



BOARD OF TRUSTEES BRIEFING TO MLAs

November - December 2024

Briefing Note for:

MLA for Highwood, RJ Sigurdson, Honourable Minister of Agriculture and Irrigation

MLA for Livingstone-Macleod, Chelsae Petrovic

MLA for Banff-Kananaskis, Sara Elmeligi

Purpose

To provide concise, reliable, and accurate information to assist the Honorable Minister and Foothills School Division MLAs in their advocacy for their constituents and for the Foothills School Division.

For Consideration: *Review and Repeal of New Transportation Walk Limits*

Summary

On December 2, 2024, Chair Letendre sent a letter to the Minister of Education requesting a review and repeal of the Transportation Mandate to be implemented September 2025. As this mandate unduly impacts Boards with urban centers, FSD requests the Ministry give consideration to moving away from a 'one-size fits all' mandate. Additionally, if the Minister chooses not to repeal the new walk limits, Foothills School Division requests adequate funding to support implementation such as financing the purchase of new buses at no expense to our school division.

Quick Facts

- In Budget 2023, the Alberta Government announced new walk limits for students from 2.4km to 1km (grades 1 – 6) and from 2.4km to 2km (grades 7-12) for students. Originally set to take effect in the 2024-2025 school year, the Minister announced a delay in implementation until September 2025.
- UPDATE: December 16, 2024 – the Minister of Education shared that the 1 km distance would be extended to 1.6km for September 2025

Financial Implications for FSD:

- The reduced walk limits for September of 2025 will require Foothills School Division to purchase up to 8 school buses to service schools and families in Okotoks and High River.
- The current transportation funding model funds all eligible students (students who live more than 2.4km from their designated school).
- In September 2025 funding will only be provided for those that are less than the 2.4km who ride the bus. This is very difficult to plan and provide service for as the number of eligible riders does not equal the numbers of riders in any given year.
- As a school board that represents both rural and urban populations, the one-size-fits-all transportation funding disproportionately impacts rural students. Our transportation funding shortfall is coming out operational funding – classrooms across the entire division.



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Issue: *Systemwide equity of educational opportunities are negatively impacted by increased 'choice in Education' through publicly funded charter schools.*

Summary

Minister of Education, Demetrios Nicolaides's [Mandate Letter](#) states, "Expanding parent and student options in our public, separate, francophone, charter, independent (private), early childhood and home education systems will ensure parents have a host of tailored options for their children's education that best suit the needs of their individual students." FSD appreciated that the original vision of a limited number of charter schools operating as centres of research and innovation, sharing rather than competing with public schools, played an important role in promoting the growth of specialized and alternative school programs within the public system. As charter school applications continue to rise, 'choice in education' has become a means of restructuring public Education to make it more cost-effective, efficient, and accountable to the demands of parents. Increasingly, the result of this shift is elevated competition between two public school systems – public and charter – for the same resources under different governance models. Foothills School Division's opposition to any new charter school across the province is largely due to the fact that educational programming 'choice' already exists within public school authorities.

Quick Facts

- As a public-school authority, Foothills School Division offers "pathways for all" within our system, offering our students and their families, programming that best suits their learning needs.

Our alternative programs include:

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| → French Immersion | → Career & Technology Foundations (CTF) |
| → Montessori | → Career & Technology Studies (CTS) - such as Aviation, Vertical Farming, Blacksmithing, Sustainable Cattle Ranching, and Cosmetology |
| → The International Baccalaureate (IB) Program | → Nature-Based Learning Program |
| → Junior and Full-Time Kindergarten | → Fine Arts Programs – including Band, Musical Theatre, and Drama |
| → Dual Credit Pathways | → Digital/Online and Outreach Programs |
| → Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) | |
| → Green Certificates | |

Additional Background

Charter schools are:

- publicly financed, autonomously operated schools of choice;



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- not governed by democratically elected trustees, instead, they are governed by a non-elected charter board thus are publicly funded, yet privately managed;
- receive public funding without the requirement of public transparency; but
- are accountable for student achievement, financial reporting, meeting educational goals, and compliance with provincial regulations and policies.

- If sufficient space and resources are unavailable, charter school authorities are not obligated to enroll every student who seeks admission.
 - Charter schools can select students in accordance with a selection process established by the charter board.

- Passed in 2020, Bill 15, the [Choice in Education Act](#) allows an individual seeking to establish a new charter school to circumvent local school boards and apply directly to the Minister of Education, removing a historical requirement of first working with the local school board to establish an alternative program of choice.
- Removing the cap on charter schools and streamlining the application process is resulting in more competition over the same resources – funding, staffing, and students.
- Charter schools have no statistically significant impact on student achievement.

Considerations

[Alberta Education Assurance Measure Results \(Fall 2024\)](#)

[PRIVATIZING PUBLIC CHOICE THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE OF CHARTER SCHOOLS IN ALBERTA](#)

Yours in Education,

Theresa Letendre, Board Chair | Ward 3

Lisa Penzo, Vice Chair | Ward 4

Jack Molyneux | Ward 1

John Evans | Ward 2

Sharon Nichols | Ward 4

Phil Irwin | Ward 5