

Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

School District Discriminates Against Child with Disabilities

The Alberta Association for Community Living (AACL) is appalled to find that Elk Island Public Schools is discriminating against Hannah Gunderson, a young girl with disabilities, by forcing her to be segregated from her friends, against the wishes of her parents and her school community, when she travels to school. In effect Elk Island School District is punishing a child with disabilities and separating her from her friends because she is unable to walk.

At a time when Alberta Education has just completed a review of special education that calls for every student with special needs to belong and be included, Elk Island is instituting regressive practices that deny Hannah the right to be included. As a student with disabilities who cannot easily defend herself Hannah needs her friends to ensure her safety and protection. The research evidence is unequivocal in that segregation increases the risk of abuse and violence against children with disabilities. Elk Island Public Schools is increasing Hannah's risk of harm by forcing her to be involuntarily segregated from her friends and classmates.

Until this forthcoming school year Hannah was included on the same bus as her friends, traveling to school together and sharing in all the experiences of her peers as she grows up with them. This coming school year, without consultation with her parents, the Elk Island District unilaterally altered Hannah's busing to her detriment. The School District and its Trustees have refused to reconsider this decision ruining a young child's summer and that of her family as they anxiously consider a future where Hannah is deprived of the ordinary relationships most other families take for granted.

Wendy McDonald, AACL President and a parent of a student with disabilities who is fully included, stated, "As a parent of a child with disabilities I know how hurtful this must be to Hannah and her family. As an Association representing many thousands of families with children with disabilities I call upon the Elk Island School District to demonstrate its capacity to listen, change and respond to the cries of a young child with disabilities."

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