



Northern Lights

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Working Together to Help Every Student Learn and Excel

May 27, 2025

The Honourable Mandy Gull-Masty, PC, MP
Minister of Indigenous Services
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario,
Canada
K1A 0A6

Subject: Indigenous Services Canada and Jordan's Principle

Dear Minister Gull-Masty,

On behalf of the Northern Lights Public Schools (NLPS) Board of Trustees, please accept my sincere congratulations on your appointment as Minister of Indigenous Services. As a school division in northeastern Alberta with 38% of our student population identifying as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit, we deeply appreciate Indigenous Services Canada's efforts to improve supports and services. We understand the importance of your challenging role, and wish you a successful and productive term.

Recognizing that First Nations children have not always had the same access to services as other Canadian children, NLPS appreciates the intention of Jordan's Principle funding. However, extreme delays and recent changes to the application and approval processes has forced NLPS to discontinue the provision of services and support needed by over 280 of our students.

The shift in the application and approval process outlined in the February 2025 Operational Bulletin seems contradictory to the intention of Jordan's Principle, and has led us to great uncertainty that our application will be approved. Our practice has been defined by the directives we've received from ISC, and from the context of the principle itself - a child-first principle meant to prevent First Nations children from being denied essential public services or experiencing delays.

Crucially, the bulletin now:

- requires that requests show how the requested service meets the child's needs and how they experienced gaps, delays, or denial, and requires supporting documentation *from a professional*.
- explicitly states under the section "For Communities" that **funding should not be spent unless approved first through Jordan's Principle**.
- adds "**Supports to school boards off-reserve and private schools will be redirected to provincial school boards, or other existing provincial and federally-funded programs.**", despite the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal (CHRT) indicating that Jordan's Principle applies equally to all First Nations children, whether resident on or off reserve.

These shifts are significantly out of alignment with the historical context that ties the principle to overcoming the delay of supports and jurisdictional payment disputes.

Historically, NLPS has successfully submitted and been approved for group proposals through participation in a pilot program, allowing First Nations children to access assessments, the support of educational assistants, occupational therapy, speech and physical therapy, and Augmentative and Alternative Communication devices in our schools. We are proud of our close work with Jordan's Principle staff to ensure our applications and rigorous reporting met standards, striving for educational equity for our students.

Our July 2024 application for the 2024-2025 school year has not yet been reviewed. Our practice, supported by the CHRT ruling, has been to provide the services and supports required for equitable education opportunities for First Nations students **before** the application is approved and funding is provided. We continued to support First Nations students under the same criteria and provided ISC with requested information and financial reports into early 2025, anticipating approvals and funding around February, as was the precedent.

By the end of March 2025, NLPS had spent over \$3.6 million of our application total, and without confirmation of federal funding being approved we could no longer sustain the services on our own. The decision to discontinue these essential supports affected over 280 First Nations students. The impact on these students is tremendous, and directly influences their future educational attainment and successes. If the historical pattern of submitting applications over the summer and approvals occurring in February continues, the Operational Bulletin, which states that funding should not be spent

without approval being received, will effectively leave students without critical assistance for the majority of their academic year (September through February), with additional delays as services are re-established.

Respectfully, we request an expedited review and approval of the Northern Lights Public Schools' funding application, allowing us to reinstate the provision of services and supports. We also strongly recommend that the significant shift in the practical application of the principle - that funding should be approved first and for on-reserve children only - is reversed. Jordan River Anderson's legacy, that First Nations children would get the services and supports they need, when they need them, must be honoured.

Yours sincerely,



Karen Packard
Board Chair
Northern Lights Public Schools

cc: Honourable Demetrios Nicolaides, Minister of Education and Childcare
MP Shannon Stubbs, Lakeland
MP Laila Goodridge, Fort McMurray - Cold Lake
Dennis MacNeil, PSBAA President
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