

Important Transportation Fee Update

We are writing to inform you that at the January 15, 2020 Board of Trustees meeting, a motion was passed to increase the fees for all students who use the Chinook's Edge bus service, including a new fee for rural students riding the bus.

The Board respects the fiscal realities of our families and are delaying the implementation of these fees until the start of the 2020-2021 school year. We are informing all staff and all parents because, while the fees will only apply to those students riding the bus, budgeting decisions affect all of our students and their families.

For the 2020-21 school year, we are anticipating approximately \$6 million in grants from the government to support our transportation system which will require \$7.2 million to continue effectively. To reduce the impact on the classroom, this \$1.2 million shortfall will be covered by user fees.

- Chinook's Edge does not receive sufficient grant funding to pay for the typical rural student, where the number of riders on our buses is under the break-even point. For the grant to cover the transportation costs, we would have to increase ride times and this would saddle students with unreasonable ride times. Students who live more than 2.4 km from their designated school (partially funded students) will be asked to pay \$200 a year (although we cannot offer a monthly payment plan, this would amount to the equivalent of \$20 a month). These students are 'partially funded' because we need at least 46 students on a bus to avoid subsidizing the costs incurred.
- Students who live closer than 2.4 km to their designated school (unfunded students) and those attending schools of choice will have fees increased to \$500 a year (although we cannot offer a monthly payment plan, this would amount to the equivalent of \$50 a month). As well, students requiring seats on multiple buses will pay the appropriate fee for each seat (this does not affect normal bus route transfers).

Chinook's Edge has been dealing with a transportation deficit for several years, but changes in provincial funding has created a greater challenge this year. We examined many options to make up the shortfall before we moved to cost-recovery fees. However, these strategies were rejected after reviewing the negative impact on students. Some of these considerations included:

- Taking \$1.2 million from instruction and reducing a significant number of teachers and/or educational assistants across the school division.
- Filling buses to capacity and increasing ride times, even though some of our youngest students already ride for over an hour each way.
- Not replacing aging buses which creates safety and maintenance cost issues in the future.

While we face an immediate deficit in our Transportation budget, we are implementing these cost-recovery fees in a manner which we hope will aide families in this transition:

- Waiting until the start of the 2020-2021 school year to implement the fee changes.
- Providing a payment installment option so that families do not have to pay the entire bus fee upfront. One payment can be made in full or two installments can be made – 50% any time prior to the first day of school (September 1, 2020) and the balance by February 1st.
- Reducing the fees by 50% for the third and subsequent children in a given family.
- Keeping the fees to a cost-recovery focus to make up the difference between grants received and actual transportation costs.

We have compiled [detailed information](#) on our website which includes frequently asked questions, podcasts from the Superintendent and a question portal to submit any additional questions that you may have. We are also available to answer questions or concerns directly:

- Shawn Russell, Associate Superintendent Corporate Services (403) 227-7070
- Kurt Sacher, Superintendent (403) 227-7070
- Board of Trustees <https://www.cesd73.ca/Contact%20your%20Trustee.php>

On behalf of the entire Board of Trustees, thank you for your support and understanding as we move forward. We are confident this decision will successfully achieve our goal to eliminate the deficit in our Transportation budget.

Kurt Sacher
Superintendent of Schools
Chinook's Edge School Division No. 73
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