

June 25, 2021

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

Dear Minister LaGrange,

Request for meaningful consultation on Standards for Special Education

At Edmonton Public Schools, we strongly believe that every student can learn. We also believe that every student is unique, with different strengths and challenges. This is why our Division offers a range of programming and environments to support all students in their learning and to help nurture their emotional, mental and physical well-being. We're focused on helping every child experience success, regardless of their background, needs or abilities.

Collaboration is one of our Division's cornerstone values. This is why, for example, we have an Inclusive Learning Parent and Community Advisory Committee. We know that their direct experience makes them subject matter experts and their voices and lived experiences enrich our processes and approaches. We also understand that engagement is key to enhancing public trust and confidence that the education system is meeting the needs of students.

Given this, you can imagine our dismay and frustration to read [the announcement](#) in the media on June 19 that you would be introducing new Standards for Special Education via a ministerial order without school boards, students or parents having been meaningfully consulted in the development process. Issuing the Standards by ministerial order would further limit comment by circumventing discussion and debate in the legislature.

As outlined in the [International Association of Public Participation \(IAP2\)](#) principles, engagement, at its most basic level, requires at least informing the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives and/or solutions. Not even this most basic level of engagement has taken place, let alone consultation (defined by IAP2 as obtaining public feedback on the analysis, alternatives and/or decision).

Inviting a single staff member from an organization to one engagement session, as happened with two organizations we are aware of, does not constitute meaningful consultation, particularly when the individual must sign a non-disclosure agreement before participating.

Such “engagement” prohibits publicly elected school trustees from addressing public education issues of importance to students, parents, and the community at large and ensuring that parent voices are heard on issues that affect them and their children - the very jobs trustees are elected to do.

In fact, the [current Standards for Special Education](#) (page 9) direct that school boards must “invite meaningful involvement of parents in planning, problem-solving and decision-making relating to students’ special education programming.” Trustees cannot do this if they are not invited to participate in the conversations concerning changes to special education programming.

We support a revision to the Standards for Special Education. Given that current Standards were last amended in 2004, they are long overdue for revision. In fact, our Board supported the call at the 2019 Alberta School Boards Association Fall General Meeting to replace them with Standards for Inclusive Education.

However, because the Standards affect some of our most vulnerable and complex students, it is imperative that any revisions are informed by the very people they will most profoundly affect - students, their families and educators - and those who will be responsible for their implementation - school trustees and administrators.

We request that you engage parents, students, caregivers and stakeholders in the revision of the Standards for Special Education and that any changes made reflect what was heard during a meaningful consultation process.

Sincerely,



Trisha Estabrooks
Board Chair

KM/mj

c. Lorrie Jess, President, Alberta School Boards Association



