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May 28, 2025

Honourable Demetrios Nicolaides  
Minister of Education and Childcare  
228 Legislature Building  
10800 – 97 Avenue  
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Dear Minister Nicolaides,

Thank you for meeting with us on May 14, 2025. We appreciated the time to connect with you on a variety of topics that are important to our Board of Trustees, our system and the 144,000+ students we serve.

The Calgary Board of Education is a community of schools. We are also a strong community partner within Calgary and value our relationship with the province.

**We are committed to a positive working relationship.**

As a Board, we are committed to a positive working relationship with the provincial government, with you and your office. We want our relationship to be defined by collaboration, mutual respect and two-way dialogue. By working together, we believe we can achieve great things for students.

**Recent government decisions are having a significant impact on CBE operations.**

There have been several recent policy decisions (e.g. Bill 50, Bill 51) and changes to legislation (e.g. *Alberta Education Amendment Act, 2024* and *Real Property Governance Act*) that will have an impact on our system.

We need to work more closely to build understanding of how these recent policy decisions impact large metro boards, and how risks can be mitigated. To date, there has been a lack of meaningful consultation and opportunities for input. All of these legislated changes require significant resources across the system to implement. It is challenging to be successful when there are tight timelines for implementation.

**We have many questions about Bill 50, Bill 51 and the Impact of the *Real Property Governance Act (RPGA)*.**

We have many questions and concerns related to the ability to plan long term to meet the learning needs of CBE students now and into the future. We are also concerned about the erosion of local autonomy and risk to the sustainability of local school boards and the CBE.

- How can we regain clarity and confidence in the capital planning process amid the uncertainties introduced by Bill 51 and the *RPGA*?
- How do these changes support CBE's JUPA (Joint Use and Planning Agreement) or partnerships we have or want to establish in the future if we don't have authority over those lands or buildings?
- Does the *RPGA* mean government will now own school buildings and we will become lessees? There is so much uncertainty related to not knowing the details and impacts (terms of the lease, lease length, even whether we locally name a school). All of this is challenging our thinking and our confidence.
- What are the impacts for communities? Does this mean the first school in a community may not be a public school? How will this impact school sites chosen, funding to fit-up schools not covered by the school construction grant (e.g. funding for student information technology devices, wireless access points or staffing to prepare the school for opening)? How will this impact the continuity of programming?

**The *School Transportation Amendment Regulation* and the metro transportation funding formula are impacting the CBE and families.**

The cost of providing yellow bus transportation continues to increase and transportation funding is not keeping pace. Service provider costs including wages, buses, fuel, and insurance are all rising. With over 26,000 students currently transported by yellow buses, this fall, the CBE is implementing legislated changes that will lead to over 7,000 additional students becoming eligible to take yellow buses, further increasing the overall cost of providing transportation. CBE trustees have been very vocal with government about the impacts families will experience because of Alberta Education's [School Transportation Amendment Regulation](#).

In addition to this, the metro transportation funding formula penalizes rapidly growing school boards like the CBE. The formula assumes that schools with high enrolment will have a greater number of students who can walk to school. Therefore a percentage of the funding is subtracted based on average enrolment. The higher the average school enrolment, the greater the deduction.

With a current utilization rate of 95%, CBE is overflowing students from 30+ schools to 45 receiver schools. When students are overflowed, they need

transportation to another school, but the funding formula does not account for this.

In fact, CBE's transportation funding is decreasing by \$2M year-over-year despite growing enrolment and more students needing to be overflowed to other schools. Fees must increase to cover the revenue gap.

Compounding this problem is the fact that over 60% of the transportation grant is used to transport 2,500 students requiring complex learning needs (CLN) transportation (i.e. less than 10% of total ridership). Specifically, CBE receives \$13M in funding for CLN transportation and the cost to provide this service is \$31M. School boards are not permitted to charge a fee for CLN transportation.

