

Board of Trustees

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April 23, 2025

Honourable Demetrios Nicolaides
Minister of Education
10800 – 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB
T5K 2B6

Dear Minister Nicolaides,

Re: Charter School Application - Willow Ridge Academy

The Calgary Board of Education (CBE) received notification from Alberta Education of a charter school application in Calgary, namely the Willow Ridge Academy. The CBE Board of Trustees is concerned with the potential duplication of existing programming provided by CBE and the implications for funding as a result of this redundancy. Given the current fiscal strain across the province, the creation of a new Charter School focused on areas already well-covered by the Calgary Board of Education (CBE) represents a significant duplication of resources. At a time when every education dollar is crucial to maintain and improve the quality of education for all students, redirecting resources to a redundant initiative would not only stretch the province's limited resources but also detract from the effectiveness of proven, existing programs. This approach risks undermining the broader educational system in favor of inefficient duplication.

Section 3(1) of Charter Schools Regulation states that the Minister of Education will “consider any information received from any board of a public or separate school division, Francophone regional authority or charter school that receives notice under section 24 of the Act, including information about any alternative programs that currently exist in the geographic area”.

The notification of application by the Willow Ridge Academy proposed that the school would open in the 2025 – 2026 school year and would be located in Calgary, Alberta. As described in the notice, the Willow Ridge Academy aims to offer

Kindergarten to Grade 12 programming with a focus on school-wide enrichment and academic rigor for all students. The proposed charter school will promote global perspectives, critical thinking, and academic agency in an orderly and consistent learning environment, with an emphasis on goal setting and communication, including dialogic teaching and interactive and reflective discourse.

The Calgary Board of Education (CBE) already provides comprehensive programs in these areas, making the introduction of such a school redundant. The Alberta Education Ministerial Order on Learning outlines that critical thinking, global perspectives, and academic agency are core priorities for all schools in the province. These elements are embedded in the Alberta Program of Studies, which is followed by every school, ensuring that students across the province engage in goal setting, reflective discourse, and dialogic teaching. These practices are already in place in Calgary Board of Education (CBE) schools and other public institutions, making the

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proposed charter school's focus redundant. In fact, CBE's commitment to fostering academic rigor, student agency, and reflective learning is evident in their everyday teaching practices. Collaborative learning and inquiry-based methods that support critical thinking and problem-solving are already part of the CBE's pedagogy.

Furthermore, in a time of growing fiscal strain, the creation of small, boutique schools like Willow Ridge Academy would significantly increase costs, both in terms of staffing and infrastructure. The operation of a new school—especially one with limited enrollment— requires substantial resources that could be better allocated to enhancing existing programs across the public education system. Adding another layer of administration and operational overhead is not an effective or efficient use of provincial funds. It is crucial that every dollar spent on education maximizes value for all students, and creating a new school in this context only serves to fragment resources and spread them thin across multiple institutions. The idea of "school choice" must also be reconsidered when evaluating the impact of such proposals. The Willow Ridge Academy, with its focus on enrichment and academic rigor, does not offer a distinctive advantage over what is already being provided in public schools. All students in the public system already have access to high-quality educational opportunities that promote critical thinking, global perspectives, and academic achievement. Parents are offered a wide range of "school choice" through publicly funded public schools, separate schools, francophone schools, and independent schools.

In conclusion, the proposed Willow Ridge Academy does not bring anything new to the table that is not already being offered by public schools across the province. The creation of another institution with overlapping goals will only result in unnecessary duplication and added costs, which are particularly concerning given the current fiscal environment. We strongly urge the Ministry to reconsider this proposal and focus on enhancing and expanding the programs already in place to ensure that all students have access to the best possible education.

Should you have further questions regarding details of CBE programming, we are happy to provide additional information. We look forward to receiving information regarding your decision regarding the preliminary applications as stated in the notice, on or before April 23, 2025.

Sincerely,



Patricia Bolger, Chair
Board of Trustees

cc: Tania Brudler, Executive Director, System Support and
Student Records Sector
Joanne Pitman, Chief Superintendent
Jennifer Turner, Superintendent, School Improvement
Michael Nelson, Superintendent, School Improvement





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EDUCATION and CHILDCARE

*Office of the Minister
MLA, Calgary - Bow*

AR129705

May 28, 2025

Patricia Bolger
Board Chair
Calgary Board of Education (CBE)
1221 8 Street SW
Calgary, Alberta T2R 0L4

Dear Ms. Bolger:

Thank you for your letter on behalf of the Calgary Board of Education Board of Trustees regarding the application for Willow Ridge Academy, a public charter school in Calgary. I appreciate the opportunity to respond.

I sincerely value the insights and context you provided regarding existing program offerings within the Calgary Board of Education.

In addition to the materials submitted by the applicant, Alberta Education will consider the information that you provided as outlined in section 3.2(2) of the Charter Schools Regulation.

Thank you once again for taking the time to write.

Best,

Demetrios Nicolaides ECA PhD
Minister of Education and Childcare