

DATE: April 1, 2025

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: Trustee Saadiq Sumar

SUBJECT: Advocacy re: Jordan's Principle Funding and Operating Procedures

RESOURCE STAFF: Todd Burnstad, Karen Mills

REFERENCE [CBC Article](#) dated January 7, 2025
[Red Deer Advocate Article](#) dated December 13, 2024
[Edmonton Journal Op-Ed](#) dated December 30, 2024
[Statement by Minister Hajdu](#) dated February 10, 2025

ISSUE

There is a backlog of Division requests submitted under Jordan's Principle that have not yet been fully processed. In addition, changes were recently announced to funding eligibility under Jordan's Principle.

BACKGROUND

At the February 11, 2025, Board meeting, Trustee Sumar served notice of motion that the Board of Trustees advocate to the Federal Government to provide a timeline to applicants, including school boards, as to when they can expect to receive funds that have already been approved and to clarify procedures and timelines to more expeditiously review existing and future requests submitted under Jordan's Principle.

Jordan's Principle, established by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal and endorsed by the House of Commons, was established to ensure that First Nations children do not face barriers or delays in accessing services because of their identity. It was named in memory of Jordan River Anderson, a young boy from Norway House Cree Nation in Manitoba, who died at the age of five in the midst of a dispute between provincial and federal governments over who was responsible for his care.

In November 2024, the Government of Canada was ordered by the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal to address the backlog of requests in this program. As of December 2024, the government reported that there were 140,000 outstanding applications, including approximately 26,000 urgent applications, with no identified timeframe in which to clear the backlog. More specific to our Division, individual and group applications for 455 students were submitted in May 2024. The supports requested through these applications amounted to \$8.1M. To date, funding applications for 73 students have been approved, totaling \$1.8M in funding for supports, with approximately \$560K of this total still to be received. It's important to note that 365 Phase II applications were forwarded for national level approval in mid-December, but no updates have been received on these applications. These applications amount to an additional \$5.6M in supports.

In order to streamline funding, the Government of Canada in February adjusted the eligibility requirements for the program, including the following change:

"[Indigenous Services of Canada] has determined, based on its analysis of legal obligations related to substantive equality under Jordan's Principle, that funding for the following items will not be approved unless such funding is required by substantive equality: [...] School-related requests, unless linked to the specific health, social or educational need of the First Nations child. Supports to school boards off-reserve and private schools will be redirected to provincial school boards, or other existing provincial and federally-funded programs."

Based on this change, the Division would no longer be eligible to submit individual or group applications on behalf of First Nations children.

These issues have been raised from school boards across the province and the country, as this negatively impacts our ability to provide supports to students, either through staff or other resources. In some cases, school divisions have had to lay off support staff because of the delays in funding from the program.

RELATED FACTS

- Since 2016, \$8.8B in funding has been announced for services and supports under Jordan's Principle.
- In May 2024, individual and group applications were submitted by staff on behalf of 455 students.
- Applications for 73 students have been approved, while 351 applications remain unresolved.
- For the 2024-2025 school year, \$1.8M in funding has been approved, with approximately \$560K in funding still to be received by the Division
- Edmonton Public Schools is no longer eligible to submit applications on behalf of students because of changes to eligibility requirements announced in February 2025.
- Approximately 9,360 self-identified First Nations, Metis, and Inuit students are enrolled in Edmonton Public Schools.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Board of Trustees write to the federal Minister of Indigenous Services to request a timeline as to when the remaining applications will be reviewed and any outstanding commitments will be met, and request that changes to eligibility criteria that exclude off-reserve school boards be reversed.

NEXT STEPS

Upon approval, the Board Chair will submit a letter to the federal Minister of Indigenous Services. Both provincial associations (ASBA and PSBAA) and the Alberta Minister of Education will be copied on this letter.

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