



**MINISTER
OF EDUCATION**

Room 168
Legislative Building
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada
R3C 0V8

**MINISTER
OF FINANCE**

Room 103
Legislative Building
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada
R3C 0V8

All Board Chairs and Superintendents:

Dear Colleagues:

At the request of all School Divisions, we write to confirm government's general COVID-19 driven mandate for collective bargaining with all non-teacher's bargaining units. You will all appreciate that this involves a multiplicity of bargaining units, which have evolved to some 80 in number, collectively, across all School Divisions.

To ensure clarity and transparency, this mandate letter is being concurrently provided to all bargaining agents, as per the attached circulation list. The list is based on information from School Divisions, as compiled by the department of Education. Should there be any incompleteness or inaccuracy, regarding your own Division, please follow-up directly, for openness.

The surrounding context is critical. On behalf of all Manitobans, government continues to address the unprecedented challenges caused by the COVID-19 global pandemic. Given government's responsibilities as the overall steward of public funds, these COVID-19 challenges must shape its focus in setting broad monetary collective bargaining mandates within the public sector.

While this context necessarily requires some difficult choices, our mandate approach is ultimately based on the need for cooperation over the shorter term; as all public sector employers, unions and workers are asked to participate in an all-hands-on-deck approach to addressing the unprecedented demands of the pandemic. All Manitobans are dealing with overarching health concerns and anxieties. And many workers and their families have faced outright job loss, insecurity and significant income disruption. Accordingly, apart from its critical focus on public health, safety and protection, government has also sought to ease economic impacts for these hurting workers and businesses through a wide range of stabilization and support measures.

All of these large scale but essential government expenditures – coupled with falling revenues – mean there will be a very large deficit in 2020/21 (though its full magnitude is not yet known), with ongoing fiscal shocks well beyond this year. Despite all of these extensive pressures, government has largely succeeded in avoiding public sector layoffs wherever possible, while also keeping the tax burden and public ratepayer levels as low as possible for all Manitobans.

Balancing all of these considerations must guide public sector bargaining mandates during COVID-19, particularly over the shorter term. All Manitobans are meeting unprecedented hardships – individually; on behalf of their families, friends and neighbors; and in the broader public interest.

In this extraordinary context, government's collective bargaining mandate is that all parties focus on the four-year renewal cycle – based upon 0% salary and compensation increases for the first two years, a 0.75% increase for the third year, and a 1.0% increase for the fourth year. This “reset” would update the current situation in most cases, while providing everyone with an opportunity to reassess the situation for the next round of bargaining – when there are less unknowns about COVID-19 and the massive budgetary and other pressures it is causing.

This general mandate should assist with the ongoing budgetary processes for School Divisions. It should also enable additional transition planning, as part of the ongoing major reform initiatives recently announced by government. However, we also recognize there may be anomalous situations where the current bargaining cycle is not aligned, or where individual bargaining units already have a collective agreement on parameters similar to this mandate. In those cases, the Education department will continue to facilitate specific mandates as required.

We do appreciate that this general mandate approach may not meet some expectations. But it is consistent with the broader approach being taken across the larger public sector bargaining environment. And it certainly reflects our aim to balance the interests of all public sector workers – who of course share in the benefits of our low taxation and rate levels and other relief policies – with the interests of all Manitobans. Again, we are respectfully asking for cooperation here, as part of the all-hands-on-deck approach being adopted province-wide during these difficult times.

Government continues to acknowledge the joint efforts of many public sector employees and their unions and associations, as they contribute to addressing the interests of all Manitobans. We again extend our appreciation to all of our critical stakeholders, as everyone works to address our shared challenges and responsibilities.

Sincerely,



Honourable Cliff Cullen
Minister of Education



Honourable Scott Fielding
Minister of Finance

c. Bargaining Agents