

Board of Trustees ADVOCACY PRIORITIES



Fair and Equitable Funding

Currently, Alberta's UCP Government provides the **highest level of funding for independent education** options across Canada. **This is not advantageous for families**, particularly in our sparsely populated rural communities. To ensure all students receive the same quality education across the province, the PRSD Board of Trustees are committed to advocating for a funding model that addresses the unique challenges of rural, sparsely populated divisions like our own. Some of these challenges include declining enrollment, increased transportation costs, and the high cost of maintaining aging and underutilized infrastructure.

Limitations of the Adjusted Enrolment Method (AEM) Funding Model - this funding model causes too many funding fluctuations based on enrollment projections, leading to 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

School Divisions are funded for Operations and Maintenance through three grant calculations: Student Allocation (AEM Full Time Equivalency Enrolment x Applicable Rate); School Space Allocation (Utilized and under-utilized space); and the Supplemental Rural O&M Allocation. However, **the average utilization of our school buildings is about 58.5%** 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 our location, the PRSD continues to face an urgent need for increased funding for school operations and maintenance. Budget allocations have required the Division to make **strategic decisions**, resulting in a **71% reduction in our Facilities Staffing levels** over the last ten years. This has translated into a greater inability to complete important maintenance projects using our own resources.

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.



Transportation and Safety

Funding: The funding calculation for school bus transportation is complex and includes many factors. When the Government made adjustments to the walk distance, this not only increased our service requirements but also eroded sparsity funding for rural divisions. We have lived experience on how the current funding framework unintentionally penalizes rural boards with large geographic areas. The Board of Trustees are **advocating for a funding system where students who reside within urban settings do not dilute rural sparsity measures**, or for a system where rural distances are weighted more heavily to reflect true operating realities.

Rising Costs: The cost to purchase **new buses** is now approximately **67% greater than it was in 2021**. These rising costs have impacted our ability to maintain our fleet using our existing evergreen program, which sees the replacement of buses as they reach 10 years of age, taking into account the overall condition of the bus.

School Bus Safety: Despite the threat of tickets and demerits, there remain many motorists who continue to drive in an unsafe manner around school buses. **In June of 2025, one of our school buses was hit by another vehicle**. While the collision caused significant damage to the bus, thankfully, no individual was seriously injured in the accident. However, a number of small changes could have resulted in a much more tragic outcome. Our Board maintains that **there is a need for continued awareness campaigns** around important school bus safety rules.

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Student Mental Health Supports

Mental Health Services for Students: Ahead of the 2025-2026 school year, the PRSD made some significant operational decisions to keep staff previously employed under the Mental Health in Schools pilot program in our school buildings and available to our students. **Providing universal mental health support to our students is a priority for the PRSD.** However, **this decision comes at a cost.** We have had to reduce the number of social workers we are able to employ by one, and our remaining staff are on a one-year contract. As a result the PRSD is once again finding ourselves in a very uncomfortable position when it comes to being able to appropriately support the mental health of our students.

In place of the Mental Health in Schools pilot program, the PRSD did receive about \$157,000 in grant funding to support schools outside of Grimshaw and Peace River. **Simply put, this amount is inadequate to support the needs of eight rural schools.**



Inclusive Schools

Students with Complex Needs: During the 2024-2025 school year, the PRSD provided 1 in 7 students with specialized support as part of their educational programming. **In some of our schools, that ratio can be as high as 1 in 4 students who were provided with specialized support.** 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**, and sometimes no access at all, **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 provide an inclusive school environment.



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 enrolment 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 meaningful financial relocation incentives.

Innovative Solutions: Our rural, remote location required that we develop and implement our **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.