

Good News Items

- Trustee Debra Lozinski commended J.A. Williams students and staff on their recent production of *Peter Pan Jr.* The cast and crew put on nine performances over three days at Portage College.
- Trustees remarked on the high community engagement and quality of performances at Christmas concerts that have taken place at Northern Lights schools so far this year.
- Trustee Maurice Richard congratulated Vera M. Welsh Elementary School on a successful partnership with the Lord of Glory Lutheran Church. The church collects donations and then offers all students the opportunity to “shop” for gifts for family members during “Christmas in November.”
- Trustee Richard also congratulated J.A. Williams High School teacher Andrew Przybylski on being selected to receive the Alberta Schools’ Athletic Association Zone Award of Merit. It will be presented at the school’s upcoming pancake breakfast.
- Vice-Chair Arlene Hrynyk highlighted Alberta’s results on the 2015 Programme for International Student Assessment done by OECD. Alberta students performed higher than average in Science, Math and Reading compared to all countries involved; higher than average in Science and Reading compared to Canada as a whole; and higher than average compared to Finland, whose education system is considered one of the best in the world.

Mindfulness Presentation

Six students from North Star Elementary demonstrated mindfulness exercises for the Board and shared their thoughts on the difference that learning about mindfulness and breathing and relaxation techniques has had on them and their classmates.

Principal Maureen Miller explained that the entire school starts each day with a mindful moment that sets the tone for that day. In addition, students in grades 1-3 spend time working on mindfulness strategies with Carol Hendricken, the school’s Wellness Coach and Apple Schools Co-ordinator, in the school’s new wellness room, and the school’s teachers have also incorporated mindfulness into activities in their classrooms.

Since the focus on mindfulness started last year, there has been a marked difference in the atmosphere at the school, and staff, students and parents are all reporting differences in student behaviour.

Board Chair Mandi Skogen thanked the school for focusing on an initiative that benefits students’ mental health and aligns with the health and wellness goal in the Division’s Three-Year Education plan.

Class Size Report

Superintendent Rick Cusson provided the Board with the 2016-2017 class size report which is submitted to Alberta Education. The report shows the average class sizes in as well as all subjects.

Northern Lights’ goal is to align with the class size recommendations made by the Alberta Commission on Learning. Those recommendations are 17 students in Kindergarten to Grade 3 classes; 23 students in grades 4-6; 25 students in grades 7-9; and 27 students in grades 10-12. Currently all class sizes in grades 4-12 meet those targets.

In Kindergarten to Grade 3, class sizes are above what is recommended, but have gotten smaller over the last couple of years.

Lack of classroom space is a factor on class sizes. The Board will continue to lobby the government to make changes to the way it determines the capacity of a school in order to address the lack of classroom space at some schools in the division.

The Division is also looking at other factors that may be impacting class sizes and working to reduce class sizes further at the K-3 level.

Mathematics Supports

The Board thanked Alberta Education for its recent announcement to support professional development in mathematics for teachers and changes being made to provincial assessments for students.

Board Chair Mandi Skogen said the Board supports any initiatives that are good for the Division's students and staff, and is waiting to see the details on how the changes will be rolled out.

Minister's Visit

Northern Lights will have the chance to showcase its new School Nutrition Pilot project at Vera M. Welsh Elementary School on Monday, December 19th when Minister of Education David Eggen comes to visit the school.

Northern Lights was one of 14 school jurisdictions to receive grant funding to be part of the Government's pilot program. The Division's program is unique because the students at J.A. Williams High School make all of the food that is served to Vera M. Welsh Elementary students for lunch every day.

Thanks to the School Nutrition Pilot Program and the efforts of Kids Are Worth It, which provides students in need with breakfast and snacks, students who may not have access to healthy food at home can now eat breakfast, lunch and snacks at school.

2017-2018 Calendar

The Board gave approval in principle to a new draft of the 2017-2018 school calendar. The calendar was revised after staff indicated on a survey that they would prefer that System Day take place later in the school year instead of just prior to school starting. The new draft was developed in conjunction with representatives from the ATA and school administration.

The new 2017-2018 calendar will be circulated to all stakeholders for feedback and will come back to the Board, along with any feedback collected, at a future Board meeting for final approval.

PSBC Meeting Hosts

Northern Lights has agreed to host the August meeting of the Public School Boards Council in Lac La Biche. This is an opportunity to showcase the Division and the region to representatives from public school boards across the province.

Next Board Meeting

The next Regular Board Meeting will take place on January 11 at the Division Office in Bonnyville.

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