



June 19, 2025

Honourable Demetrios Nicolaides
Minister of Education and Childcare
Government of Alberta

Honourable Adriana LaGrange
Minister of Health
Government of Alberta

Honourable Rick Wilson
Minister of Mental Health and Addiction
Government of Alberta

Dear Ministers Nicolaides, LaGrange and Wilson,

RE: Inter-Ministerial Collaboration – Health/Education/Mental Health & Addiction

On behalf of the Board of Trustees for Sturgeon Public Schools, I am writing to raise a strategic opportunity as Alberta transitions from the Primary Care Network model to the newly formed Primary Care Alberta (PCA) agency. As this significant transformation in health service delivery unfolds, the timing presents a rare and vital opportunity to align cross-ministerial priorities, specifically those of Education, Health, and Health and Addiction, in a way that will yield improved outcomes for students and families and long-term cost efficiencies for the province.

This is not a call for more burden, but for better alignment of services. We urge your ministries to consider a provincial framework that integrates primary health care services, including mental health supports, directly into schools and school communities, potentially referring to the former Regional Collaborative Service Delivery (RCSD) model; analyzing “what worked well and what did not” as the launch point for discussion.

Why It Matters

The Education Ministry Business Plan 2025–2028 highlights a priority to “expand mental health and well-being supports for students” (Outcome 1.2) and “improve access to qualified professionals” (Outcome 4.5). This aligns with Premier Danielle Smith’s 2023 Mandate Letter to the Minister of Education, which called for the expansion of prevention and early intervention mental health supports integrated within schools and communities. We echo and support this direction.





Yet, from the frontline, we also live the realities: Alberta classrooms are facing increased complexity, overstretched staff and insufficient access to health professionals. The recent strike vote by 95% of Alberta Teachers' Association members sends a clear message that the current model is unsustainable: "We are expected to do more with less every year" (ATA President Jason Schilling, June 2025).

June 14, 2025, on *Your Province, Your Premier*, Premier Danielle Smith, recently acknowledged these same pressures, stating:

We're now beginning to hear from teachers about the issues and conditions in the classroom around aggression and safety... complexity you can manage if it's a small number of students, but if you start getting six or eight students in a classroom that have complex needs, it becomes overwhelming if you don't have an education assistant.

She further emphasized:

We often allow the school boards... and we just expect them to manage... What we're hearing is that, that process is not working as well as it should.

This moment demands action but also offers opportunity.

The Opportunity

We believe that the emerging PCA framework can serve as the backbone for a renewed collaborative education/healthcare service delivery model, where cross ministerial funds support coordinated healthcare delivery in school communities, directed and governed through Primary Care Alberta or other system aligned health agencies.

In Sturgeon Public Schools, the implementation of CASA Classrooms has provided important lessons and successes, as well as surfaced critical challenges. CASA's mandate supports a small, specific population of students with targeted, intensive mental health needs. While this model is essential, it does not address the broader group of students who experience persistent dysregulation and complex mental health challenges that manifest daily in classrooms.

These students, while not eligible for CASA Classroom, significantly impact the learning environment for others. Their needs often exceed what school-based staff are equipped to manage without additional system supports. When appropriate and coordinated mental health services are not available within schools, the safety, inclusivity, and well-being of both students and staff are compromised.



CASA Classrooms have demonstrated the value of cross-sector collaboration. When education and health partners are aligned, open to adaptation, and willing to jointly invest in shared solutions, the result is improved access to care, reduced strain on acute systems, and better outcomes for students. However, a broader system of collaboration between education and mental health and wellness is required to create safe, caring, respectful, and welcoming schools for *all* students, not just those eligible for specialized services.

Research into collaborative healthcare and education models reveals that regions such as Parkland County and Fort McMurray have existing partnerships in place within their Primary Care Networks (PCNs), which are now part of the newly formed Edmonton Corridor. This illustrates the capacity for cross-ministerial success in meeting the needs of our students that is currently happening in the Edmonton Corridor.

Based on the above mentioned research, our goal is to create a collaborative education and health partnership in our region within the Edmonton Corridor. This will alleviate pressure on hospitals and community-based emergency services, a priority identified in the PCA framework as articulated in the agency's 2025 FAQ: to "[prevent] downstream demand on acute services" and provide care "closer to home".

By incentivizing coordinated healthcare service delivery for school communities through clear inter-ministerial collaboration, Alberta has a real chance to:

- Increase access to care for students and families
- Reduce long-term system costs across ministries
- Support teacher retention by reducing burnout and burden
- Support the complex needs of neurodiverse students (drastic increase in %)
- Support the mental health of our children and families
 - In our lifetime, 1 in 5 people will experience a mental illness and as many as 10% of people over the age of 15 will battle a drug or alcohol dependency. The financial impact on society is in the billions of dollars. The emotional impact on families and individuals is incalculable ([GoA](#) Children's Mental Health).
- While Alberta's current programs and services are helping to address the needs of Albertans struggling with addiction, mental health problems and mental illness, we know more must be done.
- Improve measurable student outcomes, such as high school completion and post-secondary transitions which are targets clearly outlined in the 2025-2028 Education Ministry Business Plan.



A Vision for Alberta's Future

In her 2023 Mandate letter, Premier Smith stated that “ensuring our children receive a world-class education is a top priority” and that students with mental health needs must be “provided with every opportunity to flourish”.

June 14, 2025, Premier Smith also noted the importance of reassessing how classroom needs are supported, stating:

We may have to be a little bit more hands-on... if it's going to prevent us from getting to a deal with the teachers because they don't believe we're addressing the true workplace issues.

This vision can only be realized through intentional, integrated planning across ministries. We must incentivize collaboration, not simply coordination.

We would welcome the opportunity to contribute to a cross-ministerial planning process or pilot initiative. In doing so, we believe Alberta can demonstrate national leadership in health and education integration, while investing in the well-being of its future workforce and citizens.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "T. Oatway-McLay".

Tasha Oatway-McLay
Board Chair, Sturgeon Public Schools

cc Honourable Dale Nally, MLA, Morinville-St. Albert
Shane Getson, MLA, Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland
Marilyn Dennis, ASBA President
Dennis MacNeil, PSBAA President
School Board Superintendents
Alberta School Councils' Association
School Board Chairs

