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November 23, 2022

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

Dear Minister LaGrange,

Requests re: mitigating respiratory illness for students, staff and families

We would like to begin by congratulating you on your reappointment as Alberta's Minister of Education.

The main purpose of this letter is to share with you the current situation Edmonton Public Schools is facing with regards to unprecedented and very high rates of absence in our schools due to the presence of COVID-19, influenza and other respiratory viruses. The week of November 7, over 13 per cent of Division students were absent due to illness. That is over 13,500 students - the equivalent of 50 average size elementary schools. It is little wonder that hospital emergency room wait times are [ballooning](#). We are concerned that the wait times for children to be seen in hospitals remains high and that the overall pressure on our healthcare system is increasing. We are fielding pleas from parents looking for further interventions, such as mandatory isolation periods and masking requirements. Past experiences would suggest that masking during outbreak periods in schools can contribute to easing the strain our healthcare system is facing.

As we have reiterated throughout this pandemic and as we have heard you say numerous times, school boards are not health experts and so we look to the Chief Medical Officer of Health and Alberta Health Services for guidance to support the safe operations of schools during high rates of illness or outbreak status. Throughout the pandemic, we have relied upon and followed the advice of health officials. We appreciated hearing Dr. Joffe [explain](#) that wearing a well-fitting, high-quality mask can help reduce the risk of becoming sick and help protect others from being exposed.

We recognize that the pandemic is not over and as such we have written to Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr. Joffe, asking for further information around how the province is monitoring the rate of illness in schools, what targets around rates of illness would trigger provincial action, including a potential

mask mandate, and direction related to the operations of schools and what those potential actions may be. We would be pleased to receive any input you may have on those questions as well.

We, along with our administration, would like to meet with you, the Chief Medical Officer of Health and the Minister of Health at your earliest convenience to discuss how we can work together most effectively for the health of the students we serve, our staff and the broader community.

Sincerely,



Trisha Estabrooks
Board Chair

- c. Hon. Jason Copping, Minister of Health
Dr. Mark Joffe, Chief Medical Officer of Health
Darrel Robertson, Superintendent, Edmonton Public Schools
Marilyn Dennis, President, Alberta School Boards Association
Dr. Vivian Abboud, Chief Executive Officer, Alberta School Boards Association