

DATE: November 28, 2023

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Darrel Robertson, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Funds for 2024-2025 Exempt Staff Professional Improvement Program

ORIGINATOR: Angela Anderson, Chief Human Resources Officer

RESOURCE STAFF: Trish Kolotyluk, Renée Thomson

REFERENCE [Division Strategic Plan](#)

ISSUE

An allocation of funds from the 2024-2025 operating budget is requested to support the Exempt Staff Professional Improvement Program. Through this program, exempt staff can access tuition and leave support for post-secondary coursework. An allocation of funds to support this program is an investment that will benefit our Division in several ways, including improving student achievement, building capacity in our exempt staff and sharing knowledge and expertise. The request for a commitment of funds is made well in advance of the distribution of the funds to accommodate application and program admission processes.

BACKGROUND

Edmonton Public Schools recognizes that professional development for staff is a critical aspect in supporting successful outcomes for students, as well as for succession planning. The Exempt Staff Professional Improvement Program is aligned with the [Division Strategic Plan](#) and is grounded in our values of accountability, collaboration, equity and integrity. The program is also in direct support of our Division's vision of "Enhancing pathways for student success", as well as our mission, which states that "Our commitment to high-quality public education serves the community and empowers each student to live a life of dignity, fulfillment, empathy and possibility."

Through this program, Division exempt staff have the opportunity to apply for tuition and leave support to participate in professional improvement activities that are aligned with Division Priorities and areas of need. A comparison of successful applicants by year (Attachment I), as well as a synopsis of funds and support granted over the past few years (Attachment II) are included in this report.

RELATED FACTS

- The program ensures that exempt staff members across the Division have access to opportunities that would serve to enhance their professional capacity and allow them to stay current with industry standards and trends.
- Support for professional development assists in the attraction of exempt staff to the Division and in the retention of those employees.
- Exempt staff have the opportunity to apply for support in January for courses that take place between July 1, 2024, and August 31, 2025, or in September for courses that take place between December 1, 2024, and August 31, 2025 (Attachment III).

- The application process for this program is rigorous. Assessment of applications is completed by a committee of Division leadership staff who consider the alignment of applicants’ proposed professional improvement plans with the Strategic Plan and identified areas of need in the Division. Additional considerations are the anticipated benefits to the Division, as well as connections to the applicants’ professional growth plans and career goals.
- Successful applicants agree to a return of service to Edmonton Public Schools of one year for tuition support and three years for a full-time leave with an allowance; part-time leaves are prorated accordingly.
- For the 2023-2024 Exempt Staff Professional Improvement Program, requests for support from exempt staff varied as greatly as their roles in the Division. All 12 applicants were granted the support they requested and were eligible to receive. Six (50 per cent) were first time applicants, while six (50 per cent) submitted applications in previous years.
- It has been an administrative practice to maintain a holdback of a portion of the allocation to address potential increases to leave allowance costs and tuition fees in the next academic year, as well as potential fluctuations in the exchange rate for tuition fees paid to international post-secondary institutions.
- In the 2024-2025 school year, Human Resources will draft an application process that will allow applicants to request support for either one or two years. Human Resources and Financial Services have discussed budget options that could accommodate a two-year funding cycle. Funding granted to applicants for the second year would be tentative based on final budget approval.
- The Exempt Staff Professional Improvement Program is one way that professional learning is supported for Division staff. The chart below outlines sources of support for professional learning.

Funds for Professional Learning	Details
Decision Unit Budgets	Funds are allocated for staff professional learning within decision units.
Central Decision Units	Central decision units allocate funds for the delivery of targeted professional learning courses and sessions for staff. These include sessions offered through Curriculum and Learning Supports, Specialized Learning Supports, Technology and Information Management and Human Resources, among others.
Professional Improvement Program	Tuition and leave support is available to exempt staff through the Professional Improvement Program for post-secondary coursework aligned with the Division’s identified areas of need.
Bursaries and Scholarships	Staff are encouraged to access support through bursary programs and to explore scholarship opportunities through their post-secondary institution and other community organizations.

