



Fair and Equitable Funding

Unique challenges of Rural Education - To ensure all students receive the same quality education the PRSD Board of Trustees are committed to advocating for a funding model that addresses the unique challenges of rural, sparsely populated divisions. Some of these challenges include **declining enrollment**, increased **transportation costs**, and the high cost of maintaining **aging infrastructure**. It is the opinion of the PRSD Board of Trustees that a "one-size-fits-all" approach does not work for small, rural school divisions.

Limitations of the Weighted Moving Average (WMA) Funding Model - this funding model creates too many funding fluctuations based on enrollment projections, creating program and staff instability. The PRSD Board of Trustees are committed to advocating for a **more stable and predictable** funding model for all rural school divisions.



Operations and Maintenance

Schools Divisions are funded for Operations and Maintenance through two grant calculations: Student Allocation (WMA Enrolment Full Time Equivalency x Applicable Rate); and School Space Allocation (Utilized and under-utilized space). PRSD has had a fairly steady enrolment over the last few years but about **a 25% decrease in enrolment since 1995**. The **average utilization** of our schools is **about 52%** as calculated by Alberta Education, resulting in reduced funding to operate and maintain our school buildings.

With many aging school buildings and an inability to implement any further efficiencies in some communities because of location, the PRSD is facing an urgent need for increased funding for school operations and maintenance. While the PRSD has engaged in innovative solutions for underutilized schools, such as community partnerships and repurposing of facilities, **it remains difficult to complete roofing repairs, replace HVAC systems, or find replacement parts for some of our aging systems** with the existing funding models. It is our opinion that a one-size-fits all funding approach to school infrastructure repairs and maintenance does not work for rural school divisions.



Support for Small Rural Schools

Staffing: In most of our rural small schools it is very difficult or even impossible to find efficiencies with staffing. Even though student enrollment is low, we still require enough staff to provide quality education and adequate programming for our students. Most of our small schools already have classrooms with two or three grade-level configurations. Recruitment of staff to these rural, remote areas also **continues to be challenging without the ability to offer financial relocation incentives**.

Innovative Solutions: Our rural, remote location required that we develop and implement a **virtual education program** to support high-quality education to high school students. This program is not without cost and is integral to providing a first choice education to students living in rural, remote Alberta.



Board of Trustees ADVOCACY PRIORITIES



Student Mental Health Supports

Mental Health Services for Students - Without reliable and secure government funding, the PRSD is unable to continue the **Mental Health in Schools Pilot Project** beyond the 2024-2025 school year. **This program** improved our ability to provide universal and targeted mental health supports to all of our schools, which **has resulted in a decrease in the number of students who require a tier three level of support**. With a chronic lack of access to mental health services, such as psychiatry and counseling, in rural areas these mental health supports at the school-level are critical to the well-being of our students and staff.



Inclusive Schools

Students with Complex Needs: During the 2023-2024 school year, the PRSD provided 1 in 7 students with specialized supports as part of their educational programming. In some of our schools, that ratio can be as high as 1 in 4 students were provided with specialized supports. Our commitment to inclusive education means every student enrolled at PRSD has the same opportunity to learn and succeed. However, our rural location means we have limited access to specialists such as occupational therapists, speech pathologists, and physical therapists. These professionals are critical to meeting the needs of our students.

The PRSD believes that **all students should have equal access to their community schools** and be able to learn alongside their peers. At the PRSD, we support and will continue to advocate for the student supports that are necessary to providing an inclusive school environment.



Transportation and Safety

Funding - The funding calculation for school bus transportation is complex and includes many factors. PRSD implemented the new walk distance in the 2023-2024 school year (1.0km for students in K-6 and 2.0km for Grades 7-12). This resulted in more students being transported within some of the larger towns. **Increasing the number of students** being transported on PRSD buses **increased our density calculations resulting in significantly less transportation funding** than the previous year. Alberta Education has now proposed another change in the walk distance for the 2025-2026 school year to increase the walk distance to 1.6 km for K-6, while maintaining the 2.0 km walk distance for Grades 7-12. We are not sure how this will impact our funding at this time.

Rising Costs - The cost of a 73-passenger bus is now \$180,000+, which represents an increase of about 60% from 2020. **These rising costs have impacted our ability to maintain our fleet** using our previous replacement schedule.

Province-wide Safety Campaign - Despite the threat of tickets and demerits, there remains many motorists who continue to drive in an unsafe manner around school buses. There is a need for a province-wide education campaign to raise awareness around important school bus safety rules.