**We offer three recommendations for keeping fees affordable and supporting a sustainable transportation model:**

1. Provide a supplementary grant of \$6.5M for the 2026-27 school year and beyond to return fees to \$260/year (fee charged in 2024-25).
2. Revise the metro board funding formula to account for rapidly rising enrolment and increasing specialized transportation costs.
3. Eliminate the in-year funding reduction

More details are in the *Metro Transportation Challenge* flatsheet that is attached and available on the [CBE's website under Board advocacy](#).

**CBE schools are full and there remains an urgent need for learning spaces.**

During our term, we have been [advocating for learning spaces](#). We want the School Construction Accelerator Program to be successful. We want community schools to be built, which in turn builds community.

We are grateful for the approval of 13 new schools. Given it takes several years for new schools to be built, the system utilization rate is still projected to remain at 100% by 2029. That's why in our [Three-Year School Capital Plan 2026-29](#) we requested another 16 new schools, as well as one addition, one modernization and one replacement school. [More modular classrooms](#) have also been requested to help relieve short term pressure.

In addition, the CBE has taken significant actions to manage our finite learning spaces. We have used capital dollars to relocate modular classrooms, we have shifted grade configurations, repurposed spaces in schools such as learning commons, stages and music rooms for classroom spaces. CBE has also taken steps to add or optimize roughly 2,575 learning spaces including:

- In 2024, 47 new modulars have created approximately 1,150 new spaces and the relocation of 17 modulars created another 425 spaces.

- In fall 2025, CBE is reopening Windsor Park school to add 200+ spaces for regular programming. This will have positive impacts on Elboya and Rideau Park schools reducing the number of students being overflowed.
- Work is underway to consolidate Chinook Learning Services and recapture ~550 high school spaces across four high schools by mid 2026.
- Closing the All Boys Program at Sir James Lougheed School will open 250+ future learning spaces.

The CBE is also working closely with the City of Calgary and developers to address the need for site readiness, especially the urgent need for a high school in the south and two other high school site. If these school sites were site ready, West Macleod High School would be identified in Year 1 as priority #3, Glacier Ridge High School would be identified in Year 1 as priority #4, and Livingston High School would be identified in Year 2 as priority #15.

**Public school boards deserve equitable funding to ensure all students can be successful.**

We believe in public education. We are a school system that is committed to welcoming and meeting the needs of our diverse student population. We are proud of our student results; CBE students continue to outperform the province on many fronts. However, if base funding does not increase, our current breadth and depth of programming alongside student success is at risk.

We value choice and want to continue to offer – in fact - expand choice. We want to be engaged in creating an environment where all public schools, separate schools, private schools and charter schools are held accountable to the same standards, where we can continue to be agile and innovative and continue to effectively and efficiently use tax dollars to support student success.

**We look forward to continuing this conversation.**

As highlighted in this letter, we still have many questions. At our meeting, you indicated a willingness to meet again before the end of June. We have reached out to your office to schedule a time.

It is important that we re-establish a shared vision for public education where local voice, accountability, and student success remain central.

We want to gain a better understanding for how government will support school boards, like the CBE, that are demonstrating excellence, innovation, and fiscal responsibility, but now face increasing risk to that success. Over our term, we have exhibited a high level of accountability, demonstrated our commitment to collaborate with you and other ministries and share our expertise and insights.

We look forward to learning more about how you will support the CBE and the continued success of the students we serve.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'P Bolger', written in a cursive style.

Patricia Bolger, Chair  
Board of Trustees

c.c. Joanne Pitman, Chief Superintendent of Schools

Encl. Metro Transportation Challenges





# CBE Transportation Funding Challenges

The CBE is facing pressure on transportation funding as our system grows. This is resulting in higher fees. Challenges include:

## Costs are Rising Faster than Funding

The cost of providing yellow bus transportation continues to increase and transportation funding is not keeping pace. Service provider costs including wages, buses, fuel, and insurance are all rising. This fall, CBE is implementing the legislative changes that will lead to over 7,000 additional students becoming eligible to take yellow buses, further increasing the overall cost of providing transportation.

