



Board of Directors
www.calgarygirlsschool.com

June 7, 2018

Honorable David Eggen
Minister of Education
228 Legislature Building
10800 – 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB
T5K 2B6

Dear Minister Eggen:

Re: School Transportation Survey

Our Board appreciates the opportunity to provide a written submission that will inform your review of school transportation and especially the eligibility criteria. In particular, we are responding to question 9 in the Alberta Education Transportation Survey: *What do you think is the most important issue currently facing student transportation in the school system?*

While the most pressing issue is funding, we are not simply suggesting that funding be increased or redistributed with the likely effect of causing hardship elsewhere. It is our premise that the current transportation strategy creates or at least sustains a funding crisis. Thus, the most important issue is the need for a broader re-visioning of the transportation strategy for Alberta's students. Our letter includes some ideas, but first it is important to explain the impact of the current funding model.

The funding model presents several challenges to develop a balanced transportation budget while minimizing costs to parents. Funding per eligible rider covers about one third of the actual cost. Fees to parents (\$850 annually/rider) make up the rest of our budget. Despite these fees, our students have long rides, over much distance, as we serve the entire city. It should be noted that we provide fee subsidies based on eligibility criteria. The number and total cost of the subsidies is increasing every year. Further, we are noting a substantial increase in the number and amount of uncollected fees. These indicators show that our necessary fees are a hardship to many of our families.

The funding model considers basically two categories of school location: urban (including urban metro) or rural. Rural funding recognizes distributed or sparse population over great distances whereas urban funding assumes density of riders with less time and shorter distances for routes.

The factors describing rural transportation fit our student population, yet our funding is the more restrictive urban/metro.

Further, other public schools in urban/metro areas receive funding for all students who reside beyond the defined walk distance whether or not those students actually use school transportation. Our students are funded only if they use the school bus service. On the surface this seems reasonable, but it is a form of picking and choosing the application of funding criteria to the disadvantage of our students.

The point to be made is that funding for transportation should be fair to every student by reflecting the student's situation and not simply the location of the school. Each time the more limited urban/metro formula is applied to our school, and especially when that already restricted formula is further limited in its application to public charter schools, the effect is increased costs for families.

We recognize that as a school serving only one gender we have an added impediment for efficiency in filling our buses. Thus, we are highly motivated and interested in co-creating solutions with Alberta Education for the benefit of all students and the effective use of resources.

The solutions we propose may need further exploration, however, we offer these ideas:

- Establish common school calendars; finding efficiencies through shared transportation routes would be much easier with alignment of school calendars.
- Encourage and perhaps mandate cooperative busing; integrating publicly funded school transportation systems would create a more effective and efficient system for all riders.
- Broaden the conversation to encourage transportation innovation; e.g., collaborate with other public transportation providers such as the municipalities to explore efficiencies and opportunities that are scalable. Strive for an integrated, cost effective and efficient public transportation system that is safe and reliable for all students.
- Recognize that alternative programs and Alberta's thirteen public charter schools contribute to Alberta's successful public education system. Families who choose these programs experience the negative effects of more restrictive funding and not just with respect to transportation support. All students deserve fair and equitable treatment.



Board of Directors
www.calgarygirlsschool.com

Parents/guardians are required by the School Act s. 3 and s.8 to send their children to school. As such, transportation to and from school needs to adapt to reflect the world we live in which includes large and more distributed populations and respect for choice in many areas including education services.

Thank you for seeking our input. We invite you to contact us at any time for more information or discussion on this important topic.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Natalya Nicholson", is enclosed in a white rectangular box.

Natalya Nicholson
Board Chair

Cc: Board of Directors: Gary Care, Caroline Claussen, Christine Jackson, Geordie MacPherson, Margo Purcell (Vice Chair & Society Vice President), Brad Takenaka and Stanley Wong (Society Secretary Treasurer)
Superintendent: Dianne McBeth

