



ALBERTA
EDUCATION

*Office of the Minister
MLA, Red Deer-North*

November 24, 2022

Letter to Parents – Ensuring access to education for all students

Dear Alberta parents and guardians:

We know we have asked a lot of you in the past couple of years. Since March 2020 parents and families have been told with little to no notice that students would be required to move to learning at-home or online. We have heard first-hand from students, parents, and teachers that learning disruptions over the course of the past couple of years have impacted the mental health and wellbeing of students, significantly impacted learning development, and has placed financial burdens and additional stress on working parents and families.

In recent months, parents have approached our office with uncertainty and questions, concerned that their child's education may once again be impacted by transitions to at-home learning. School authorities have sought clarity related to their ability to bring in health measures that may limit access to education, given there are currently no health orders to support these decisions. Today I have announced new regulation, effective November 24, 2022, that will protect student's access to in-person learning. This includes:

- Ensuring access to in-person learning for grades 1 to 12 students despite any instances of operational issues caused by rates of student and/or teacher absenteeism.
- Affirming that a student cannot be denied in-person education by their school authority due to their personal decision to wear or not wear a mask. This applies to all students.

We know that all Alberta families are facing increased costs due to rising inflation affecting mortgages, fuel costs, electricity, heating and food. These changes will ensure parents can continue to work to support their families without the added burden of finding and paying for childcare during the school day.

This will also ensure that all students have access to specialized supports provided in a school environment. We know that isolation in recent years has increased youth mental health issues and that these students need access to supports provided at school.

Our teachers have worked hard to ensure students who may have fallen behind grade level due to the instability in learning environments have the additional supports they need in the classroom. By protecting in-person learning students will be provided with stability.

As has always been the case, the *Public Health Act* provides the overarching direction on all public health matters, and it would continue to prevail over the *Education Act* and associated regulations in a future public health emergency.

We hope that with this new regulatory change comes more predictable and stable circumstances, an increase in the mental wellbeing of our students, and the preservation of in-person quality learning opportunities for students.

Sincerely,

Adriana LaGrange
Minister of Education