## In-Year Funding Reductions Had an Impact

In 2024-25, CBE had an in-year funding reduction of \$2.5M. Grant funding is based on enrolment projections; during the year, the grant is adjusted based on actual enrolment. The transportation grant in the 2025-26 CBE funding profile is about \$2.2M less than the reduced 2024-25 grant funding. As long as CBE continues to experience strong enrolment growth and high utilization rates, transportation costs will increase.

### Three contributing factors to grant reductions:

1. Prior to 2021, CBE's system utilization rates were declining resulting in a smaller in-year reduction.
2. In 2020-21, Alberta Education paused the metro formula and applied a growth factor to the 2019-20 grant.
3. In 2024-25, the metro formula has been reapplied. Given enrolment growth, higher school utilization and growing ridership, CBE is seeing a significant impact on funding.

## The Funding Formula Doesn't Work for Rapidly Growing Metro Boards

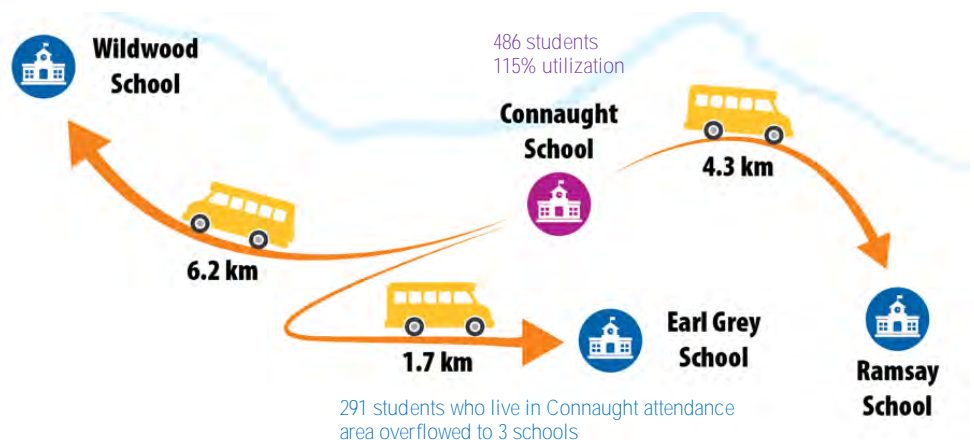
The provincial funding manual allocates transportation funds differently for charter, rural, urban, and metro boards.

The metro calculation is based on an estimated number of bus riders. The formula assumes that a school with high enrolment will have a greater number of students who can walk to school. Therefore a percentage of the funding is subtracted based on average enrolment. The higher the enrolment the greater the deduction.

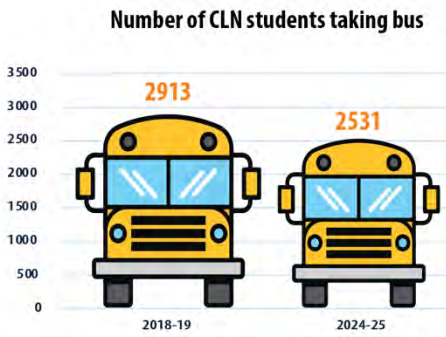
With a utilization rate of 95%, CBE is overflowing students from 30+ schools to 46 receiver schools. When students are overflowed, they need transportation to another school, but the funding formula does not account for this.

This Connaught School example demonstrates how, as school utilization increases, more students need transportation to overflow schools, which are not within walking distance.

The funding formula doesn't recognize the need for additional busing and instead reduces the total passenger estimate, which in turn, impacts funding.



