

EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

May 10, 2011

TO: Board of Trustees

FROM: E. Schmidt, Superintendent of Schools

SUBJECT: Delegation - Strategic Alliance for the Advancement of Immigrant and Refugee Children and Youth (SAAIRCY) Sub-committee on Refugee Transportation Loans

ORIGINATOR: T. Taylor, Director, Executive and Board Relations

RESOURCE

STAFF: Anne Sherwood

INFORMATION

The Strategic Alliance for the Advancement of Immigrant Refugee Children and Youth (SAAIRCY) has requested an opportunity to appear before the Board of Trustees to request a letter (or other form of support, i.e. resolution) to support their campaign that advocates for the Government of Canada to:

1. Immediately cancel all outstanding refugee transportation and pre-entry medical loan debt.
2. Cease seeking repayment of the refugee transportation and pre-entry medical costs for new Government Assisted and Privately Sponsored refugees coming to Canada.
3. Undertake these actions without reducing the number of refugees who are allowed to resettle in Canada.

The delegation's spokespersons are Ms Roxanne Felix and Mr. Matt Hundert, Representatives of the SAAIRCY Sub-committee on Refugee Transportation Loans.

In accordance with Board Policy JAB.BP - Comments, Delegations and Presentations at Board Meetings by Public and Staff Representatives (Appendix I), arrangements have been made for Ms Felix and Mr. Hundert to make their presentation at the May 10, 2011 board meeting at 7:30 p.m.

SAAIRCY has provided the following four documents as background information:

- A briefing note on what the refugee transportation loan is (Appendix II)
- Frequently Asked Questions about the refugee transportation loan (Appendix III)
- A copy of the letter received from the Edmonton Catholic School Board (Appendix IV)
- A copy of the resolution recently passed by the Alberta Public Health Association (Appendix V)
- A copy of a letter in support of the campaign from Mayor Stephen Mandel to the Honourable Jason Kenney, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (Appendix VI)

A DVD entitled *Hidden Costs: Paying Back the Refugee Transportation Loan* from SAAIRCY was provided to Trustees under separate cover.

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- Appendix I - Board Policy JAB.BP - Comments, Delegations and Presentations at Board Meetings by Public and Staff Representatives
- Appendix II - Briefing Note re Refugee Transportation Loan
- Appendix III - Frequently Asked Questions re Refugee Transportation Loan
- Appendix IV - Copy of Letter Received by SAAIRCY From the Edmonton Catholic School Board
- Appendix V - Copy of Resolution Recently Passed By the Alberta Public Health Association
- Appendix VI - A Copy of a Letter in Support of the Campaign from Mayor Stephen Mandel to the Honourable Jason Kenney, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada

Edmonton Public Schools

Board Policies and Regulations

CODE: JAB.BP	EFFECTIVE DATE: 24-11-2009
TOPIC: Comments, Delegations and Presentations at Board Meetings by Public and Staff Representatives	ISSUE DATE: 25-11-2009
	REVIEW DATE: 11-2014

GENERAL

The Board values the views of all stakeholders on educational issues and seeks to provide opportunities to hear from the public in a variety of ways.

The intent of this policy is to clarify the Board's procedures for its official board meetings with respect to members of the public and staff group representatives providing general comments to the Board on an educational issue or on specific board meeting agenda items and making formal presentations to the Board.

In accordance with the *School Act*, the Board of Trustees as the Corporate Board of Edmonton School District No. 7 holds its official business meetings in public. Board meeting agendas are posted to the District website www.epsb.ca. No person shall be excluded from the meeting except for improper conduct. Attacks on the personal character or performance of any individual or disruptive remarks shall be ruled out of order and persistence in such remarks shall cause the individual to be excluded from the meeting room.

A. GENERAL COMMENTS ON AN EDUCATIONAL ISSUE AT A BOARD MEETING

1. A member of the public or a staff group representative may address the Board on any educational issue.
2. A member of the public or a staff group representative may speak for three minutes at a public Board meeting under the agenda category *Comments from the Public and Staff Group Representatives*. The total duration of the *Comments from the Public and Staff Group Representatives* section of the agenda shall not exceed 20 minutes. Exceptions to the time limits may be made by a majority vote of the Board.
3. Speakers shall address their comments to the Board Chair.
4. The Board Chair will thank the speaker.

