

# School's out but multi-million dollar renos are in for Red Deer Catholic schools

Some students at the aging St. Patrick's Community School in Red Deer sat in classrooms with no windows. Others had to walk through one classroom to get to another. But that's about to change.

Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools has begun a \$15-million renovation of the aging St. Patrick's School, with the net addition of six classrooms over the next 18 months. Built in 1980, school officials say it's showing its age and, with 600 students, it's at full capacity. The renovation will create badly needed space for an additional 150 students, to accommodate an anticipated increase in students this fall.

Millions of dollars of construction, renovation and improvements are also underway at several other Red Deer region Catholic schools. The district also plans to spend \$1 million on smaller school renovation projects and an additional \$1 million will be spent on 11 new modular classrooms for Holy Trinity School in Olds, St. Matthew's in Rocky Mountain House, Our Lady of the Rosary in Sylvan Lake, and Father Henri Voisin School in Red Deer.

"We appreciate the support. The renovation money is enough but with more we could had more, such as renovating the office and administrative suites," said Anne Marie Watson, the chair of Red Deer Catholic Regional School's Board of Trustees. "But those don't affect the students."

Now that students are on a summer break, the renovation of St. Patrick's Community School, in particular, is under a tight timeline of four-and-a-half weeks, school officials say. It's the only school that provides classes year-round, and students will be back in class on Aug. 13.

Watson said the school district had been advocating for a renovation of St. Patrick's School for years.

"St. Patrick's is kind of near and dear to all of us. It's a school that was old and carved up, so some classrooms had no windows, and you had to go through one classroom to get to another."

Watson said there may be some project savings from the St. Patrick's renovation, which will be based on an Integrated Project Delivery model in which all the contractors are on hand at the beginning.

Enrolment in Red Deer Regional Catholic Schools has grown by about five per cent annually for the last eight or nine years, and the demand for classroom seats is expected to increase again in the fall, district officials say.

“There are two things happening here: The communities we serve are seeing growth; and more parents are choosing Catholic schools to educate their children,” said Ken Jaeger, superintendent of support services at Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools which educates just over 10,000 students.

“They like our values and Christ-centred education.”

Watson also noted that enrolment is up in part due to increased immigration from Catholic countries.

The school district plans to hire more teachers to accommodate the increased enrolment, but Jaeger said those plans won't be finalized until September.