

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

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December 2, 2025

The Honourable Danielle Smith, Premier of Alberta

The Honourable Demetrios Nicolaides, Minister of Education and Childcare

The Honourable Rick Wilson, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions

Subject: Follow-Up on Earlier Correspondence Regarding Integrated Youth Supports in the Foothills Region

Dear Premier Smith, Minister Nicolaides, and Minister Wilson,

On behalf of the Foothills School Division Board of Trustees, I am writing to follow up on our letters dated **October 16, 2023** and **August 19, 2025**, in which we sought the Government of Alberta's support for establishing an Integrated Youth Services (IYS) Hub in the Foothills Region. These submissions outlined the longstanding, multi-sector collaboration already underway within our region, the demonstrated need for integrated mental health and wellness supports for children and youth, and the readiness of our community to implement a solution that aligns with provincial priorities.

Following the Premier's remarks during the December 1 telephone town hall with teachers, I wish to reaffirm that the Foothills Community Coalition is exceptionally well positioned to be a partner in advancing the very priorities the Government of Alberta articulated last night.

During the town hall, Premier Smith emphasized several key themes:

- A commitment to local, site-based decision making, paired with provincial support when school divisions are overwhelmed.
- A renewed focus on cross-ministerial collaboration—specifically among Education, Children's Services, Health, and Mental Health & Addictions—to ensure children and youth receive the supports they need.
- Recognition that schools have increasingly been expected to be "all things to all kids," a model that is no longer tenable.
- Interest in alternative and innovative approaches for students with extreme complexity, including a "last chance high."
- Investment in CASA Classrooms, intended to expand access to clinical and therapeutic supports.

These themes directly mirror the concerns and opportunities outlined by the Foothills Community Coalition. Our region has built precisely the kind of cross-sector framework the province is now seeking to strengthen. For more than a decade, we have been bringing together local municipalities, school

divisions, health partners, immigrant services, Family Resource Networks, Inclusion Foothills, Alberta Health Services, and more than thirty community organizations to address child and youth wellness in a coordinated manner.

While we appreciate the government's investment in additional CASA Classrooms, experience in Foothills has shown that CASA's narrow and clinical scope does not meet the needs of many of our students—particularly those whose complexity spans mental health, neurodiversity, behaviour, family systems, and social circumstances. These students require integrated and wrap-around supports, not singularly clinical ones.

This gap between what CASA provides and what many rural youth require underscores why an Integrated Youth Services Hub is essential. Our decision to step away from CASA programming was not due to lack of need, but due to misalignment between the service model and the realities facing our young people.

The Premier spoke about the government's intent to bridge the silos between ministries and create a more coordinated provincial response. The Foothills Community Coalition is already functioning in this way.

Through partnerships and our Youth Mental Wellness Summits, our region has built a unified, local mechanism for:

- Early identification and intervention
- Navigation and case management
- Integrated, multi-agency problem-solving
- Coordinated supports for families
- A shared commitment to “every door is the right door”

This is exactly the approach Alberta is seeking to advance.

Selecting the Foothills Region for an IYS Hub would not require creating something new from the ground up; it would allow the province to strengthen an existing, highly functional model that is already achieving what provincial policy now calls for.

The Premier also referenced situations of extreme complexity, noting the need for openness to new models such as a “last chance high.” In our region, we see daily the increasing level of complexity among children and youth. We believe any provincial initiative in this area must be grounded in:

- Integrated wrap-around supports, not isolated interventions
- Prevention and early intervention, not reaction
- Continuity of care across school, health, and family systems
- Local collaboration, which allows for quicker response and more stability for youth

An Integrated Youth Services Hub offers a stronger, earlier, and more sustainable gateway to intervention than any single-program model can provide.

The government's recent *Aggression and Complexity Report* further reinforces what our educators and community partners are already experiencing:

- Rising levels of dysregulation, aggression, and behavioural complexity
- Lack of access to coordinated mental health supports

- Increasing pressure on schools that were never designed to meet clinical or multi-system needs
- A clear call for integrated and cross-ministry action

An IYS Hub in the Foothills would operationalize several of the report's key recommendations in real time and would serve as a powerful demonstration site for how Alberta can respond to complexity in rural regions.

Given this alignment with provincial direction, we respectfully repeat and expand upon our request:

1. That the Foothills Region be selected as an expansion site for an Integrated Youth Services Hub, in partnership with the Foothills Community Coalition.
2. That the Government of Alberta prioritize cross-ministerial support for this initiative, consistent with the Premier's stated focus on shared responsibility for child and youth wellness.
3. That the province support the enhancement of prevention and early-intervention programs in our highest-needs schools, as previously requested.
4. That the Foothills region be considered as a potential pilot site for any future provincial programming serving students with extreme complexity, given our demonstrated infrastructure for integrated care.

Our community partners, school divisions, municipalities, and families are aligned, engaged, and ready. We are uniquely positioned to become a provincial exemplar for integrated service delivery in a rural region. The opportunity now is for the province and the Foothills Community Coalition to move forward together.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to explore next steps.

Sincerely,



Theresa Letendre
Board Chair, Board of Trustees | Ward 3
Foothills School Division

cc:

- Dr. Christopher Fuzessy, Superintendent of Schools, Foothills School Division
- Tanya Thorne, Mayor, Town of Okotoks
- Craig Snodgrass, Mayor, Town of High River
- Rob Siewert, Reeve, Foothills County
- Andrea Keenan, Board Chair, Christ the Redeemer Catholic School Division Board of Trustees