



Office of the Minister

March 24, 2020

Dear Educators,

On behalf of the Government of Alberta, we sincerely thank you for your dedication to your students during this unprecedented time. We know that these are trying circumstances and that you have had to adapt quickly to keep supporting the children and young adults of Alberta.

As the Ministers of Education and Children's Services, we want to draw your attention to a potential issue that could arise during periods of social distancing, self-isolation, and increased stress with respect to your students.

As teachers and administrators you are not only responsible for teaching children but for protecting and caring for your students every day. For the most vulnerable children in our province whose parents sometimes struggle to provide safe, stable homes, schools are a crucial part of their support network. As this pandemic progresses, we are concerned about children facing neglect and abuse, without the typical support systems in place. In fact, the factors that lead to abuse, namely poverty and trauma, may worsen in the coming months. We need to work together to make sure that vulnerable children and their families continue to have the right types of support and that we remain vigilant for any signs that a family is unable to keep their child safe at home.

Parents who may already be struggling will be put under additional stress brought on by financial insecurity and prolonged periods of isolation. Parents who have faced trauma in the past may find it very difficult to cope with these additional pressures.

As teachers who spend a great deal of time with the children in your class, you no doubt already know who these at risk kids and families are.

So we are asking for your help. As you work over the coming weeks to put together your programming for the continuity of learning, we ask that you take special consideration of the children and families in your classes that may need additional supports or more frequent check-ins to ensure they are safe and their needs are being met. You are our eyes and ears for vulnerable kids and families. Please reach out to kids and families that have struggled in the past by either communicating via your online learning platform, or picking up the phone if your content is being delivered offline. Check in with parents to see how they are coping with the new normal we all face. Look closely for signs of potential abuse, neglect, or sexual exploitation. As always, if you have any concerns please immediately contact the [Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-387-5437](tel:1-800-387-5437). If you believe a child is at risk, you must report it. Help is available in multiple languages 24/7.

While abuse may be more difficult to pick up on via videoconference, the phone, or messaging apps, the following link highlights some behaviors that you can be looking for:

<https://www.alberta.ca/what-is-child-abuse-neglect-and-sexual-exploitation.aspx#toc-1>.

Like all ministries, Children's Services is adapting to the new reality of COVID-19 but remains ready and able to assess and investigate the abuse and neglect of children. While offices will not be open to the public, caseworkers are still at work, connecting with families with open Child Intervention files and ensuring that children placed in kinship, foster and group care have the supports that they need.

School authorities across the province have also been adapting their services to best support their students during these unprecedented times. For example, Prairie Rose School Division has used their nutrition funding to create food packages for families who require it, and have been having their bus drivers deliver them to their homes. Funding continues to flow to school authorities. If you have any innovative ideas for how your school authority can adapt their services, such as their nutrition program, to support students, we would encourage you to voice them to your authority's leadership.

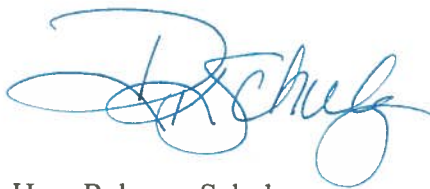
Additionally, the Kids Help Phone, at 1-800-668-6868, is Canada's 24/7 national service offering professional counselling, information and referrals and volunteer-led, text-based support to young people. If you have families struggling with mental health issues please refer them to the Mental Health Help Line at 1-877-303-2642.

The COVID-19 pandemic remains one of the toughest challenges that our province has ever faced but Albertans are resilient and community-minded. We have been overwhelmed by the outpouring of kindness and support, and those called to serve their communities with acts of generosity. We are humbly asking for your help as we look to continue to protect those that need our help most.

Thank you,



Hon. Adriana LaGrange
Minister of Education



Hon. Rebecca Schulz
Minister of Children's Services