B. COMMENTS ON SPECIFIC BOARD AGENDA ITEMS

1. If a member of the public or a staff group representative wishes to give a position to Board on a specific board agenda item, the individual shall register with the Board Secretary by noon the day of the meeting.
2. The Board Chair will, at the time the item is considered, seek concurrence of the Board to hear the individual.
3. Speakers shall confine themselves to three minutes and address their comments to the Board Chair.
4. The total duration of public comment on a specific agenda item shall not exceed 20 minutes per agenda item. Exceptions to the time limits may be made by a majority vote of the Board.
5. The Board Chair will thank the speaker.

C. FORMAL DELEGATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS TO BOARD

1. The Board Secretary shall advise the delegation on the procedures for submitting a brief and/or making a verbal presentation and assist the delegation in making their request.
2. Groups or individuals who wish to appear before the Board to make a presentation to or a request of the Board shall first discuss the request with the Superintendent of Schools or a designate. This provides the presenter an opportunity to clarify his/her understanding of district practices related to the presentation topic and determine what other assistance may be available through the Administration.
3. If after meeting with the Administration, an appearance before the Board is still desired, the delegation must make their request in writing to the Board Secretary at least three weeks in advance of the preferred meeting at which they wish to appear. Notwithstanding the three week notice, the Superintendent may consider a request to waive the timelines if circumstances warrant; for example, if the Board will be making a decision on the matter before the delegation is scheduled to present to Board.
4. The Board reserves the right to determine whether the delegation will be heard, and if so, whether it will be heard by the Board or by a committee of the Board. For matters clearly within the practice and mandate of the Board, the Board Secretary in consultation with the Superintendent of Schools and Board Chair shall make appropriate arrangements for the delegation to be heard.

5. Written briefs or a digest of the information to be presented must be submitted to the Board Secretary at least five days prior to the meeting. The notice and the brief will be provided to each Trustee with the notice of meeting at which the delegation is to appear.
6. The delegation may have 10 minutes in total to make its presentation and may appoint two spokespersons. The Chair will thank the speaker.
7. Decisions regarding requests made by delegations will be dealt with at the next meeting of the Board or appropriate committee unless the Board will be making a decision on the matter as part of another scheduled item of business on the agenda or it is otherwise agreed to by a majority vote of the members present.

Reference(s):

[AB.AR](#) - Appeal Processes
School Act Section 123

 EDMONTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS



End the Burden of Transportation Loans for Refugees!

For humanitarian purposes, Canada sponsors a small number of refugees each year who come from devastated countries where there has been severe loss through war, natural disaster or persecution for the people there.

However, there is a policy that requires that government-sponsored refugees pay for their medical exam and their travel to Canada. Since most refugees can't afford these expenses, Canada offers them a loan that must be repaid with interest. As a result, refugee families start their new life in Canada with a debt of up to \$10, 000.

The burden of the transportation loans is having a painful impact on thousands of refugees and on Canadian society. It undermines refugees' ability to integrate and to contribute to their full potential in their new home. These limitations, coupled with a fear of losing their status in Canada, force refugee families to make decisions that compromise their quality of life and health.

- Teenagers struggle to keep up with their studies while working to contribute towards loan payments
- Refugees postpone upgrading their language and employment skills while working at low-end jobs to meet the monthly loan payments
- Parents working multiple jobs to meet loan payments are hardly at home and cannot give children the support they need
- Refugee families making loan repayments may not have enough money for basic living costs, including food and appropriate housing
- Refugees struggling with the trauma of past persecution, exile, and the stress of adapting to a new country are vulnerable to feelings of acute anxiety over the debt burden

The cost to the federal government of absorbing the medical and transportation expenses would be insignificant in terms of the overall budget. It would also be a good investment as it would enable refugees to integrate much more quickly and contribute to the economy.

I'm sure those who have designed the transportation loan to be paid back had either maybe good intentions or had a purpose for it. But seeing the effect that the flight loan has brought over the people, they should try to stop it and try to plan again.

It's a really big problem for me that I have to pay it back. If there was no loan, I would have more money to buy food or other necessary things. We're happy that the government brought us here and provided opportunities. ... It's not that we don't want to pay it back, it's that we can't pay it back.

Members of refugee communities in Alberta



Take action

Taking action on this issue will help address issues of poverty, educational well-being, health, and gang violence in our communities. Even though many families have the determination and commitment to honour this oppressive loan repayment, we should still take action. What can you do? **Ask the Canadian Government to eliminate the burden on refugees of loans by absorbing the costs of transportation and overseas medical expenses for refugees.**

- **Share this fact sheet** with your networks and commit to taking action as a collective
- **Watch and share the DVD:** "Hidden Costs: Paying back the refugee transportation loan" with your networks or with your MP and MLA. There is no copyright on this 15 minute film. We encourage you to copy and distribute this DVD for the purposes of taking action on this issue.
- **Write a letter** to the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. A model letter is available at the website below. Send a copy of this letter to your local MP and MLA (Don't know who they are? Check the websites below.) A letter to your MP does not require a stamp.
- **Get involved.** Start a local network about this issue in your community.

