Board wants to be proactive with priorities

Change is a constant in all facets of life, including education.

Student populations, the needs of families, neighbourhood demographics, the popularity of programs, provincial funding, the economy—these and many other things frequently change.

And all of these factors must be considered by the board of trustees when they set and work to meet their priorities for the school year.

Along with all of their other responsibilities, trustees have made it a priority to: review catchment areas of French milieu schools east of Lagimodière Boulevard; review French immersion enrolment and related catchment areas west of Lagimodière Boulevard, including Ward 5 (East St. Paul and St. Clements); and review the division’s Specialized Learning Environment (SLE) program.

The immersion and milieu programs themselves aren’t being reviewed, says trustee Michael West (board vice-chair); however, the board needs to take a close look at the numbers.

“The area is growing because of development and with growth comes a change in needs,” he says. “We have to determine which language programs are being chosen by these growing populations and make sure the current catchment area boundaries are suitable.”

Trustee Colleen Carswell (board chair) points to École Centrale as an example of the changing needs in some areas for French programming. The school recently made renovations, adding three new classrooms, and those classrooms are already full. As well, French programming in schools west of Lagimodière is steadily growing.

“We want to be proactive and see how we can best meet the needs of our community, our students and our schools,” she says.

Growing need is also being seen with the SLE program, which provides education in a setting that’s separate from schools for students who need alternative programming.

The program helps these students develop the skills needed to transition back into a school environment, so they’re able to address their issues and be successful in school.

It was started to meet the needs of a few students and the need is growing, says trustee Colleen Carswell, so a review is being done to ensure this successful program is being run in the best, most fiscally accountable way possible.

“We have responsibility to many groups—students, parents, staff members, ratepayers and the province—and it’s a challenge to meet everyone’s needs, but we certainly do our best,” she says with a smile.
Kindergarten schedule changes

The RETSD board of trustees has listened to what families have told them about their changing needs. Over the past year, when they were reviewing the scheduling model for kindergarten, those needs factored into their decision to switch to full-day every-other-day kindergarten in all 27 River East Transcona early years schools for the 2018–19 school year.

“Community needs were a key influence,” says trustee Rod Giesbrecht. “We also had to look at the educational value and the financial impact on transportation and classroom space. It was important to us that this be a positive change for our community.”

RETSD piloted this schedule at Bird’s Hill School and Sherwood School and received positive feedback from school staff and parents.

Having a full day with their students gives teachers the flexibility to devote bigger blocks of time for play-based learning, which has been proven to benefit young children. And teachers will have more time to spend with the children on their daily routines.

Students also get to have a full, rich school day experience. “They can eat lunch with their classmates, and experience recess and more school events,” says trustee Jerry Sodмолak, who was a principal at Donwood Elementary School for several years. “They get more of an opportunity to be part of the school community, and that helps prepare them for the full-day every-day experience of Grade 1.”

Though full-day every-day kindergarten may appeal to some families, the division is currently only funded by the province of Manitoba to offer half-time kindergarten.

Those with children entering kindergarten next year are invited to attend the divisional information evening at Donwood Elementary School on Wednesday, Jan. 17, 2018 at 7 p.m. Information will be provided about the new schedule and about kindergarten programming.

Literacy project unites students

Some Murdoch MacKay Collegiate students were on a mission on November 17, as they made the short trip straight west to Wayoata Elementary School.

They visited along with their teacher, Julia Barton, to engage the younger children as part of a literacy project for their Grade 12 English class. The Murdoch students were paired up with Wayoata students and read stories to them they had written.

Ms. Barton created the project so her students could experience what it’s like to write for a target audience and then have that audience listen to the story and respond to it.

They had to plot out a theme for their story, create a storyboard and rough draft, edit it, and create their final written and illustrated copy.

“I had them choose a theme with a positive message,” says Ms. Barton, “because we talked about how children’s books serve two purposes—to entertain but also to teach lessons.”

She co-ordinated the activity with Wayoata teachers to ensure their students would also benefit. They had the opportunity to ask the older students about their story ideas and writing techniques, and made connections to their own creative processes.

It’s one of many examples of how RETSD schools at different age levels work together to everyone’s benefit.
Heritage Committee seeks community members

Handling the concerns of the present and making plans for the future are usually what keep the RETSD board of trustees occupied.

However, recently they’ve delved into the division’s past—gathering information on and honouring past trustees—and this led to a renewed interest in preserving the history of River East Transcona School Division.

The board has formed a Heritage Committee that will organize efforts to collect and compile what information they can find, and they’d like to have community members on the committee.

“We have to understand the past. We welcome community members who are interested in keeping history alive and preserving a record of our past,” says trustee Eva Pryszney.

“Knowing where we’ve come from helps us to appreciate our heritage and understand how our community has changed and grown.”

The collected archives may be shared with the community and featured when schools celebrate milestones. They may also be of historical importance to students, teachers, historians, academics and genealogists.

For more information about the Heritage Committee, contact trustee Eva Pryzney by email at eprysizney@retsd.mb.ca or by phone at 204.668.3501.

RETSD schools marked Remembrance Day in a wide variety of ways this year. (Clockwise from right) Several took part in a tribute in the Field of Honour at the Transcona Cemetery as part of a national program called No Stone Left Alone; