

February 15, 2024

The Honourable Danielle Smith
307 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Dear Premier Smith,

On behalf of the Edmonton Public Schools Board of Trustees, I am writing to share our Board's concerns with you regarding the recent announcement of forthcoming policies and guidelines described as aiming to preserve choice for children and youth.

Our Board heard you emphasize the importance of parents in a child's education, the need for strong support and sound decision making in matters affecting children and youth, and ensuring resources and instruction are age appropriate and based on factual information.

We strongly agree with all of these principles and have had robust guidelines and policies in place for many years to ensure that our practices support all of them. Edmonton Public Schools values working closely with parents and guardians as partners in their children's educational journey. We believe this partnership is fundamental to fostering a supportive learning environment that caters to the needs of all students.

Our Division also already has incredibly strong practices and policies that not only support students in their personal and educational growth, but also promote a healthy family dynamic. We have developed a framework that ensures that each student is provided a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment that respects diversity and fosters a sense of belonging, as is already mandated by Section 33 of the *Education Act*. One example is our policy respecting students' pronouns while providing support and encouragement to share with their families.

As you noted, being a young person can be a confusing time - it's a time to figure out one's identity and place in the world. It is a time of exploration, information gathering, testing, reflecting and sharing. It is also a time when having safe spaces and trusted adults is key, particularly for trans and 2SLGBTQIA+ children and youth. In the vast majority of cases, a child's parent or guardian is their trusted adult; we encourage and celebrate that relationship. However, for a variety of reasons, there are cases when a parent or guardian is not able to provide the support a student needs, or cases when a student wishes support from a non-family member before sharing information about their identity. For these situations, it is critical to preserve the respectful, safe and caring spaces and established relationships created in

schools - and which are already required through the *Education Act*. Our current policies support this essential balance.

Many of our policies have been used as models by other school divisions. We would be very happy to share with your office how our policies and practices work and how they have been benefiting students and their families.

Another example of what's already working is our delivery of the comprehensive sexual health education mandated in the provincial curriculum. Our factual, age-appropriate instruction, coupled with transparent parental notification and opt out offer (as already directed in the *Education Act*), respects both student well-being and parental input. Requiring parents to opt in does not serve to add any additional parental control; it simply adds administrative red tape to important lessons set out in the Alberta provincial curriculum.

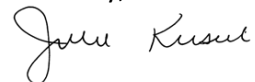
Similarly, we already have a robust policy and rigorous practice regarding the vetting of all resources and third-parties used in teaching sexual health. Requiring government approval would only serve to add more administrative red tape.

In conversations with parents and community members over the past year though, we have found that there is a great deal of misunderstanding about what current practices in schools are, what content is contained in the provincial curriculum, and what concepts the curriculum introduces at which grade levels. Again, we would be happy to work with your office and your government to help ensure all Albertans have the facts they need on these topics.

We have solid policies and practices, and years of experience, from which we could add a helpful perspective to discussions concerning gender diversity and education. As a Division educating one-sixth of the province's students, we were disappointed to first hear of these policy considerations through the media. However, we believe we can still add value to future conversations. We respectfully request a robust, authentic, and meaningful consultation process involving Edmonton Public Schools and other school divisions across the province before any changes are implemented. We are keen to engage in further conversations about the education-related aspects of this policy announcement.

We look forward to the opportunity to collaborate with your office to ensure the best outcomes for the children and families of Alberta.

Sincerely,



Julie Kusiek
Board Chair

c: Honourable Demetrios Nicolaides, Minister of Education
Marilyn Dennis, President, Alberta School Boards Association