

January 21, 2022

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

Dear Minister LaGrange,

Greater access to COVID-19 vaccinations for children between the ages of five and 11 needed

In our Division's ongoing efforts to keep staff and students as safe as possible within in-person learning environments, we continue to follow the guidance of Alberta's chief medical officer of health. Dr. Hinshaw has stated on several occasions that the most important thing eligible individuals can do to protect themselves and others against COVID-19 is to be fully immunized.

Given the current rates of the Omicron variant in our province, its transmissibility and airborne nature, ensuring as many Albertans as possible are fully immunized is critical to protecting essential public services including our medical system and our schools by helping prevent potential disruptions caused by the possibility of high student and staff absences.

Edmonton Public Schools has encouraged vaccinations by hosting clinics in our schools, sending motivational messaging to our staff and students, implementing a vaccination policy for staff, and our Board is currently developing a vaccination policy for Trustees.

Vaccination uptake by our staff and older students has been excellent. What we are hearing from parents of children under the age of 12 however, is that there are barriers preventing them from having their children vaccinated, even though they would like to.

The limited hours and locations of public health centres make them inaccessible for many families. The absence of a walk-in option further limits access. Lack of information in languages other than English also pose a challenge for some families to get the information they need to make informed decisions. A [recent report](#) confirmed that Alberta's rate of immunization for children between the ages of five and 11 is well below other large population provinces, and that lack of accessibility is a contributing factor. For all of these reasons, at our January 18, 2022, public meeting, our Board unanimously passed a motion asking that there be equitable and greater access to COVID-19 vaccinations for children between

the ages of five and 11. We ask that your government expand access points to families wishing to be vaccinated by:

- implementing mobile vaccination clinics,
- offering voluntary in-school AHS-run COVID-19 vaccination clinics in underserved areas, with the requirement of clear and documented parental consent, and
- making pediatric COVID-19 vaccines available in pharmacies and doctors' offices in addition to public health centres.

The Premier has commented that in-school clinics were not considered for younger children because uptake was low for previous clinics for older children. We believe that the low uptake was the result of the clinics not being in place until long after vaccinations were widely available through pharmacies. Furthermore, the airborne nature of Omicron, its prevalence in our community, rates of transmission and the effect it has been having on our staffing challenges and families, combined with the convenience of timely, barrier-free opportunities to in-school clinics for those under 12, would likely encourage a much higher uptake.

We do not make the request for in-school clinics lightly, as we know they would create more work for our already strained staff. However, we feel that access to these vaccinations for our youngest learners is crucial to their health and the overall health of our community. Schools are familiar, convenient locations that families feel comfortable coming to. Ontario and Manitoba are offering school-based clinics, and finding success with them.

Providing these clinics, in addition to the other supports we have [requested previously](#), such as improved ventilation, PCR testing for staff, will help ensure that we can all weather this pandemic safely while minimizing disruptions for students, staff and families.

Sincerely,



Trisha Estabrooks
Board Chair

- c. Hon. Jason Copping, Minister of Health
Dr. Deena Hinshaw, Chief Medical Officer of Health
Marilyn Dennis, President Alberta School Boards Association
Dennis MacNeil, President, Public School Boards' Association of Alberta