Further information –

See our Blog - <http://abrefugeetransportationloan.blogspot.com/>

Join the "End the burden of transportation loans to refugees" Facebook group:

<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?v=info&gid=81724972178>

For more information, sample letters, and links to order forms for the DVD please see the Canadian Council for Refugees website <http://ccrweb.ca/transportation-loans>

To view the DVD "Hidden Costs: Paying back the refugee transportation loan" go to:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UDQW6qJYZ74>

Or you can order copies (for free) of the DVD at the following website:

<http://www.ccrweb.ca/documents/publicationsorderform.pdf>

Your MLA - http://www.assembly.ab.ca/lao/mla/mla_help.htm

Your MP -

<http://www2.parl.gc.ca/Parlinfo/Compilations/HouseOfCommons/MemberByPostalCode.aspx?Menu=HOC>

If you would like to be connected to what's going on in Alberta or to contribute your efforts to this issue, please contact Roxanne Felix (roxanne.m.felix@gmail.com) or Matt Hundert (mhhundert@gmail.com).

CANADA'S REFUGEE TRANSPORTATION LOAN POLICY: LIMITING REFUGEE POTENTIAL

What is a refugee?

The 1951 Geneva Convention describes refugees as people outside their country of nationality or habitual residence who have a well-founded fear of persecution because of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion. People fleeing conflict or generalized violence are also considered refugees.

Which top 5 countries participated in the UNHCR resettlement program in 2008?

United States: 56,700; Australia: 6,500;
Canada: 6,140; Sweden: 1,900; Norway: 1,200.

How do receiving countries cover the medical/transportation expenses associated with the resettlement of convention refugees?

Only three countries - Canada, the United States, and Australia - of 26 resettlement countries charge refugees for any part of their medical and transportation costs. Australia charges a maximum of \$4,000 in interest-free loans. Canada is the only country that expects refugees to repay their medical and transportation costs AND charges interest after one year. Under the current policy, a large family can owe well over the \$10,000 maximum if the family includes youth over the age of 18. In 2009, Canada accepted over 12,400 government- and privately-sponsored refugees, all of whom were responsible for repayment of transportation loans.

Has the burden of the transportation loan changed over the years?

The earning power of refugees invited to come to Canada has diminished considerably in the last ten years. In 2001, Canada began selecting refugees on the basis of greatest need. Many of these grew up in refugee camps; they have very little education and few marketable skills – only potential. **The burden of the transportation loan increases the risk that initial poverty will evolve into an ongoing cycle of poverty among immigrant families and communities.**

What are the consequences of not repaying the loan?

- 1) A refugee is not eligible to apply to sponsor family members, including his/her spouse.
- 2) Private collections agencies will pursue repayment aggressively.
- 3) The government will garnish a refugee's wages.
- 4) The refugee will be denied travel documents.

Impact of the Loan on Education

In 2007, 45% of government-assisted refugees were children and youth. Many families expect their youth to earn money to help repay the loan. As a result, youth may not complete high school, severely limiting their job prospects. In 2008, the annual tangible cost to Canadian society of one high school dropout was estimated at over \$15,000 (including private health care, social assistance, crime, tax revenue loss, Employment insurance premium loss, Employment Insurance costs; but excluding public health costs).

Impact of the Loan on Employment Income

Because settlement and economic integration take time, the unemployment rate of recently arrived immigrants (including refugees) is almost twice that of Canadian-born workers (15.0% and 7.8%, respectively, in 2009). Many refugees work for minimum wage and face long-term underemployment. Transportation loan repayments further reduce refugees' incomes and their ability to care for their dependants. This exerts severe psychological and financial stress on the family.

Impact of the Loan on Housing

In 2008, refugees in Edmonton spent 44% of their pre-tax income on shelter costs, far exceeding Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation's 29% affordability threshold. Transportation loan repayments limit the disposable income available for safe housing and for nutritionally adequate food, clothing, and other basic needs.

How much would it cost to eliminate new loans?

\$13-15 million annually.

How much would it cost to forgive current outstanding loans?

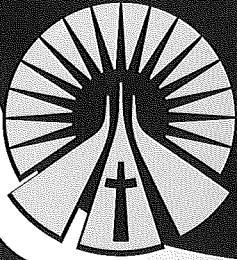
Approximately \$38 million.

