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May 14, 2018

Rick Grebenstein, Senior Transportation Manager
Business Operations and Stakeholder Support Branch
Education
8th Floor Commerce Place
10155 – 102 Street
Edmonton, AB T5J 4L5

Re: Student Transportation Criteria

Please consider our written submission as you review the distance criteria, service levels and safety considerations involved with changes to the student transportation system.

The PHPS Board of Trustees would like the government to consider a predictable and sustainable transportation funding model that includes funding for maximum ride times. By providing guidelines around ride times it will allow us to plan our routes accordingly, knowing that we will be properly funded for those routes. The distance from a student's home to school can significantly affect how many students are placed on that route and what the overall ride time is.

As a Division with declining enrolment, we are faced with some fixed costs in transportation, but students still need to be transported from home to school regardless of where they live. Funding on the actual costs incurred to reflect the distance and area travelled with the establishment of a provincial ride time would enable rural boards to route accordingly. In sparsely populated areas with limited roads, it is not possible to add additional students to routes, and sometimes backtracking is necessary. The first student on a bus is not necessarily the farthest student as sometimes circular routes are used to limit individual student's ride time on the bus.

Our in town students might be able to walk or bike to school, but for the majority of our students this is not an option due to safety concerns and distance. There is no public transportation available within the Division. Our Board would encourage the province to fully fund transportation for rural students living outside their town or city regardless of distance from their designated school due to safety concerns such as railway crossings, highways, wildlife, etc.

As the government moves towards an equitable funding formula, it is critical that the fuel price contingency funding be reinstated or incorporated into the funding rates. Due to the increase in fuel prices, the cost of purchasing parts and freight has also increased resulting in additional costs to our service department. The impact of increasing fuel costs has resulted in an aging fleet, as we try to balance the costs of operating a transportation system. This creates a cycle of challenges, given that an aging fleet results in higher operating costs.

Our Transportation department has worked hard to find efficiencies within the system and as a Board we made a decision not to charge fees for transportation over 2.4 km. We were then surprised to hear that reimbursements were given to Divisions who were charging fees. This type of allocation of funding is not equitable as those Divisions who were charging parents extra fees then received compensation from Alberta Education despite all Divisions having extra costs in transportation.

Regional Office

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The safety of our students is a priority. With increasing societal change, features such as cameras and GPS units on buses are becoming a standard. A swipe card system is another feature that parents are requesting. All of these items add to the overall costs of transporting a student safely from their home to school and back again. Determining a formula that focuses on ride times, fuel prices, and emerging safety concerns would allow us, as an elected school board, to make decisions in transportation that reflect our local context.

Finally, as a Board, we are deeply concerned regarding some of the questions on the Alberta Education transportation survey, in particular question numbers 10 and 13. When our Board completed the survey, we struggled with the context and implications of some of the choices. We are concerned that some of the answers would lead to increased parent expectations that might exceed funding availability.

As a locally elected school board, we understand our communities and the pressures on our transportation system. Changing transportation eligibility requirements and funding formulas without additional funding will not serve our communities and the province well.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jennifer Tuininga". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jennifer Tuininga
Board Chair