

September 22, 2022

Mr. Maurice Trottier
Field Services Manager, Central Services Branch
Alberta Education

Via email: maurice.trottier@gov.ab.ca

Dear Mr. Trottier:

Feedback regarding Thrive Charter School Society application

We received notification of the Thrive Charter School Society's application to open a Kindergarten to Grade 9 charter school specifically for students from low socio-economic backgrounds.

We share the Society's desire to ensure students do not face barriers in accessing high quality education, including students from families suffering financial hardship and the challenges that can come with that. It is for exactly that reason that we have the following initiatives in place across the City of Edmonton:

- Breakfast, snack and lunch programs, in collaboration with multiple partners and schools across the Division
- School-linked health teams, a multidisciplinary group of Division consultants who provide specialized learning supports to students. Services from consultants on these teams include speech and language, occupational therapy, assistive technology, psychology, social work and more. Every Division school is assigned a school-linked team, which means students enrolled in all programs can receive the same level of service regardless of which school they attend.
- Before- and after-school care offered through partnerships where space in our schools allows.
- An Equity Achievement Project in 41 schools. The project uses evidence-based teaching methods and interventions, combined with nutrition, mental health supports and trauma-informed instruction to remove barriers to learning and improve well-being and academic achievement.
- A Foundation that works with donors and schools to level the educational playing field in our community. Their work provides additional supports in the areas of nutrition, mental wellness, technology, full-day Kindergartens, learning enhancements and enrichment opportunities.
- Evidence-based professional development for staff, offered multiple times per year across a variety of channels, on trauma-informed care, brain development, teaching techniques and interventions.

We also share the government's assertion that families should have a broad range of choice from which to choose for their children's education. It is for these reasons that for over 40 years, Edmonton Public Schools have offered programs of choice to all students in all areas of the city.

We offer STEM programming, as is proposed in the Thrive Society application, in addition to our 40 alternative programs which include a variety of languages, teaching philosophies, and options for students requiring specialized supports.

We applaud the Thrive Society's desire to make a positive difference in the lives of children. However, we cannot support their proposed approach which duplicates the work already being done - on a much larger scale - by Edmonton Public Schools and funnels money from the public system to do so.

The Board of Trustees has had a long-standing position that public funding should not be spent on private or charter schools since the provincial government started providing public dollars to private schools in the 1990s and with the initiation of publicly funded charter schools in the 1990s. Both private and charter schools dilute the unity of the public education system, do not have the transparency and accountability of publicly elected school boards, are not mandated to accept all students and do not demonstrate an effective return on taxpayer dollars.

We are also concerned about the segregation of children based on socio-economic circumstances and the stigmatization that may arise based on that segregation. One of the many benefits of our public schools, which are inclusive and accommodate everyone, is the opportunity for all children to meet, learn from and collaborate with individuals from a variety of backgrounds. Limiting these opportunities does a disservice to all students.

The Edmonton Public School Board remains committed to providing robust programming and being effective and efficient stewards of public funds. The increase of charter schools raises valid concerns regarding the province's ability to fully maximize funds in support of all students, particularly in this instance where the applicant is proposing to duplicate work already being done on a larger scale by our Division.

For the reasons outlined above, we cannot support the Thrive Charter School Society's application; however, we do support their intention to help students and would be happy to collaborate with them to discuss ways in which we could work together to realize their aspirations on an even larger scale than what they are proposing through a single school.

Sincerely,



Trisha Estabrooks
Chair

c. Honourable Adriana LaGrange, Minister of Education