

NEWS RELEASE

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STF Urges Consultation, Transparency on Provincial Distance Learning Crown

LLOYDMINSTER – Samantha Becotte, President of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, is expressing concern that the Government of Saskatchewan is moving too quickly to establish a new Treasury Board Crown Corporation for distance learning. The volume and complexity of policies, potential legislative changes and technological implications that must be considered cannot be accomplished on the government's current aggressive timeline while maintaining vital and meaningful consultation with all education sector partners.

"This is an extremely complex process, and if the goal is to ensure a consistent high-quality education for all students accessing online classes, it needs to be done right the first time," Becotte said. "At this time, government doesn't even have a distance learning policy in place outlining where they are going and where they eventually want to be. Many students from all over Saskatchewan can benefit significantly from a well-run, well-funded and closely monitored online public education system that offers quality instruction from certified Saskatchewan teachers."

The Federation and other partners in the education sector await information on a number of critical issues related to this project. There are still many questions that need to be answered prior to moving forward, including:

- Whether a Crown corporation is the best structure to deliver online public education and whether it is fiscally responsible.

- When the provincial distance education policy will be finalized and if education sector partners will be consulted in its development.
- Required legislative and regulatory changes.
- Details regarding the governance structure of the new Crown.
- What adjustments must be made to structures currently in place for funding, staffing, contracts, roles of principals and capital requirements.
- How connections will be maintained between local teachers and their nearby schools.
- Details regarding the IT capacity required to build, distribute and train users of a new centralized online education platform.
- Potential screening criteria to ensure prospective students have the time-management skills needed to benefit from online course instruction.
- How technological barriers, including computers and reliable internet access, will be removed to provide equitable access to all Saskatchewan students.
- Confirmation that a plan will be developed to address possible negative consequences for students, such as increased screen time, reduced physical activity and mental health.

“It has been over a month since government announced their plan to centralize distance education, and there are still more questions than answers about how this is going to be actualized. We are ready and willing to be a part of this work,” said Becotte.

President Becotte has sent a letter to the Minister of Education raising concerns and asking when the provincial distance education policy will be finalized. This letter also asks for confirmation that all provincial education sector partners will be consulted prior to finalization of this new policy.

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