



ALBERTA  
EDUCATION

*Office of the Minister  
MLA, Calgary - Bow*

AR 125310

July 30, 2024

Ms. Karen Packard  
Board Chair  
Northern Lights Public Schools  
6005 - 50 Avenue  
Bonnyville AB T9N 2L4

Dear Ms. Packard:

Thank you for your June 17, 2024 letter on behalf of the Northern Lights Public School Board of Trustees. I appreciate you writing to share your concerns about student transportation funding, insurance costs, and access to school bus driver road tests.

In March 2023, the government announced significant changes to the student transportation funding model including increased funding support for rural transportation to reduce ride times and offset rising costs. These changes were in response to recommendations provided by the Student Transportation Task Force that met with stakeholders and parents in 2020 to discuss student transportation challenges and opportunities for improvement.

I recognize that student transportation costs, including school bus insurance rates, have increased significantly over the past few years. For 2023/24, funding increased by \$91 million (32 per cent) to \$421 million per year to support enhancements to the student transportation funding model, distance eligibility criteria changes, and rising costs. For 2024/25, funding has increased to \$492 million to support the continued implementation of the distance eligibility criteria changes and rising costs.

For Northern Lights Public Schools, student transportation funding increased by \$550,000 to \$6.4 million for the 2023/24 school year. Northern Lights will also receive \$311,496 in Fuel Price Contingency Program funding for the current school year.

I understand how rising insurance premiums have impacted smaller contracted bus operators. The funding increases provided over the past two years include additional funding to address these rising costs. Currently, the government has no plans to implement a provincial insurance program for school buses.

Contracted bus operators are encouraged to work with their provincial stakeholder organization, the Alberta School Bus Contractors Association, to establish a group insurance program for members.

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Thank you also for sharing your comments about the current 10,000-person population threshold for urban transportation funding. As recommended by the 2020 task force, an audit team was established to review the student transportation funding model and funding for school boards across the province. In their final report, the audit team did not identify any concerns with this urban population threshold but did recommend increased funding for rural school boards with high student sparsity and declining enrolment. The funding increases announced in March 2023 were in response to these recommendations.

I have consulted with the Honourable Devin Dreeshen, Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors, regarding your concerns about road test scheduling delays in your area. The Government of Alberta recognizes that the shortage of in-house commercial driver examiners has created a backlog in commercial road testing in recent months. To address this, 24 additional driver examiners were contracted and deployed by Transportation and Economic Corridors in April 2024 and they continue to work to create additional capacity for Class 2 road testing in the fall 2024.

Additional Class 2 testing spots will be allocated in Bonnyville, Cold Lake, and Lac La Biche to address the increased demand during the peak summer season. Please email Driver Examinations at [commercialroadtests@gov.ab.ca](mailto:commercialroadtests@gov.ab.ca) with your testing requirements in advance, and every effort will be made to schedule examiners to complete testing as soon as possible.

I appreciate you taking the time to share your school board's concerns.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Demetrios Nicolaidis". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "D" and "N".

Demetrios Nicolaidis ECA PhD  
Minister of Education

cc: Honourable Devin Dreeshen, Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors  
Scott Cyr, MLA for Bonnyville-Cold Lake-St. Paul