## Transporting Students with Complex Learning Needs (CLN) Continues to Increase



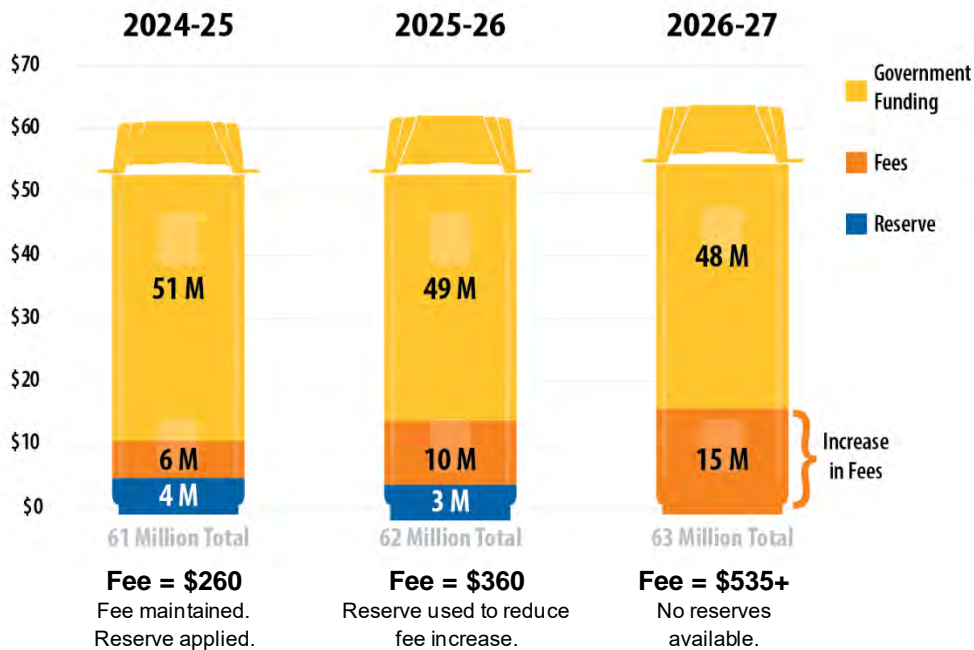
The transportation grant provides \$13M for CLN transportation. Actual costs are \$31M.

**This means 61% of the transportation grant is used to transport 2,500 students.**

School boards are not permitted to charge a fee for CLN transportation.

## Impact of Metro Funding Formula and Fees

In 2024-25, we received \$51M to transport about 26,000 students. In 2025-26, we will receive \$49 million to transport about 30,000 students, a reduction of \$2M. **The metro formula effectively penalizes CBE for high average enrolment. Fees must increase to cover the revenue gap.** A mid-year funding reduction based on actual riders further impacts boards. Service levels have already been established so this in-year reduction creates budget uncertainty for the following year.



## Measures CBE has Implemented to Improve Transportation Efficiency

- Ensured costly supports for students with special needs are based on assessed needs
- Transitioned more students to Calgary Transit
- Aligned bell times to allow buses to run multiple routes within a single block of time
- Increased the number of students per bus run
- Reviewed contracts with service providers
- Implemented congregated (community-based) stops for alternative program riders
- Incorporated low rider routes into existing routes
- Conducted external reviews and audits

## Recommendations to Keep Fees Affordable and Support Sustainable Transportation

- Provide a supplementary grant of \$6.5M starting in the 2026-27 school year to return fees to \$260/year.
- Revise the metro formula to account for rising enrolment and increasing specialized transportation costs.
- Eliminate the in-year funding reduction.



ALBERTA

Education  
and Childcare

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*Office of the Minister  
MLA, Calgary Bow*

AR 130456

August 8, 2025

Ms. Patricia Bolger  
Board Chair  
Calgary Board of Education  
1221 8 Street SW  
Calgary AB T2R 0L4

Dear Ms. Bolger:

I appreciated the opportunity to meet with you on May 14, 2025, to discuss some of the challenges facing the Calgary Board of Education (CBE). I value the collaborative relationship we have with CBE and welcome the opportunity to continue that discussion.

