



BLACK GOLD SCHOOL DIVISION

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October 21, 2020 (electronic letter emailed)

Honourable Adriana LaGrange
Minister of Education
Office of the Minister
Education
228 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Dear Minister LaGrange:

Now that we are well into the second month of this unprecedented school year, we can clearly see the substantial impact the COVID-19 pandemic is having on the Black Gold School Division (BGSD).

As a rural / urban school division with steadily increasing regular enrolment over the last ten years, BGSD prudently calculated a slight increase in student numbers in our 2020-2021 spring projections (12,907 regular enrolments – a 5.67 per cent increase over 2019). However, our actual student numbers for the 2020-2021 school year are approximately 0.36 per cent less than 2019-2020 school year and 5.7 per cent less than our spring projections.

As a consequence of this decline in enrolments and the ongoing public health crisis, we were not able to reduce our staffing costs. Instead, we had to create an entirely new Distance Learning Program to meet the educational needs of 1504 students and their families.

This significant increase in the demand for remote learning programs has resulted in a redeployment of current staff and necessitated the need for additional teachers and support staff being hired on temporary contracts. We know that BGSD is not alone in facing this reality.

The Division anticipates that as society adjusts to the 'new normal', many students will choose to return to in-person classes in the near future; however, under the recently implemented Weighted Moving Average (WMA) education funding formula, the decrease in the 2020-2021 student enrolment will have an adverse effect on funding, not just on our school division, but on all school divisions in the province, for the next three years.

Minister LaGrange, given the complex and unpredictable nature of COVID-19, and our deep concern for the future of K-12 education funding, we respectfully ask that school divisions be held harmless for any future years' funding as a result of lower-than-projected enrolments in this school year.

We request that Alberta Education base the WMA calculation for 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 school years on an amended formula that uses the 2020-2021 projected enrolment numbers, rather than the September 30, 2020, actual numbers. This way, school divisions will not experience significant shortfalls in their upcoming budgets, so that they can continue to provide all Alberta students with a world-class, high quality education.

Thank you for your consideration of this important adjustment, and we look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Devonna Klaassen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter 'D' being particularly large and stylized.

Devonna Klaassen, Chair
BGSD Board of Trustees

cc: Andre Corbould, Deputy Minister, Education
Brad Rutherford, MLA Leduc - Beaumont
Mark Smith, MLA Drayton Valley - Devon
Honourable Rick Wilson, MLA Maskwacis - Wetaskiwin
Lorrie Jess, President, Alberta School Boards Association