

SA Update - Province Demands Support Staff Cuts

Many of you have seen the news or have been contacted by friends or colleagues about the announcement yesterday afternoon by Education Minister, Adriana LaGrange, that the provincial government was adjusting (reducing) funding for K-12 education starting in April for the balance of the current school year. We (and apparently the School Boards) found out at the same time by the same means.

Two weeks ago, the government ordered that schools be closed to students, and Boards were assured they would receive their full funding for the current school year and have been planning accordingly since. Yesterday, they were notified that funding would be reduced. The expectation of the government is that Boards will deal with the reduction by laying off Educational Assistants and other support staff not considered important or crucial to supporting at-home student learning. Of course, with every broken promise around education funding comes another promise from the same folks, no doubt expecting it to be believed. The funding will supposedly be restored if/when students return to school – itself perhaps a pretty good indication that they won't be this school year.

With governments at all levels encouraging and supporting employers to retain staff rather than laying them off during this coronavirus pandemic, our provincial government clearly feels no compulsion to practice what it preaches. Better to put thousands out of work while impugning the value of that work, to require others to decide who those will be and to deflect the cost of any income or social support for those individuals to some other level of government. Leadership by example?!

At this point, we do not know the exact amount of the funding reduction or specifically how the CBE will try to address it, with or absent of our input. If layoffs can happen, we do have extensive provisions in our Collective Agreements covering that process. It may be complicated given the likely numbers involved, but we will do whatever necessary to ensure compliance and that entitlements are upheld. We also know how crucial benefits are to most, and especially at this time, so we will pursue their retention wherever and however necessary.

So, what do you need to do? Right now, no one is laid off. As previously reported, school-based staff, other than Administrative Assistants, can and should stay and work from home. PSS and service unit employees who have been approved to work from home, continue to do so - others report to their usual worksites.

In the previous environment of retaining all employees, we had started discussions with CBE to look at what work and professional development would be necessary and appropriate for staff while students were not in schools and how that might reasonably be assigned/distributed, relative to existing position descriptions. However, since the government now sees no current value in any work or employees not directly providing at-home education, there is no reason for such work to be assigned or expected if it falls outside of your position description. If asked to do otherwise, please let us know.

This is a busy, trying and unpredictable time, and all of us at SA are committed and working tirelessly to help and support you. We expect many developments over the next week and will try to keep you apprised as best we can of the facts. There may be many rumours, assumptions and misinformation around, so please feel free to contact us with any questions that you may have.

Thank you for your understanding and patience as we all navigate through this together. Please continue to check your email or the Staff Association website (www.staffassociation.ca) and the CBE Insite page (www.cbe.ab.ca) for the most up-to-date information.