What are some of the policy changes we as Canadians can support?

- 1) Eliminate the refugee transportation loans completely.
- 2) Limit the loans to \$5,000 per family unit, regardless of the age of family members, *and* eliminate interest payments.
- 3) Abolish interest payments on the loans and extend the deadlines for repayment.

For more information, see:

Canadian Council for Refugees - <http://www.ccrweb.ca/transportationloans.htm>
UNHCR - <http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home>



EDMONTON CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Growing in the **SPiRiT**

February 7, 2011

SAAIRCY Sub-Committee on Transportation Loans
10310-145 Street NW
Edmonton, AB T5N 2X7

Attention: Roxanne Felix

To Whom It May Concern:

The Board of Trustees of Edmonton Catholic Schools has discussed the request by the Strategic Alliance for the Advancement of Immigrant and Refugee Children and Youth (SAAIRCY) for support of their lobby to have the Canadian government cancel all outstanding refugee transportation and pre-entry medical loan debt, and to have the Canadian government change its policy so that these costs are not charged to new government-assisted refugees coming to Canada.

SAAIRCY will be approaching the Edmonton City Council to pass a resolution asking for changes in the Canadian transportation loan policy in May of 2010. Specifically, we were asked to support the campaign and the proposed resolution.

Since this issue impacts the educational outcomes of refugee youth, our Board was eager to support this initiative. I am pleased, therefore, to advise that at the January 18, 2011, Public Board Meeting, the Board of Trustees of Edmonton Catholic Schools passed the following resolution.

That the Board of Trustees of Edmonton Catholic Schools:

1. supports the Strategic Alliance for the Advancement of Immigrant and Refugee Children and Youth (SAAIRCY) lobby to have the Canadian Government:
 - (a) cancel all outstanding refugee transportation and pre-entry medical loan debt, and
 - (b) change its policy so that these costs are not charged to new government-assisted refugees coming to Canada
2. writes a letter to the Strategic Alliance for the Advancement of Immigrant and Refugee Children and Youth (SAAIRCY) supporting their efforts to have the City of Edmonton Council pass a resolution asking the Canadian government to make these changes

Best wishes as the campaign moves forward.

Sincerely,

Debbie Engel
Board Chair

Copy: Board of Trustees 9
Joan Carr, Superintendent

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Debbie Engel

Ward 1

Becky Kallal

Ward 2

Cindy Olsen

Ward 3

Rudy Arcilla

Ward 4

Marilyn Bergstra

Ward 5

Kara Pelech

Ward 6

Joan Carr

Superintendent

Catholic Education Services
9807-106 Street
Edmonton AB T5K 1C2
T: 780 441-6002
F: 780 423-6739
www.ecsd.net

REDUCING THE BURDEN OF THE TRANSPORTATION LOAN PROGRAM FOR REFUGEES TO ALBERTA

Moved by: Roxanne Felix

Seconded by: Darlene Spelten

WHEREAS for humanitarian reasons, Canada supports the annual resettlement of approximately 12, 000 government assisted and privately sponsored refugees¹, who have come from devastated countries where they have experienced severe loss through war, natural disaster or persecution

WHEREAS Canada, as part of its national humanitarian program for Government Assisted Refugees, is the only country worldwide^{2,3} that issues interest-bearing loans to refugees to cover their pre-entry medical examination and transportation costs to resettle to Canada

WHEREAS children and youth make up approximately 45% of all Government Assisted Refugees⁴

WHEREAS Canada caps the loan for each family at \$10,000 per family, with adult children in these families who are over the age of eighteen years can have additional loans to repay

WHEREAS refugees in Canada face challenges in maintaining safe, affordable housing: refugees spend upwards of 51% of monthly household income on housing in Surrey⁵; in Winnipeg, Calgary and Edmonton, a sample of refugees receiving services through immigrant serving agencies reported spending between 22 and 88% of their pre-tax income on shelter costs⁶; and in Edmonton, refugees have a mean shelter-to-income ratio of 44%⁷, which exceeds the affordability threshold of 29% established by Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

WHEREAS stresses associated with repayment of refugee loans, coupled with a fear of losing their status in Canada, often lead refugee families to make

¹ Presse, Debra & Thomson, Jessie. (2007). "The resettlement challenge: integration of refugees from protracted situations." *Refuge* 24 (2):48-53,

² Canadian Council for Refugees. End the Burden of Transportation Loans, October 2008 at <http://www.ccrweb.ca/documents/loansEN.pdf>

³ Access Alliance: Multicultural Health and Community Services. 2008. Impact of Transportation Loan Repayment Requirement on Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) in Toronto,

⁴ Kappel Ramji Consulting Group. June 30, 2007. A National Approach to Meeting the Needs of GAR Children and Youth within the Resettlement Assistance Program,

⁵ Sherell, Kathy and Immigrant Services Society of BC prepared for the City of Surrey. March 2009. At Home in Surrey? The Housing Experiences of Refugees in Surrey, B.C.

