



CANADIAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION



SOCIÉTÉ
CANADIENNE
DE PSYCHOLOGIE

May 13, 2020

The Honourable Adrianna LaGrange
Minister of Education
Office of the Minister
Education
228 Legislature Building
10800 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6
Email : Education.minister@gov.ab.ca

Dear Minister LaGrange:

On behalf of the Psychologists' Association of Alberta (PAA) and the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA), we are writing to raise our serious concerns with the recent decision of the Calgary Board of Education (CBE) to layoff psychologists.

The PAA and CPA align in our missions to promote the science and practice of psychology in the service of the health and welfare of Albertans and Canadians. There are approximately 3 800 psychologists registered to practice in Alberta. Psychologists make up a significant proportion of the province's regulated and specialized mental health resource.

At this time of the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for psychological services for Albertan children and youth is acute. The stress, anxiety and isolation from peers will take their toll as will disruptions in learning and academic achievement; even more so for children and youth living with pre-existing emotional and developmental problems.

Absenting psychologists within the province's school systems is akin to absenting physicians from primary health care. Psychologists' unique expertise is critical to accurately assessing and diagnosing mental, behavioural and developmental problems and to delivering care to students who needs are complex.

The work of psychologists lends itself more readily to telehealth practice than many of the health professions and the need is great. The policy decision to lay off the school board's psychologists puts short term gain before the long-term gain and, more importantly, before the health and welfare of the province's youth.

Approximately 70% of mental health problems manifest before young adulthood and the greatest return on investment when it comes to mental health is an investment in children and youth. Mental health care delivered within the systems that serve children enables the early identification and remediation of mental health and developmental problems. Removing timely access to psychological care by psychologists through the school system is a mistake that will be felt within the classroom long after children return to school post-COVID-19.

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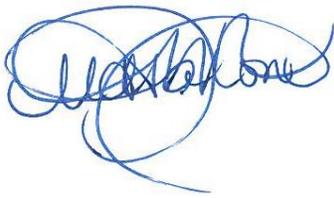
There are significant barriers to funded access to psychological services in Alberta. Unless the psychologist is employed by a publicly funded institution, their services are not covered by Alberta Health Services. Students whose parents have no private extended health care coverage will have difficulty getting their psychological service needs met if there are no psychologists employed with the school board to meet them. Offloading funded psychological care to the health care system, at a time when it is stretched to capacity, poses even more burden on Albertans.

Children and youth are the future of Alberta and access to psychological services should not be compromised, particularly at such an unprecedented moment in time when stress is high and needs for support are great. Now, more than ever, steps must be taken to reassure students and families that access to school-based mental health experts is being protected and valued.

Minister, the PAA and CPA stand ready to work with you to find ways in which we can ensure timely access for those students in need.

Dr. Malone, CEO of the PAA would be pleased to discuss this with you at your earliest convenience, and can be reached at judim@paa-ab.ca.

Sincerely,



Judy Malone, PhD., R. Psych
Chief Executive Officer
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K. R. Cohen, Ph.D, C. Psych.
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