



YIJIE (JENNIFER) CHEN

**TRUSTEE – WARD 6
THE WINNIPEG SCHOOL DIVISION**

RE: INDEFINITE SCHOOL SUSPENSIONS

Dear CUPE Manitoba,

Thank you for your letter concerning keeping education support staff on the payroll for the rest of the school year. The Winnipeg School Division's Board of Trustees is committed to supporting our staff, parents, students, and the community through this difficult time. As the School Trustee who represents Daniel McIntyre, Centennial, West Alexander, and Weston areas, I am also concerned about the impact of indefinite school suspensions on the vulnerable and underserved populations. I want to thank CUPE for raising this important issue, and for being such a strong advocate for our schools, as well as our community.

Since the suspension of classes on March 23, I have heard feedback from teachers that they need help from Educational Assistants to support home learning by assisting with check ins and offering supplemental supports to students. I have heard concerns from settlement agencies and the newcomer community that many newcomer families don't have access to technology; because of language barriers, newcomer parents often have difficulty supporting their children learning at home; newcomer students also need help with their learning and assignments. Educational Assistants can provide critical supports to these students who may hesitate to ask for assistance.

As an immigrant myself and an activist in ethnocultural communities, I hear and see the challenges that newcomer communities face every day. Our Intercultural Support Workers work extremely hard to help newcomer families settle in and integrate and connect them with services and resources. During COVID 19, our Community Support

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Workers help families get information such as mental health supports and supports with EI applications. I recall CUPE's efforts to defend the jobs of our Intercultural and Community Support Workers. Because of CUPE, the Board at the time voted against cutting these positions. Our families know the value of these workers, especially in these times, and I want to thank CUPE for fighting to save these positions.

To prevent the spread of COVID 19, custodians thoroughly clean schools every day, and bus drivers can play a role in helping deliver course materials to parents – especially those without their own transportation. We need education support staff more than ever.

With indefinite school suspensions, vulnerable and underserved populations will face even more challenges. I am committed to working with CUPE to ensure special efforts are put in place, e.g., students with limited access to technology, child nutrition needs, distance and online learning, students with special needs, and adult learners.

I am committed to working with our administration to ensure layoffs are not on the table for the Winnipeg School Division. I believe none of our staff should be laid off in this challenging time for our students and families.

I want to thank CUPE for your ongoing advocacy for all school support workers. CUPE has been at the forefront of ensuring school support staff's voices are heard at the board level, and your advocacy for staff only makes our education system stronger.

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