### **Recent Legislative Changes**

I recognize the need for clarity and confidence in the capital planning process following the introduction of the *Education Amendment Act* and the *Real Property Governance Act*. This legislation has no direct impact on Alberta Education and Childcare's existing gated capital planning process for approving school capital projects.

However, this legislation will affect the ownership of new school buildings. Alberta Infrastructure will assume ownership of all new and replacement Kindergarten to Grade 12 school real property and then lease the property to school boards for operation and maintenance. With Alberta Infrastructure handling property issues, school boards will be able to focus resources on education and the communities they serve rather than on property.

I understand CBE's concern about how this policy shift will impact current and future Joint Use Planning Agreements. When a school board determines it no longer needs a parcel of land previously owned by the municipality, the land is transferred to Alberta Infrastructure before being sent or offered back to the municipality. We are not anticipating amendments to Joint Use Planning Agreements or changes to partnerships at this time. If CBE would like to share partnership agreements with the department for our feedback, we are happy to review.

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The *Real Property Governance Act* and the *Education Amendment Act* do not affect the prioritization of school capital projects. Once a project has been approved, we expect the ownership transfer to occur early in the design process, but the typical site readiness process will remain the same. We expect any site readiness issues to be resolved prior to the land being transferred. Schools will still need to complete the initial site selection and evaluation work and submit a Site Evaluation Checklist to the department. This legislation does not affect existing start-up grants for new schools.

### **Transportation**

Thank you for the information you provided on the impact of the changes to distance criteria that come into effect for the 2025/26 school year. I recognize CBE's capacity concerns regarding this change and appreciate the efforts CBE has made to increase capacity to transport the additional students now eligible for transportation service. Since 2022/23, CBE transportation funding has increased by \$11.5 million (28 per cent) to support increased ridership due to enrolment growth and the changes to distance criteria.

I also appreciate the information you provided regarding rising costs for special transportation, and concerns about how the metro transportation funding model accounts for students who are directed to other schools because their designated school is at capacity. Department staff recently met with CBE student transportation administration to gain a better understanding of these challenges. The information provided will be helpful when we review the metro transportation funding model this fall.

### **Capital Planning**

I understand the urgent need for more schools to support CBE's rapid enrolment growth. Through a generational investment of \$8.6 billion, the Schools Now Program (formerly the School Construction Accelerator Program) will create more than 200,000 new and updated student spaces over seven years. We will do this by building up to 90 new schools, updating or replacing existing schools, and expanding our use of modular classrooms.

While we are working quickly to open new schools, we are also enhancing our modular classrooms program so we can meet some of the most urgent needs for student spaces while schools are being built. In March, Alberta's government invested \$50 million through its 2025/26 Modular Classroom Program. To address the immediate need for student spaces, Education and Childcare is investing an additional \$50 million to support in-year modular classroom funding. This funding will provide 62 new modular classrooms and relocate four others to areas of highest need, creating approximately 1,650 new or relocated student spaces in some of Alberta's fastest-growing communities. As part of the in-year approval, the Calgary Board of Education was approved for 13 new modular classrooms. Considerations for their placement are currently being reviewed. The \$50 million in-year investment adds to the earlier \$50 million invested and the \$140 million invested in modular classrooms in 2024.

Through the 2025/26 Modular Classroom Program, CBE received approval for two new modular classrooms for Dr. E.P. Scarlett High School, and six new modular classrooms for John G. Diefenbaker High School. The addition of these eight modular classrooms will provide space to address enrolment pressures at the high school level until the recently approved John G. Diefenbaker replacement school can be built.

I appreciate the information you provided regarding the initiatives CBE has undertaken to generate additional learning spaces by finding efficiencies in the allocation of existing learning spaces, including the consolidation of some programs.

I look forward to future discussions with CBE regarding these topics. Your dedication to ensuring the success of CBE students is appreciated.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Demetrios Nicolaides". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Demetrios Nicolaides ECA PhD  
Minister of Education and Childcare