

December 19, 2024



Honourable Demetrios Nicolaides
Minister of Education
423 Legislature Building
10800-97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB T5K 2B6

Dear Minister Nicolaides,

On behalf of the Board of Trustees for Sturgeon Public School Division, we are writing to echo the concerns and recommendations shared by Wolf Creek Public Schools regarding the provincial data collection and reporting process. We concur with Wolf Creek that the data could be improved to be of more use to school divisions to track successes and continuously improve the quality of education for students.

As Wolf Creek Public Schools has noted, the utility of the data provided through Provincial Achievement Tests (PATs), Diploma exams and parent/staff/student surveys could be greatly enhanced by addressing several challenges in the current processes. For instance:

- **Survey Design:** The inclusion of a "don't know" option in the parent surveys has presented challenges for interpreting results. For example, in the 'Access to Supports and Services' measure, parents who selected 'don't know' often skew results downward. This is particularly evident when a majority of families have not accessed specialized services, making it difficult to discern whether results reflect service quality or lack of need. We support Wolf Creek's suggestion to replace "don't know" with "not applicable" and exclude those responses from the calculation of results.

Similarly, the 'Parental Involvement' measure asks parents about their satisfaction with their level of involvement in school decisions. However, the question assumes a baseline understanding of school decision-making processes, which many parents may not have. This lack of awareness can lead to lower satisfaction ratings that do not necessarily reflect the quality or frequency of engagement opportunities provided. Refining this question to include examples or clarifications could improve the reliability and usefulness of the data.

- **Survey Distribution and Accessibility:** In our Division, we also see low participation rates among parents. Low participation rates are a concern because they do not provide valid data. We support the suggestion to modernize survey distribution by enabling schools to send electronic access codes directly to families, which we believe could improve parent participation.





- **Data Timeliness and Relevance:** The delay in receiving PAT and Diploma data remains a critical issue. For example, in the fall of 2024 school divisions did not receive our PAT and Diploma data from the spring of 2024 until near the end of October 2024. This is challenging then for schools and divisions to plan accordingly for the current year when we receive the data two months after the school year has begun. We also know AERR reports are due to Alberta Education by the end of November, which adds to the challenge. This delay limits our ability to analyze and respond to trends in a timely manner, particularly as we prepare our Annual Education Results Reports (AERR).
- **Data Interpretation:** Like Wolf Creek Public Schools, we have noted challenges in how data trends are presented, including instances where minor fluctuations are marked as "significant." One example from the 2024 results is the 'Student Learning Engagement' measure. While the overall result declined slightly from 83.1% to 81.3%, it was categorized as a significant decline. This presentation can create unnecessary alarm, despite the changes being statistically minor and within normal variation. Clearer thresholds for significance would enhance understanding.

Additional Challenges:

One persistent challenge is the suppression of data due to low participation rates, particularly for demographic groups such as Indigenous families or families of English as an Additional Language (EAL) students. For example, results for Indigenous student outcomes are often unavailable because the sample size is too small. This makes it difficult to track progress on equity initiatives and improve services for underrepresented groups. Improving accessibility to surveys, perhaps through multiple languages or simplified formats, could help mitigate this issue and ensure all voices are represented in the data.

We appreciate the attention and care Wolf Creek Public Schools has brought to this matter and respectfully urge Alberta Education to take steps to address these concerns. A more refined data collection and reporting process would enhance our ability to support continuous improvement for students, staff, and families.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Tasha Oatway-McLay
Board Chair

cc Honourable Dale Nally, MLA, Morinville-St. Albert
Shane Getson, MLA, Lac Ste. Anne-Parkland
Marilyn Dennis, ASBA President
Dennis MacNeil, PSBAA President
School Board Chairs