



BOARD OF TRUSTEES BRIEFING TO MLAs

September - October 2023

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.

Subject/Issue: *Securing construction funding for a new high school in Okotoks.*

Summary

For the past three years, the top priority on Foothills School Division's Capital Plan has been a new 10 – 12 School, (1500 capacity) in Okotoks. Underscoring the urgent need for a new facility are the 'over capacity' enrollment numbers of École Secondaire Foothills Composite High School/Alberta High School of Fine Arts (ÉSFCHA/AHSFA) as well as the sharp rise in residential developments within the Town of Okotoks, spurring population growth to ÉSFCHA/AHSFA's student attendance area.

Quick Facts

- In 2022-2023, enrollment at ÉSFCHA/AHSFA was 1429 students or approximately 130% of its intended capacity.
- School programming opportunities are limited in over-capacity schools.
- Since receiving planning funding in the 2023-2024 budget announcement, FSD is continuing to work with Alberta Infrastructure and the Town of Okotoks to ensure school site readiness.

Considerations

Minister of Education, Demetrios Nicolaidis's [Mandate Letter](#) initiative directing the Minister to "[work] to significantly increase the number of schools in the communities of greatest need".





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Subject/Issue: *Request reconsideration of the mandated new walk limits within large towns and cities and/or commit to appropriately funding the mandated changes without impacting future divisional funding.*

Summary

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 taking effect in the 2024-2025 school year. The new funding formula is difficult for boards who have most of their eligible riders in medium sized municipalities as Foothills School Division does in the Towns of Okotoks and High River where most of our students reside. With the reduced walk limits, FSD will need to purchase at least 16 more school buses to service schools and families in Okotoks and High River, costing approximately \$2.7 Million.

In September 2023 an announcement from the Government of Alberta invited school boards to apply for 'funding' by requesting to borrow the funding for the new, mandated buses, from the division's future funding to be amortized over 10 years. If FSD is a successful applicant, our annual funding for the next ten years will reflect this 'advance', negatively impacting classroom funding and further indebting our division to the province.

Quick Facts

- Foothills School Division receives grants from the provincial government to provide for the transportation of students to and from their designated schools. Grants are only provided for students who are eligible for bussing. These grants only cover a portion of the cost of providing transportation and FSD does not receive third-party funding for students who are ineligible for bussing.
- Foothills School Division's capital reserves currently sit at \$2.5 Million.
- The current Alberta Education funding model for transportation is based on 2013 data - costs for fuel, buses, insurance, and human resources have increased significantly since 2013. Adjustments for these factors have been inadequately funded.
- FSD cannot use capital funding dollars to purchase insurance on capital assets.
- FSD realizes a \$250,000 shortfall in transportation costs every school year and this is drawn from our operational funding, which is best intended for classroom support.



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Subject/Issue: *Secure a mental health integrated hub for the Foothills region in addition to funding to expand Integrated School Support Programs to high-need schools in the area.*

Summary

The Network is a collective community impact initiative located within the Foothills region composed of more than thirty participating organizations including Foothills School Division, Christ the Redeemer Catholic Schools, Calgary Rural Primary Care Network, local municipalities and towns, Foothills County, Family and Community Support Services, Foothills Community Immigrant Services, Inclusion Foothills, Alberta Health Services, and the local Family Resource Networks, among others. The Network and its partners understand that addressing child and youth mental health requires a comprehensive community response involving the collective of community shareholders, inclusive of youth and families.

Quick Facts

- In response to growing concerns for the mental wellness of our children and youth in our community, exacerbated by the recent pandemic years, The Network has held two consecutive Youth Mental Wellness Summits (Summit) in Foothills region.
- In the 'Call-to-Action Leadership Meeting' convened post 2023 Summit, The Network partners and local community leaders were resolute in the commitment to action the shared vision of building an integrated community child and youth mental health hub in the region of the Foothills.
- Key stakeholders are supportive of this project including the Mayors and Councils of Okotoks, Diamond Valley, High River and the Reeve and Council of Foothills County in addition to the Chair and Board of Trustees of both Foothills School Division and Christ the Redeemer Catholic Schools.

Considerations

Mandate letters for the Minister of Mental Health and Addiction, Dan Williams and Minister of Education, Demetrios Nicolaides directing each ministry to collaboratively “construct four new youth mental wellness centres to provide inpatient mental health and addiction treatment to youth while expanding prevention and early intervention mental health support for children and youth that are integrated within schools and communities.”

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

