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Good afternoon everyone,

We are aware that there are various pieces of misinformation as well as questions circulating regarding funding and expenditures by Canadian Rockies Public Schools. In the interests of transparency and to provide clarity, we are sending this communication to explain the details of the challenges we are facing for the 2020-21 school year.

CRPS is experiencing multiple challenges simultaneously. These challenges include, but are not limited to, the following factors:

1. **Declining Enrolment:** We appreciate that our new budget from Alberta Education has finally been adjusted to support smaller rural school divisions. The formula is based on a three-year weighted system. The present budget is built on the student numbers we had during the 2019-20 school year. If the same number of students do not materialize during this school year (2020-21) then our budget for the next school year (2021-22) will be clawed back to reflect this lower enrollment.

Staffing to reflect our declining enrolment must be done now. If we do not adjust immediately, we will not have sufficient funds to put appropriate staffing in place for the following school year.

Presently, we have 48 students less than what had been projected, which translates to approximately \$480,000 before factoring in COVID-19 impacts and associated costs. I want to note that this decline is caused by outward migration from the Valley, likely as a result of the decline of employment opportunities.

2. **Declining International Students:** For the past 5 years, funds raised through the International Student Program and Canadian Rockies Outdoor Learning Center programming have supplemented the budget received from the Alberta government by approximately 1 million dollars per year. With the advent of COVID-19 these additional funds have virtually disappeared.

To provide a concrete example of this impact, let us consider the International Student Program. The division normally hosts 50 international students, each of whom pay in the vicinity of \$15,700 tuition per year. For the 2020-21 school year, we have 1 student who stayed this summer and therefore was able to continue on with us for the 2020-21 school year. As a result, rather than having \$785,000 in additional revenue we are looking at revenue of only \$15,700.

3. **Outdoor Learning Center Programming:** OLC programming will not only be diminished during the current school year, but it was significantly impacted in the last school year due to the closing of schools in March and the inability to run the summer CALM program onsite, as was

done in previous years. This projected income of approximately \$250,000 was budgeted for in the 2019-20 school year, but was not forthcoming due to the impact of the pandemic. This decrease in programming from the OLC, and in turn revenue, continues on in the 2020-21 school year. This money, which was always used to supplement and keep staffing allocations at present levels, is now gone.

4. At-Home Learning: For the beginning of the 2020-21 school year, we have 300 students whose families have selected teacher-led, at-home learning as the most suitable form of instruction to meet their family's needs at this point in time. This large number of students requires a significant complement of staff to support their learning. The average teacher cost for the division is \$102,000 per teacher. The total staffing to support this cohort of students is close to 1 million dollars. This is a major expenditure that could not be accounted for in budget planning because we had no way to determine the number of students who would be accessing this type of instruction. To help address this added expense, we have combined some classes that had lower than expected in-person enrollment. However, additional teaching staff were still hired in order to support the needs of the at-home learning students as well as the in-person learning students. It should be noted that extensive costs for technology to deliver teacher-led, at-home learning has not been calculated at this juncture.

5. Substitute Costs: Another major impact on the budget for the current school year will be the cost of substitute staff. Teachers, educational assistants, administrative assistants, administrators, bus drivers, custodians... all play a vital role in our schools. When they are unable to work, they need to be replaced. With the current health directives surrounding COVID-19, any staff member who develops COVID-like symptoms will have to isolate for ten days or until the symptoms have disappeared, whichever is longer.

To illustrate, when a teacher develops COVID-like symptoms and must adhere to the 10-day mandated self-isolation period, a substitute teacher will be required. A substitute teacher will cost the district, on average, \$215 per day for the first five days. For the remaining five days or more the substitute teacher is paid full salary, as is required by the Collective Agreement. This cost is approximately \$400 to \$500 per day. This means that the district will be paying two staff members to do a job everytime someone develops any of these symptoms. We are projecting that our normal substitute staffing costs will potentially quadruple for the 2020/2021 school year, resulting in extra expenditures in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

6. Personal Protective Equipment and Cleaning: In order to keep our students and staff safe, we need to supply proper PPE and staff necessary to ensure we are adhering to COVID-19 cleaning protocols. Prior to the provincial government announcing that they were going to supply PPE to schools, our division had already invested close to \$150,000 to purchase PPE and sanitation products, including special electrostatic sprayers to sanitize each bus after every run. An extra \$30-\$60,000 in custodial staff and time have been added to ensure that our schools are the safest places possible for our students. We expect these cost overruns to continue throughout the year. In addition, the aforementioned expenses are by no means an exhaustive list.

We have a very experienced staff, but this situation is changing daily and is new for us all. We are working tirelessly to ensure that we can keep our students safe and offer parents choice in

how their child receives their education during this unprecedented time. To use an old adage, hindsight is 20/20. We may make mistakes, but we appreciate and need your support and understanding. Difficult choices have to be made and every decision made will be done in the best interest of the students we serve.

As you can see from the parameters outlined above, we have extensive funding losses along with major expenditures that could not be anticipated and were, subsequently, unaccounted for. In a recent announcement the federal government gave Alberta Education \$262 million dollars and from this, CRPS received \$640,000. At an initial glance, \$640,000 seems like a lot of money. However, it does not come close to covering the revenue losses and the expenses that we have incurred and will continue to incur as we respond to the impact of this pandemic. This amount and much more is required to support the needs within the entire division. The Minister also gave school divisions permission to spend reserves. These funds have already been utilized to support the shortfalls mentioned above, but again it is feared this may not be sufficient to meet the needs we will encounter.

The purpose of this communication is to be as transparent as possible and to provide you with factual information to assist you in understanding the challenges we are *all* facing - parents, students, staff and the community. We are moving forward on a path that supports the learning of *all* students and mitigates the risk of financial peril for the school division in the future.

Sincerely,



Christopher MacPhee
Superintendent of Schools