

WINNIPEG, MB - Hundreds of teachers, school leaders, and support staff from across Manitoba have signed an open letter to Premier Brian Pallister and Education Minister Kelvin Goertzen calling for immediate provincial funding and consistent policy to support a system in “imminent collapse,” the letter reads.

“We have tried our best over the last two months of school reopening, but the shortcomings in our system due to lack of provincial policy and funding has taken its toll on the health and wellbeing of our educators, school leaders, support staff, and students. This has been amplified in our current surge of cases” a spokesperson for the letter stated, who prefers to remain anonymous out of concern of recourse. “In August, \$85.4 million dollars in federal taxpayer money was provided to Manitoba, yet the province has not made it explicitly clear where and how these funds would be dispersed -- and staff certainly haven’t seen the impact in our classrooms.”

In a recent survey conducted by researchers from The University of Winnipeg, teachers identified experiencing the highest levels of stress since the beginning of the pandemic when closures of schools occurred in the spring of this year. Long-term stress is strongly associated with teacher burnout.

“We have teachers bouncing between two or three locations in a school simultaneously while also managing remote learners, principals starting contact tracing instead of conducting their normal duties, inconsistent policy from the province for physical education and music programming, and more occurrences where divisions have run out of available substitutes to fill teacher absences. This is a system in crisis and our staff are beyond exhaustion -- they are broken” the spokesperson stated.

“In the summer and early fall, staff worried that resources would not be established in our system, and we predicted this exact moment of crisis occurring. We knew a surge in cases would come, and we weren’t given the policy directives and funding to make our schools safe for students and staff. Today, we’re learning that a number of one-time-use masks provided to teachers and staff may be expired, and older than many of the students in our classrooms. We have reached a critical moment, just like our doctors, nurses, and paramedics have as well. We need immediate critical support and leadership from our Province.”

The letter is signed by a collective of educators, school leaders, school support staff, educational assistants, and teacher candidates who are deeply concerned about the sustainability of education in Manitoba as a result of inadequate policy and funding for learning during the COVID-19 global pandemic and the current surge in cases the province is experiencing.