



Winnipeg Association of Non-Teaching Employees

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February 1, 2021

Dear Sir/Madame,

My name is Carla Paul, and I am the president of the Winnipeg Association of Non-Teaching Employees (WANTE). I represent over 1900 non-teaching support staff in the Winnipeg School Division. I am writing this letter to you to voice our concern regarding prioritizing the Covid-19 vaccination. As a long-time Educational Assistant and the current association president, I am extremely disappointed that the government has not prioritized school support staff on their vaccination priority list. I echo James Bedford's comments, this is a slap in the face to all employees within schools, despite the fact that we are essential, tier one, critical service workers [as per Manitoba Education and Government of Manitoba mandate].

Every day, WANTE members work closely with staff, students, and others within the school community. While all of the Winnipeg School Division schools are doing their best to maintain proper *2m/6ft* social distancing and safety protocols the government has set, this is often challenging and unattainable for those working directly with students, especially those working 1:1, those working with students in kindergarten to grade three, and those working with students with special needs. It is not only teachers working closely with students in the classroom. More often than not, Educational Assistants are in direct, physical contact with students, and play a vital role in the success of many within the classroom.

Regardless of job title or position, all WANTE members are at a greater risk of contracting Covid-19, when working with fellow staff, students, or the community at large, as they have a higher chance of being exposed to others who have or may have been in contact with exposed individuals.

WANTE members work closely with staff and students daily, and as such, they are finding themselves in the situation where they are being instructed by Public Health to self-isolate and remain home, because they are continuously listed as close contacts. This time off in self-isolation is detrimental to students, as WANTE members wait for test results, or remain in periods of quarantine. Although we are sharing our concerns today about the vaccination priority schedule, I would like to take a moment to commend the government on their push for rapid testing for school staff.

School support staff, especially Educational Assistants, are vital to the daily function of schools, performing duties that assist in meeting the needs of students and staff. All WANTE members are being called upon to go above and beyond their regular duties. Even though these individuals are exhausted, they continue to work tirelessly, and do so without hesitation.

As schools continue to report positive Covid-19 cases, WANTE members remain at a high risk of being infected. It is imperative that Educational Assistants and other support staff working directly with students be considered as a priority for the Covid-19 vaccination. All critical and front-line workers deserve to be protected with utmost priority. The vaccination plan that was put forward by the

government discounts this and will continue to put these staff members in danger of contracting Covid-19.

As president of the association, I am calling on you, Minister Cullen, to support and protect our critical service and frontline workers within the schools. WANTE members are counting on you to revisit and amend the vaccination priority list, in order to ensure school support staff are no longer in danger of contracting Covid-19.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carla Paul".

Carla Paul
W.A.N.T.E. President