RECOMMENDATION

That an allocation of \$140,000 from the 2024-2025 operating budget be approved for the Exempt Staff Professional Improvement Program for the purpose of granting professional improvement leaves and tuition support to exempt staff for the 2024-2025 school year.

CONSIDERATIONS and ANALYSIS

Based on the number of applications and the types of requests we have received over the past few years, it is anticipated that maintaining the allocation of funds for this program at the current level would adequately cover the requests for support in 2024-2025. There is a relatively small pool of applicants to

the Exempt Staff Professional Improvement Program. Fluctuations in the support granted each year are significantly influenced by the nature of the requests for leaves and tuition support, as well as associated allowance and tuition costs. A decreased allocation may not adequately support anticipated fluctuations in funds required to support requests.

A selection of statements from staff members who were granted support through the Exempt Staff Professional Improvement Program has been included with this report (Attachment IV). Program participants reflected on the benefits of their professional learning and how it has been effectively integrated into their work responsibilities.

While post-secondary professional learning is critical to building staff capacity and supporting student learning, we acknowledge the current economic climate. We continue to see strong demand for support through the Exempt Staff Professional Improvement Program. For these reasons, this option, which would maintain the allocation of funds for this program at the current level, is considered most appropriate.

NEXT STEPS

Upon approval of this recommendation, the program timelines for the application intakes will be implemented (Attachment III).

ATTACHMENTS

ATTACHMENT I	Total Number of Applicants and Number of Successful Applicants
ATTACHMENT II	Exempt Staff Professional Improvement Program History
ATTACHMENT III	Exempt Staff Professional Improvement Program Timelines
ATTACHMENT IV	Selection of Reflective Statements: Benefits of Program Participation

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EXEMPT STAFF PROFESSIONAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

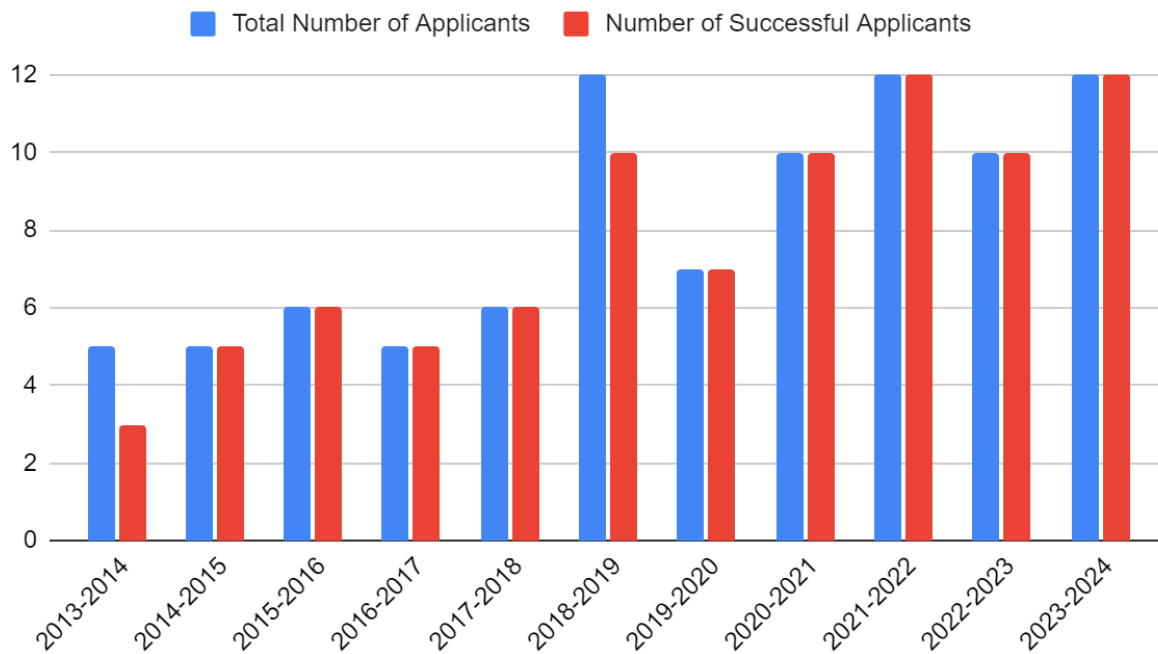
Total Number of Applicants and Number of Successful Applicants

