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ATTN: Jeff Johnson, Minister of Education  
424 Legislature Building, 10800 97 Avenue,  
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February 15, 2013

RE: Email Received on February 6, 2013, "Message From the Minister"

Dear Mr. Johnson,

I would like to thank you for your message, but it does raise some concerns for me. I am concerned about how you collected the email addresses of teachers you sent this letter to. Certainly you sent this to my school board email account which is public domain, but your reference to a "list" of email addresses concerns me, and makes me wonder how you came to get my email address. It suggests that you had access to some unknown database of emails and used it without the consent of the owners of those emails. The suggestion that you are taking ownership of this "list" also concerns me. I know I certainly did not provide any email address to your office for the purposes of this communication, and had I actually been invited to do so, I would not have provided you with my work email address.

However, in the spirit of keeping a constructive and collegial relationship with you, I would like to invite you to continue to communicate with me. I would prefer you use my personal email, so as to separate my political discussions from my professional discussions. I am sending this email using that address. It is my expectation that you develop a new database where permission has been given to you to communicate with teachers as citizens through private emails, and that I am included in that new database. It is also my expectation that my privacy is assured, and that no person other than the Minister of Education (or their representative) uses that database, and by extension, my personal email account.

Aside from my concerns of Privacy, I do have some other concerns I wish to raise with you. First, due to the projected losses in Budget 2013, it seems that every department is looking at cuts, including Education. It is my view that any budget cuts were fully preventable, and that many budget cuts could be deemed unnecessary should the revenue and tax structure of the province be adjusted or changed, but that is for discussion with the Finance Minister.

It has been rumored that the Alberta Initiative for School Improvement is one of those significant programs facing the chopping block. I hope that this is indeed just rumor and nothing more. However, if AISI is cut, many of the province's best innovations in teaching will disappear with it. If you truly value the innovations we have brought to classrooms around the province (as you suggested in your email to teachers), you will also value the AISI projects, and continue to fund them. If you cut AISI, you are looking at as many as 350 teachers losing their jobs. These teachers were hired specifically for the AISI projects their divisions are undertaking, and therefore have no classrooms waiting for them should their jobs disappear. AISI funding cuts will also remove Professional Development funding for every other teacher in the province as well. You can almost guarantee that with that many teaching jobs lost, remaining teachers will not be allocated time to innovate and improve their practice, and with their Professional Development funds drying up, those innovations may all but cease. This is not the way to encourage our Education system to remain among the best in the world.

continued ...

Another concern I have is that in your email of December 12, 2013 to board chairs, you seem to be trying to subvert the local bargaining process. Local bargaining participants are the locals of the Alberta Teachers Association and their respective School Boards. The Minister has no role in such negotiations, and to insert yourself into such discussions could easily make it difficult for teachers or School Boards to feel as though you are supportive of that process.

Your suggestion that our province should consider merit-pay for teachers is also troublesome. Being a co-chair of Inspiring Education, where discussions have occurred surrounding incentive pay, you have undoubtedly been exposed to piles of research indicating the ineffective and destructive nature of merit-pay in Education. Mentioning it now inserts questions that have no place in our Education system. It is confusing as to why an Education Minister would do this.

With regards to the prescriptive curriculum, you are absolutely right, it does need to be addressed, but this is old news. Since 2007, your department has been working on updating and improving the Arts Education curriculum. The new curriculum under the original proposal was set to be rolled out this year, and even though your department went back to the drawing board in 2009, it seems as though you are still at that drawing board. It used to be that teachers had significant input into curriculum development, but the reason this curriculum review went back to the drawing board is because they were not involved appropriately in the process. While I agree with your statement that prescriptive curriculum must be reviewed, I would love if that statement were converted into action. The Arts Education curriculum review needs get back underway again in a fully transparent way, so as to avoid having to go back to the drawing board again, and teachers must have significant involvement in the development of the curriculum, as we are the professionals in both Arts Education content and Arts Education pedagogy. In many areas, Arts Education is the reason some of our students come to school. The Arts breathe of life, culture, character, peace and community; all the things in the "unwritten curriculum". We need an Arts Education curriculum that provides the time, space and opportunity to explore these aspects of our society and our students' lives. By extension, we need our Education Ministry to set curriculum and resource development as a priority to ensure that such a curriculum exists.

I can understand your frustration with the fact that tripartite agreements broke down in November of 2012. I am quite frustrated with this too. It seems to me that the ATA proposal was more than reasonable, and considering the pinch you are currently experiencing with a poor projection of Budget 2013, a 0% raise this year and next would look rather favorable (especially when looked at through the lens of our previous contract, which would have teachers receiving an approximately 4% raise this year alone). However, with the concerns I've already mentioned it is understandable how a person can have a difficult time taking you at your word. You explain that you would like to try to reduce low-importance administrative tasks to deal with teacher workload, but it is hard to believe that will actually happen. I hope you can understand that, from my perspective, hard caps on time is a perfectly reasonable trade-off for not having to worry about your budget in a time when you have to consider cuts.

However, none of that matters now, as we are in local bargaining, where you can almost be guaranteed that hard caps will be discussed, and so will raises. As such, your involvement in the bargaining process is not appropriate, no matter how frustrated you are with the past.

I would prefer to work constructively with you. To that end I ask that you remove yourself completely from the local bargaining process, giving the School Boards the autonomy they have earned through the electoral process, and giving teachers the opportunity to focus on classroom conditions, not politics. I also ask that you review any consideration you have given to cutting AISI funding, and really evaluate AISI's long-term benefits. Lastly, I ask that you re-double or re-triple efforts to improving the curriculum of all Arts Education. I would be happy to provide you with input at each of step of these processes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joel Windsor', written in a cursive style.

Joel Windsor