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February 1, 2023

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

Honourable Devin Dreeshan
Minister of Transportation and Economic
Corridors
127 Legislature Building
10800 – 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Dear Ministers LaGrange and Dreeshan:

Re: Driver Shortage Challenges

As with school jurisdictions across this province, the Calgary Board of Education (CBE) is continuing to experience significant challenges posed by the shortage of drivers. This matter has severely affected the reliability of student transportation to over 20,000 CBE students that depend upon yellow busing to get to school ready to learn, and then back home safely.

Since the start of the driver shortage, the CBE has worked hard to implement a variety of innovative solutions to help mitigate the impact on students. The CBE does not directly employ school bus drivers, with student transportation instead contracted to private carriers. As a result, CBE efforts have focused on those factors within our control or that can be accomplished through collaboration with other third parties. Examples include expanding the number of service providers transporting students, securing support from Calgary Transit to assume some routes, working with service providers to prioritize routes and for them to emphasize communications with the families we serve, leveraging specialized transportation providers to also service regular routes with smaller ridership numbers and reducing the transportation fee for the entire school year in recognition of the adverse impact the shortage has had on students. The CBE continues to explore opportunities to improve service every day.

With this letter, we wish to extend an offer to work with Alberta Education in exploring additional opportunities that might help yellow bus service providers close the driver shortage gap as rapidly as possible. During our many consultations with service providers, they have identified that the largest challenge they experience is the delay incurred is potential drivers receiving training and their road test permit. The result is that drivers are without pay for up to six weeks while they undertake the Mandatory Entry-Level Training (MELT) and longer still as they await to be road tested. The testing delays appear to be due to short staffing of Class 2 examiners within government testing sites. Possible improvements could include:

- increasing road test permit openings;
introducing government funding for training wages as provided for Class 1 training;
introducing a multi-step bus driver program similar to Class 5 licencing that could involve:

- obtaining a “learners” Class 2 licence;
- having drivers on a probationary period; and
- full “S” Endorsement licensing upon successful completion of the probationary period;
- reducing the number of tests per year Class 2 examiners require to maintain their licence to allow more carriers to retain in-house Class 2 examiners. This could reduce the pressure on government examiners and accelerate the introduction of new drivers;
- allowing pre-booking of road tests by carriers to reduce wait times, rather than waiting for all the training to be completed;
- creating a licence that is unique to bus drivers. This would eliminate instances where individuals complete the training but choose to take up work with a Class 2 prerequisite elsewhere instead of becoming a bus driver;
- considering the creation of training unique to bus drivers that will maintain student safety as a priority while exploring what is appropriate and equivalent to training in other jurisdictions across the country; and
- allowing language supports during the written exam for drivers who are English language learners.

We would also appreciate your support for raising the awareness of the importance of school bus drivers in Alberta. By highlighting the important work they do, it may attract more people to apply and motivate existing drivers to remain. An example would be declaring a School Bus Driver Appreciation Day in 2023 [like was done in 2021](#).

We recognize that a complex problem like the driver shortage will not be solved with just one initiative. However, cumulatively the implementation of various initiatives can make a difference. Having exhausted those opportunities within the control of the CBE, we now reach out to you in the hopes that our respective teams can collaborate in identifying additional measures that can improve the support provided to students.

Thank you for your consideration on this matter.

Yours sincerely,



Laura Hack, Chair
Board of Trustees

cc: Marilyn Dennis, President of the Alberta School Board Association (ASBA)
Dr. Vivian Abboud, Chief Executive Officer of ASBA
Alberta School Board Chairs
Chris Usih, Chief Superintendent of Schools
Dany Breton, Superintendent, Facilities and Environmental Services