Year	Total Number of Applicants	Number Successful
2013-2014 ¹	5	3
2014-2015 ¹	5	5
2015-2016 ¹	6	6
2016-2017 ²	5	5
2017-2018	6	6
2018-2019	12	10
2019-2020	7	7
2020-2021	10	10
2021-2022	12	12
2022-2023	10	10
2023-2024	12	12

¹ Applications from exempt staff were assessed using processes outlined in the Teachers’ Collective Agreement.

² The Exempt Staff Professional Improvement Program was established.

Total Number of Applicants and Number of Successful Applicants



EXEMPT STAFF PROFESSIONAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM HISTORY

YEAR	APPROVED ALLOCATION	APPROVED TOTAL LEAVE FTE	ACTUAL GRANTED FOR LEAVES	ACTUAL GRANTED FOR TUITION	TOTAL ACTUAL GRANTED FOR LEAVES & TUITION
2016-2017	\$150,000	1.467	\$106,861	\$35,585	\$142,446
2017-2018	\$150,000	0.644	\$47,129	\$39,304	\$86,433
2018-2019	\$150,000	0.600	\$47,147	\$52,902	\$100,049
2019-2020	\$150,000	0.440	\$32,699	\$37,730	\$70,429
2020-2021	\$150,000	1.000	\$67,572	\$30,450	\$98,022
2021-2022	\$140,000	0.216	\$19,564	\$58,327	\$77,891
2022-2023	\$140,000	0.00	\$0	\$77,065	\$77,065
2023-2024	\$140,000	0.00	\$0	\$95,859	\$95,859

2024-2025 PROFESSIONAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM TIMELINE

JANUARY 2024 APPLICATION INTAKE (for courses that take place between July 1, 2024 and August 31, 2025)	
Activity	Date
Exempt Professional Improvement Program announced on Division Staff News and application package available on Connect	October 31
Information meeting for interested staff (4:00 - 6:00 p.m., Google Meet)	November 30
Due date for applications	January 12
Processing of applications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Receipt of applications confirmed ● Background information compiled (previous leaves, degrees, grid placement, years of service, summary of request, projected costs) ● Applications prepared for review by committee of leadership staff 	January 15 - February 2
Review of applications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Application packages prepared for committee review ● Committee workshop conducted ● Review of applications completed 	January 15 - February 7 February 9 February 16
Compile background information with input from assessors	February 12 - March 8
Recommendation submitted for approval	March 11
Approval of leaves and tuition support	March 18
Communication of support granted <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Applicants notified; letters and agreements sent to successful applicants ● TM to Board ● Division Staff News announcement 	March 19-22 April 3 April 5

2024-2025 PROFESSIONAL IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM TIMELINE

SEPTEMBER 2024 APPLICATION INTAKE (for courses that take place between December 1, 2024 and August 31, 2025)	
Activity	Date
Due date for applications	September 20
Processing of applications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Receipt of applications confirmed ● Background information compiled (previous leaves, degrees, grid placement, years of service, summary of request, projected costs) ● Applications prepared for review by committee of leadership staff 	September 20 – 27
Review of applications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Application packages prepared for committee review ● Review of applications completed 	September 30 – October 4 October 11
Compile background information with input from assessors	October 14 – 18
Recommendation submitted for approval	October 25
Approval of leaves and tuition support	November 1
Communication of support granted <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Applicants notified; letters and agreements sent to successful applicants ● TM to Board ● Division Staff News announcement 	November 4 November 9 November 10

