through:

- a need to have several schools move to a lottery system
- a large number of portables requested from the Province to ensure instructional capacity
- the use of unconventional learning spaces such as libraries, staff rooms and gymnasiums to accommodate instruction in many schools
- the unfortunate ending of leases to some key tenants, including child care, from schools reaching capacity

Recently, the Board of Trustees approved the Division's [Three-Year Capital Plan 2023-2026](#) and [Ten-Year Facilities Plan 2023-2032](#). Both of these documents have been provided to Alberta Education and Minister LaGrange. These plans detail the space challenges we are facing, and highlight the role of the [Growth Control Model](#) in helping to ensure the accommodation of our students.

Much of the discussion and debate by our Board when discussing our Ten- and Three-Year Plans centred on the lack of adequate instructional space leading to fewer choices in education for our families and our frustration and disappointment at not being able to accommodate our lease partners that provide valuable services to our families. We retain a keen interest in limiting any disruptions to community services provided by tenants, approximately 100 of which are child care providers. There is, however, a ripple effect on the Division's instructional space when new schools are not constructed in new and developing communities across our city.

The Province requires school divisions to have one-year lease terms with all tenant partners in order to ensure flexibility and address growth pressures. In the case of Lansdowne Child Care specifically, staff met with the child care provider seven and half months before the beginning of the upcoming leasing year to make them aware of the need to reclaim one of their five leased classrooms for instructional purposes. The Division provided Lansdowne Child Care the option to keep the space for one additional school year (2022-2023) and proposed solutions that would accommodate all of their anticipated growth. Based on the options discussed, the child care provider has chosen to leave the space this May.

We believe the plan proposed by the 'Board' that you reference in your letter refers to the request made by the Board Chair of the Lansdowne Child and Family Care Centre to consider enclosing the school's outdoor atrium to create additional classrooms. This causes our Board of Trustees concern since the Division needs to be intentional and take care in the expenditure of educational funds that are intended to be directed towards Kindergarten to Grade 12 programming. We are not funded to build or modify space for our leasing partners, even if it is a child care organization. The Division's capital needs are escalating, funding for new schools has not been forthcoming for the last two years and Capital Maintenance and Renewal (CMR) funding is being reduced for the 2022-2023 school year. The estimated cost to enclose the courtyard could easily approach \$300,000 - \$500,000. Such an expenditure of Division resources to avoid reclaiming a single leased classroom is not a viable alternative for our Division. We would welcome further conversation with the provincial government about direct funding towards building modifications in our schools to accommodate space for child care.

The Division is years away from capital needs being fulfilled in the areas of the city where they are required. We would love to see greater partnerships between daycares in our city and our schools as we believe child care organizations within our schools serve families and children well. However, we do not receive dedicated funding for these spaces in our schools and, as this letter has outlined, when space pressures become acute we are forced to reclaim space from our leasing partners. To be clear, we value our leased tenants and the important services they provide to our families and the larger community, but must prioritize our mandate of providing high quality K-12 education and stewarding public dollars most carefully in providing this education. Again, if there is interest in further conversation about directly funded infrastructure dollars towards modification and maintenance of leased space for child care providers within Edmonton Public Schools, we would be pleased to discuss this potential.

I appreciate you reaching out to seek further clarity on the Division's conversations with Lansdowne Child and Family Care Centre.

Sincerely,



Trisha Estabrooks
Board Chair

- c. Honourable Adriana LaGrange, Minister of Education
Honourable Prasad Panda, Minister of Infrastructure
Darrel Robertson, Superintendent, Edmonton Public Schools
Ardyce Kouri, President, Board of Directors, Lansdowne Childcare and Family Centre