

April 26, 2023

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

Dear Minister LaGrange,

Request to restore funding to the Alberta School Councils' Association (ASCA)

School councils play an important role in shaping the work of Boards of Trustees. The legally mandated relationship between the board and school councils makes them unique among stakeholder groups. In addition to providing valuable input to Trustees, school councils advocate on behalf of the students and families they serve in order to support and enhance student learning in their schools.

The Edmonton Public School Board of Trustees deeply values the work of school councils and sees them as an integral piece of a democratic and transparent education system. We appreciate the efforts of volunteers who serve on school councils and their investment of time and talent into our next generation. We believe they deserve the utmost support. Therefore, we are requesting that the provincial government return to the practice of approving grant funding as it was from 2004 through to 2019 to the Alberta School Councils' Association to be used for the purposes of delivering educational workshops to school councils, system governors and system leaders.

As you are aware, the ASCA has been supporting and enhancing parent engagement in education for 93 years, and providing materials, resources, skill and knowledge development for school councils since their legislatively mandated inception in the mid-1990s.

Drastic funding cuts to the association since 2020 have impacted their ability to deliver services that empower school councils with the knowledge, tools and support they need to engage in their legislated role.

Between 2004 and 2020 the ASCA received conditional grants from Alberta Education in the range of \$650,000 to \$732,000 to engage with school councils across the province. By 2022, their provincial funding amounted to \$15,000 to conduct a survey on pandemic learning loss.

ASCA's pre-2020 funding levels allowed school councils to book multiple free workshops, giving them the opportunity to move beyond foundational learning and empowering them to engage in their legislated role from a more in-depth, collaborative approach. It also allowed ASCA to coordinate province-wide efforts, expand their training and service options, and engage in provincial initiatives.

We acknowledge that in 2021, the province announced that it would provide \$500 to each school council through the Alberta School Council Engagement (ASCE) Grant. However, the process is cumbersome as each school council is required to apply for the grant annually and must return any unused funds. This adds extra work for already busy and hard-to-recruit volunteers. It also is important to note that school councils may use the ASCE grant to purchase most ASCA workshops, but may not use it to purchase an ASCA membership or attend ASCA's annual conference, thus restricting their access to ASCA's expertise.

The training that ASCA provides to school councils is highly valued. Because school councils are made up primarily of volunteer parents and guardians, they experience a high rate of turnover and often struggle to engage and recruit new members. Training offered by ASCA through professional development workshops, support services and an annual conference provide volunteers with vital knowledge about their legislated rights, responsibilities and limitations.

ASCA also assists school council executives to understand how to increase engagement and better represent the collective voice of their members. ASCA's work empowers school councils, which improves the input and feedback they're able to provide the Board of Trustees; this helps to strengthen trusting relationships, stakeholder confidence and sound decisions.

We look forward to seeing the provincial government return to the practice of approving conditional grants to ASCA so that school councils and school jurisdictions across our province can benefit in a more meaningful way from the expertise of this important association.

Sincerely,



Trisha Estabrooks
Board Chair

- c. Marilyn Dennis, President, Alberta School Boards Association
Vivian Abboud, Chief Executive Officer, Alberta School Boards Association
Dennis MacNeil, President, Public School Boards' Association of Alberta
Troy Tait, Executive Director and CEO, Public School Boards' Association of Alberta
Brandi Rai, President, Alberta School Councils' Association
Wendy Keiver, Executive Director, Alberta School Councils' Association