



January 23, 2025

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

Dear Minister Nicolaides,

On behalf of Sturgeon Public Schools, I write to highlight the funding challenges associated with CASA Classroom programming and seek the Government of Alberta's support for enhanced funding to school boards for the classroom teacher FTE in these targeted, low-enrolment classrooms.

Context

Sturgeon Public Schools' partnership with CASA Mental Health began in 2022. In March 2023, the Division launched the first two CASA Classrooms in the province, while other School Boards postponed their opening because they felt they were not ready. Our Board, however, felt that the need was too great and it was in the best interest of our students to get the CASA Classrooms up and running.

CASA Classrooms are essential for supporting students with mental health challenges, offering specialized programming in small group settings. Sturgeon Public Schools hosts two such classrooms serving children living in the Sturgeon County area: one at Guthrie School with 7 students and one at Sturgeon Composite High School (SCHS) with 6 students, both with a maximum capacity of 12 students. These programs are part of a broader network, including 53-60 classrooms across Alberta, with Sturgeon falling within the "donut" region around Edmonton.

CASA Classrooms address the need for services closer to students by bridging a child's mental health and school needs. In CASA Classrooms, students receive individual and group therapy, psychiatric care, medication and schooling according to their individual needs. This is provided by a team of mental health professionals, a specialized teacher and support staff. Students remain in the program for approximately half the school year, followed by another half-year of transition support.





Key Challenge: Teacher FTE Funding

The School Board hosting the CASA Classroom is responsible for the cost of the classroom teacher while CASA is responsible for the costs of the other staff associated with the classroom. Low enrolment classrooms are expensive to operate. School Boards receive no additional funding from Alberta Education for the full-time teacher required in CASA classrooms. The enrolment-based funding model does not account for these targeted, high-need programs, making the current model unsustainable for school divisions.

- a. Our Board has to cut another \$1.4M from the 25-26 budget (loss of Stabilization Grant). Over the past two years, the Sturgeon Public School Division has been able to use reserves to provide additional support to schools. To do this, the Division has been running a budget deficit. As we move into more fiscally constrained times, this is something we will not be able to continue as our planned reserve levels are being exhausted. A Stabilization Funding Grant of \$5.7M, which replaced the Bridge Funding Grant in 2023-2024 to subsidize an otherwise cut in our grant allocations, is being reduced by 25% (\$1.4M) per year beginning this 2024-2025 school year. This grant will continue to decrease yearly until it ends in 2027-2028.

Proposed Solution

We request targeted funding from Alberta Education to cover the cost of the 2 full-time teacher allocations for the CASA classrooms hosted by Sturgeon Public Schools which serve students in the Sturgeon County area.

Conclusion

Targeted teacher FTE funding will ensure the sustainability of CASA programming and its ability to support students effectively.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss this request further and explore strategies to strengthen CASA programming in Sturgeon Public Schools and across Alberta.

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

