



BOARD OF TRUSTEES BRIEFING TO MLAs

September - October 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.

Consideration: *Cost saving measure for the (Education) Funding Framework*

Summary

During the Q&A session with the Minister of Education at a Board Chair/Ministry of Education Engagement on September 25, 2024, Foothills School Division brought forth a request for the Minister to reconsider implementing the transportation walk-limits set to come into force, September 2025. In his reply, the Minister shared that all avenues of cost saving are being explored in the review of the current funding model.

By rolling back changes to 'walk limits', significant savings can be realized by the Government of Alberta as dollars intended for educating children will not be spent on transporting them.

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.
- 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.
- With the reduced walk limits announced in September of 2023, Foothills School Division will need to purchase up to 10 school buses to service schools and families in Okotoks and High River, with a minimum cost of approximately \$1.5 million.
- 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.



BOARD OF TRUSTEES BRIEFING TO MLAs

Celebration: *Mental Health in Schools Funding Extension and CASA Classroom*

Summary

Traditionally, grant funding for mental health pilot projects has been tied to the calendar year rather than the school year. This structure creates operational challenges for school divisions who often have to launch a project in January, once funding is received, and then find ways to keep it running until the end of the following school year—despite funding ending in December. Recently, the government of Alberta recognized this misalignment and has committed to [extending the Mental Health in Schools Pilot program](#) – of which Foothills School Division is a participant - ensuring that students are supported through the 2024–2025 academic year.

Quick Facts

- [December 2022](#), Foothills School Division received \$638,000 to pilot student mental health initiatives until December 2024.
- Following the August 13, 2024, announcement, Foothills School Division will receive a total of \$123 000 to extend our Mental Health Pilot Project until June 2025.
- As part of the Alberta Recovery Model, the government of Alberta has partnered with CASA Mental Health to expand services for children and youth. ([Announcement](#))
 - Foothills School Division has been chosen to host a CASA Classroom starting in September 2024. This classroom will provide intensive, school-based mental health support for students across the division in grades 6 to10 who are experiencing mental health challenges that affect their learning and well-being.

Considerations

Minister of Education, Demetrios Nicolaidēs’s [Mandate Letter](#) initiative to continue to expand “... prevention and early intervention mental health support for children and youth that are integrated within schools and communities.”



BOARD OF TRUSTEES BRIEFING TO MLAs

Issue: *Real world implications of the “Enhanced Early Years Assessment Framework”*

Summary

In previous years, Foothills School Division has implemented an assessment schedule built on wisest practice, taking into consideration the diverse learning needs of all our learners.

On July 5, 2024, school authorities across the province were advised that new, mandatory literacy and numeracy screening requirements and timelines would commence with the start of the 2024-2025 school year. At this point in time, there has not been any indication that school authorities will be given the opportunity to provide feedback on the mandated testing.

Quick Facts

- Starting September 2024, mandatory literacy and numeracy screening assessments for Grades 1 to 3 must now be completed in September and January, with an additional assessment in June for those students identified in January as requiring additional supports.
- To administer the mandatory assessments, teachers must allocate 30 – 60 minutes per student
- No additional funding has been provided to support the administration of the assessments leaving schools and school authorities to provide staff release time so that the assessments are completed by the deadlines.

Considerations

Minister of Education, Demetrios Nicolaidis’s [Mandate Letter](#) initiative to work “... collaboratively with parents, teachers, and stakeholders to continue to implement K to12 curriculum”, and direction from the Premier to “... take feedback and identify potential solutions on issues of importance to them, including finding ways our government can reduce burdensome and unnecessary red tape and barriers that are hurting their members’ ability to grow the economy and improve quality of life for the Albertans they serve.”

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