



Northern Lights

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Working Together to Help Every Student Learn and Excel

September 28, 2023

The Honourable Demetrios Nicolaides
Minister of Education
Members of Executive Council
Executive Branch
228 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Re: Capital Plan

Dear Minister Nicolaides,

On behalf of the Northern Lights Public Schools (NLPS) Board of Trustees, thank you for expressing an interest in Northern Lights Public Schools' capital plan as it relates to Art Smith Aviation Academy (ASAA). NLPS is very fortunate to have a long-standing relationship with 4 Wing Cold Lake and we are honoured to be education providers for the families of Canadian Military members serving in Cold Lake. Art Smith Aviation Academy is a very special school and it offers unique programming to the community, including French Immersion.

Although the staff do a wonderful job making the school feel like home for its students, the building is very tired and we have known for some time that it is nearing end of life. When the current lease was negotiated in 2021, we were informed that the Department of National Defense (DND) had indicated that the end of life for the facility would likely be within the next five to ten years, thus ending our ability to operate at that facility. Currently, ASAA is not listed on our capital plan, although finding a solution is a priority for NLPS. The main reason for its absence on our plan is that the building that houses ASAA does not belong to NLPS; it is a federally owned building, on federally owned land. We do not have the authority to make decisions about what repairs are made or when the building will be decommissioned. This leaves NLPS in the position of knowing we may need to find a new home for 300 or more students within the next few years but not knowing when.

In addition to the age and condition of ASAA as a consideration, the upcoming planned expansion for the future fighter jets will most certainly impact the enrolment at ASAA, with an additional approximate 500 Military members moving to the area. Although it is difficult to estimate how many, we also know that there will be an influx of people hired to do the work on the project that may bring their families to the community as well.

The NLPS Board of Trustees and Administration are participating in ongoing conversations with stakeholders, including 4 Wing Commander Colonel Turenne, MLA Scott Cyr, and personnel from both Alberta Education and Department of National Defense's Infrastructure and Environmental Group. Discussions have been focussed on the need for construction of a replacement school for ASAA due to the state and age of the current facility, and the 4 Wing's future fighter jet expansion. All parties were interested in the possibility of a Provincial and Federal partnership to achieve this goal.

For context, our current number one priority on our Capital Plan is a replacement school for Vera M. Welsh school in Lac la Biche. This has been in our top three since 1995 and we are very pleased to have been approved for design funding in 2023 and hopeful to get a construction announcement for the 2024/25 budget. Our number two priority is a replacement school for North Star Elementary School (NSES) located in Cold Lake due to the fact that it is an aging facility nearing capacity. As our Board begins to prepare our 2024-2027 capital plan, we are aware that should we receive direction that the school facility on 4 Wing will be closed, North Star Elementary will need to absorb the students from ASAA and we must consider a Cold Lake solution that includes both NSES and ASAA. In essence, NSES is number two due to its own concerns, but also as a "back-up" plan in case a partnership between the Provincial and Federal Governments is not an option.

We are hopeful that this background information provides some clarity on our position and ask that all opportunities of collaboration provincially and federally are explored. If we are successful in achieving some sort of partnership, a capacity problem for two schools in Cold Lake could be addressed for a greatly reduced cost to the Province.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or comments. We look forward to the opportunity of a tour with you through Art Smith Aviation Academy.

Sincerely,



Karen Packard
Board Chair NLPS

CC MLA Scott Cyr, Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul
Colonel David Turenne, CD, 4 Wing Cold Lake Commander