

December 16, 2020

Honourable Adriana LaGrange
Minister of Education
228 Legislature Building
10800-97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Dear Minister LaGrange,

Appreciation and a request regarding COVID-19 decisions

On behalf of our Board, I would like to thank you for your recent decision to make diploma exams optional for the remainder of the year. While not the complete suspension our Board had requested in our letter of October 14, giving students and their families the opportunity to choose will decrease some of their stress during this very challenging time.

I would also like to thank you for directing grades 7 to 12 students to at-home learning from November 30 to January 11, and for providing the flexibility for Divisions to provide in-person instruction for learners requiring specialized supports. Our staff and students have done an excellent job of following the stringent measures put in place through the Provincial and our Division's re-entry plans. However, no measures could completely counter the high rates of community transmission that, unfortunately, affected our school population. Including the at-home learning order as part of the "circuit breaking" period will help our Division, and hopefully our Province, break the transmission chain.

There is one more measure that our Board strongly believes is important in stemming transmissions and we ask you put in place: sharing in-school transmission data with schools.

In partnership with Alberta Health Services staff, we are able to monitor and track COVID-19 cases in our schools. We maintain detailed records to support timely communication and transparency with our school communities and to inform decisions around our school re-entry strategy and COVID-19 safety protocols.

As we strive to be transparent with our staff, students and families we are able to notify school communities of a confirmed positive case of an individual within the school and the number of staff and students required to self-isolate. We also are able to communicate with a school community when it is on the provincial outbreak or watch list. Families and staff have appreciated this transparency.

However, we are unable to answer questions around the frequency of in-school transmission for Division schools. Our administration has been requesting updated information around confirmed instances of in-school transmission for our schools from various health offices connected to COVID-19, but have not been successful in receiving this information.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I respectfully request that your Ministry work with Alberta Health Services to have them inform school divisions when there is a confirmed instance of in-school transmission. Receiving this information will support our open and transparent communication with school communities and enable us to work closely with schools around their COVID-19 safety protocols to ensure we are doing everything possible to mitigate risk.

Sincerely,



Trisha Estabrooks
Board Chair

- c. Lorrie Jess, President, Alberta School Boards Association
Cathy Hogg, President, Public School Boards' Association of Alberta
Dr. Deena Hinshaw, Chief Medical Officer of Health, Alberta Health