⁶ Enns, R. & Carter, T. (2009). "Refugee housing trajectories in Edmonton, Calgary and Winnipeg." *Our Diverse Cities*, 6, 109-113.

⁷ R. Enns, personal communication, September 22, 2010.

decisions that compromise their quality of life and health, in the areas of education, food security, housing and employment^{8,9}

WHEREAS the burden of the transportation loans undermines refugees' ability to integrate and to achieve their full potential in their new home

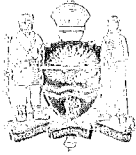
WHEREAS the Surrey City Council, British Columbia and the Union of BC Municipalities have passed resolutions urging the Government of Canada to terminate the Transportation Loan Program for Refugees

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the APHA advocates for the Government of Canada to immediately cancel all outstanding refugee transportation and pre-entry medical loan debt and to cease seeking repayment of the transportation and pre-entry medical costs for new Government Assisted Refugees coming to Canada, without reducing the number of refugees who are allowed to resettle in Canada.

APHA resolution passed on February 1, 2011.

⁸ Access Alliance: Multicultural Health and Community Services. 2008. Impact of Transportation Loan Repayment Requirement on Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) in Toronto.

⁹ Rossiter, Marian, J & Rossiter, Katherine R. 2009. "Diamonds in the Rough: Bridging Gaps in Supports for At-Risk Immigrant and Refugee Youth." *Journal of International Migration and Integration* 10:409-420.



MAYOR STEPHEN MANDEL
CITY OF EDMONTON

Appendix VI

2nd FLOOR, CITY HALL
1 SIR WINSTON CHURCHILL SQUARE
EDMONTON, ALBERTA, CANADA T5J 2R7
PHONE (780) 496-8100
FAX (780) 496-8292
EMAIL stephen.mandel@edmonton.ca

April 7, 2011

The Honourable Jason Kenney, P.C, M.P
Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada
365 Laurier Avenue West
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 1L1

Dear Minister Kenney:

Please accept this letter as a formal request to review Refugee Transportation Loans. Concerns have been brought to my attention by the Strategic Alliance for the Advancement of Immigration and Refugee Children and Youth, (SAAIRCY) specific to the hardship these loan repayments may pose for refugees.

The impact of these loans places an increased risk of homelessness, crime, dependency on food banks, and break down of family units. I urge you to consider the circumstances that these situations place on families and to create repayment options, or special circumstance forgiveness where individual cases may require leniency.

When a refugee family comes to Canada the debt they face can range between \$1,200 and \$15,000; for a family this can be an overwhelming amount. Refugee families making loan payments may not necessarily be able to also properly provide basic needs for their family such as food, shelter and clothing.

The pressure to repay loans impedes in many cases the ability of the people new to Canada to focus on upgrading language and other skills to settle successfully. Teenage refugees, for example, must make their studies a second priority to dedicate their time working to repay loans; this pressure to repay increases drop-out rates. The repayment schedule may force them to take low-end jobs in order to meet loan payments.

Canada is the only country to make refugees pay for their medical examinations and charge interest on transportation loans. I am asking on a humanitarian basis if there are alternative options we can look at for the repayment of loans.

.../2

Some options that have been brought forward to me by SAAIRCY are:

- 1.) Eliminating the refugee transportation loan
- 2.) Limit the loans to \$5,000 per family unit, regardless of the age of family members, *and* eliminating interest rates
- 3.) Abolish interest payments on the loans and extend the deadline for repayment

I feel that the immediate implementation of one or all of these options would greatly improve lives of new Canadian citizens.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my letter. I look forward to your reply.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Stephen Mandel".

Stephen Mandel
Mayor

c.c Edmonton City Council
Mr. Laurie Hawn, P.C, M.P
Mr. Peter Goldring, M.P
Mr. James Rajotte, M.P
Mr. Mike Lake, M.P
Hon. Rona Ambrose, P.C, M.P
Mr. Brent Rathbeger, M.P
Ms. Linda Duncan, M.P
Mr. Tim Uppal, M.P