

## Board of Trustees approve mental health supports for schools

**For Immediate Release, January 12, 2022:** The Board has approved a three-year project that would allow six Social Emotional Specialists to be hired through the use of reserves.

The motion was passed following a detailed presentation from Dr. Marcie Perdue, Associate Superintendent of Student Services, regarding the increasing challenges staff are facing as they try to address the range and intensity of mental health issues that are present in schools. Dr. Perdue outlined strategies to address this growing mental health challenge, which is impacting teachers, administrators, school staff and classrooms. The six Social Emotional Specialists will become part of the Student Services Department.

“Students are arriving at school facing a growing complexity of mental and social emotional hurdles that need to be addressed before they can achieve success in learning,” said Dr. Perdue.

“COVID-caused learning disruptions, isolation, a deepening impact of social media, adapting to the changing nature of family life – these are just a few of the elements that are creating stress for students and families. However, there is a percentage of students who are exhibiting more complex mental health challenges, who require specialized expertise and sometimes individual therapy to meet their needs. We don't want to be alarmist, but our schools are facing the reality that entire classrooms are being detrimentally affected by this at times. Chinook's Edge staff are striving to help this percentage of students in their time of need, while still moving learning forward for all students. It has become an almost impossible task to accomplish both at present, without the additional mental health supports the project will provide. I am incredibly grateful that our Board clearly saw the growing challenge facing our schools.”

The Board of Trustees unanimously supported the initiative. They made a subsequent motion directing the Board Chair to write a letter to the provincial government, inviting them to share responsibility for establishing these key staff roles which have become essential in schools. The division's investment for the project is approximately \$1.2 million over three years.

“Our Board fully supported an initiative of this magnitude because we truly believe it is what's best for Chinook's Edge students, families, staff and communities,” said Board Chair Holly Bilton. “We are also advocating to various levels of government for their involvement and support going forward, because this is an issue that is increasingly impacting Albertans as a whole. The mental health of our kids is paramount.”

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