**Selection of Reflective Statements: Benefits of Program Participation
2022-2023 Exempt Staff Professional Improvement Program**

Linda deJong – Supervisor Data Control, Human Resources Service Centre
Prosci Canada – Certificate in Change Management

“I have received my Change Management certification. I feel that I will be able to use the skills I have learned to benefit my team. We are looking into making some changes to the structure of our teams and the work that we do which will ultimately streamline and improve the efficiency of what we do. With all the changes planned I believe that the change management skills that I have learned will help to make this a very smooth process. Some of the changes we are making will have an impact on other teams and I am confident that I will be able to assist in keeping the process both positive and flowing smoothly for everyone involved. Should I have the opportunity to change positions in the future these skills will come with me and benefit my new division team as well.”

Carol Van Kuppeveld – Supervisor, Leadership Development, Human Resources
Leaders Lab Learning and Development Inc. – Mentor Coaching

“I anticipate the benefits from engaging in the mentor coaching will be multi-layered. On a personal professional level, I have had the opportunity to engage in deeper learning about advanced coaching skills and mindset. This involved receiving a mentor coach's feedback after they observed me coach on my coaching strengths and growing edges. This has been invaluable to my ongoing growth as a coach. Another layer of benefit will be derived by the Division leaders who engage in an executive coaching relationship with me. As my skills grow, they benefit proportionately by achieving greater clarity around goals, actions and professional growth. This in turn, supports their staff and the students and community they serve and ultimately the Division's Strategic Plan. An additional level of benefit is in the work I am now better equipped to do with the other Division staff who are certified executive coaches and volunteer their time to coach aspiring principals, first and second year principals. I am now eligible to provide mentor coaching to these coaches to support their application for, or renewal of ACC credentials with the International Coaching Federation, thereby saving the Division money and growing our internal capacity as we continue to grow a coaching culture.”

Carolyn Sparrow – Speech Language Pathology Consultant, Specialized Learning Supports
Rocky Mountain University of Health Professionals – Doctor of Speech-Language Pathology

“Some of the course work I have engaged in while working towards my doctorate in Speech-Language Pathology has helped me to better develop my understanding of evidence-based practice, including honing skills to search for and then evaluate the research literature to determine what the evidence says is best practices. Additional coursework has helped develop my learning in supervision and leadership. The skills and information that I have learned over the past year have already been put into practice, by supporting my SLP colleagues in Specialized Learning Supports in ensuring that our practices are informed by the best evidence and in starting to develop an advocacy role for students with language-learning disabilities, most specifically Developmental Language Disorder, so that all staff at EPSB can support their learning journeys. Finally, the first 4 semesters of the doctoral program have helped to hone the direction of the research and support I wish to accomplish as part of the degree. Coaching teachers who work with neuro-diverse students is an important part of the role of an SLP consultant within Edmonton Public Schools and I hope to study effective tools that SLPs (and other consultants) can use to support teachers in their daily work in classrooms.”

Ron Thompson – Assistant Superintendent, Superintendent’s Office

University of Portland – Master of Education in Educational Leadership

“As I approach the end of the first year of the Masters in Educational Leadership program through the University of Portland, I am excited about the impact this work has had, and will continue to have, on my role as an Assistant Superintendent of Schools with EPS. There has been a connection to all three Division Priorities in our coursework to date. This has provided me with the opportunity to apply both theoretical and practical knowledge to my work with schools. This connection between the concepts covered in the Master’s program and my work in our Division has deepened the level of support I am able to offer to our school principals. Engaging in professional conversations, academic writing, review of current literature, and analysis of research-based strategies has allowed me to grow as a leader, through the lens of continuous improvement for our schools. I look forward to completing year 2 and continuing to expand my understanding of educational leadership.”