

December 2, 2021

By Email Only to: minister.edu@gov.sk.ca

The Honourable Dustin Duncan
Minister of Education
Room 361 Legislative Building
Regina SK S4S 0B3

Dear Honourable Dustin Duncan:

On behalf of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation's 13,500 members, I appreciate the acknowledgement in your recent undated letter to school division board chairs, which our office received on November 30, that extracurricular activities are not considered as essential service and your recognition that these activities are offered by teachers in a strictly voluntary manner. As I expressed in my letter to you on November 19, the word "essential" has specific implications and meaning in labour relations and should only be used in that context.

I also thank you for the acknowledgement of the importance and effectiveness of vaccines in your most recent letter and your November 30 interviews on CBC Radio's Saskatoon Morning with Leisha Grebinski and The Morning Edition Sask with Stefani Langenegger. This is a critical message to share in our work to end the pandemic. While this is welcomed information, I continue to have numerous concerns by your lack of response to the issues that have been raised through previous correspondence:

- September 20, 2021: Request to reinstate the Education Sector Response Planning Team (RPT).
- October 19, 2021: Request to take action to slow the spread of COVID-19.
- November 19, 2021: Concern for letter on extracurricular activities and unvaccinated students.

As a member organization, the concerns and questions I raise are in direct response to teachers' lived experiences and the reality of teaching during this pandemic. I hear from our members every day about safety concerns and burnout. These professionals have been on the front lines of the pandemic, maintaining consistent learning services for children and providing leadership in communities across the province despite unprecedented challenges. Teachers have taken on significant new burdens, without additional resources and supports, and have not wavered in their commitment. A collaborative effort is urgently needed to better support teachers across the province.

Your recent directive caused confusion for school divisions and teachers, raising additional questions about following the guidance of our expert medical health officers. During a significant health crisis such as the global pandemic, leaders must provide clear directions that are consistent and logical. Issuing a directive that favours citizens who are hesitant to get either themselves or their children vaccinated contradicts your encouragement that everyone become fully vaccinated. It also may cause those who are vaccinated to reconsider their desire to participate in extracurricular activities, which would work in opposition to your initial intention of allowing all students to participate. If a volunteer withdraws their services due to safety concerns, all students, including those who were responsible and acted on your encouragement to get vaccinated, lose out.

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Minister Duncan, I remain frustrated that the RPT still has not been re-instated and cannot overstate the importance of reconvening it. The RPT served as a valuable tool to ensure new government measures were implemented in an effective manner within all levels of the education sector. At the recent International Summit on the Teaching Profession (ISTP) I was pleased to hear you share with all participants that you and your government believed in genuine and authentic collaboration with teacher organizations as represented in Saskatchewan by the STF. We agree wholeheartedly that the work of our sector is enhanced significantly by collaborative and strong relationships. The education RPT allowed for sector collaboration to occur in a purposeful, deliberate manner. Not only could the recent confusion regarding extracurricular activities and vaccinations been avoided, but the RPT would also have been able to ensure health measures are implemented effectively in school environments. Further, the absence of an RPT sends a clear message that meaningful collaboration is of low importance, regardless of any statements you made at ISTP.

I once again request a meeting with you to begin to actualize your stated commitment to collaboration. As noted in previous correspondence, I will make myself available to meet with you at a time and location that is convenient for you. These outstanding issues are of utmost importance to teachers and require your immediate attention.

Sincerely,

Patrick Maze
President

PM/lph

cc: Donna Johnson, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education
Dr. Saqib Shahab, Chief Medical Health Officer, Saskatchewan Health
Bobbi Taillefer, Executive Director, STF
Jaime Valentine, Executive Director, SASBO
Ben Grebinski, Executive Director, LEADS
Shawn Davidson, President, SSBA
Darren McKee, Executive Director, SSBA
Carla Beck, Official Opposition Critic for Education