

Chinook's Edge joins other divisions to advocate against funding cuts for vulnerable students with special needs

For Immediate Release, April 12, 2017: School Divisions in the central region are faced with service cuts to the region's most vulnerable students, due to nearly \$1 million in budget reductions to Central Alberta's Regional Collaborative Service Delivery (RCSD).

"RCSD provides funding for specialized services to about 51,000 students in Central Alberta," said Kurt Sacher, Superintendent of Schools. "This funding supports students with special needs where gaps in the existing base funding have been identified. A number of these students have highly complex and severe needs, and the support these vulnerable children receive from RCSD is a key link for them to meet with success at school, at home and in the community. The number of students our school division serves and the severity of their needs is increasing beyond the resources available, even before the current budget reductions. This is a major concern to us."

The RCSD partnership began in 2013, through a provincial government mandate to provide cross-ministry services for a broad spectrum of students, many with severe and complex needs. This involves Alberta Education, Alberta Health Services, Community and Social Services, and Children's Services. It works effectively to provide enhanced, integrated, comprehensive service to schools in a manner that is not available in any other form.

The Central Alberta RCSD region has struggled with a confusing history of funding since its inception, which puts students and families in this area at a distinct disadvantage. Three years ago, following an intensive appeal throughout the region and beyond, the provincial government provided an additional \$1.3 million in what it considered to be transitional funding. This, known as 'hold harmless' funding, was provided once the government came to realize the allocation model is faulty in responding to the needs in this region. It continues to be faulty and now represents a reduction of 16.6%.

"This cut in funding will create strife for the students we serve, untold hardship on families, and a diminished expectation of success for these young people," said Superintendent Sacher. "Our belief is that the long-term negative impact of these program cuts will reach ministries far beyond the few that are currently involved. Alternatively, there are lifetimes of individual, family, school and community successes that arise when children's needs can be addressed at an early age. We are appealing to the provincial government to ensure this Central Alberta RCSD funding shortfall is addressed quickly, so we can continue assisting the broad spectrum of students with special needs who rely on this funding. These fragile young people are counting on our provincial leaders to not abandon them."

Chinook's Edge and the other school divisions in the Central Alberta zone have requested an opportunity to meet with the provincial government, so everyone can work together to create a funding solution that allows the vital specialized services for these children to continue.

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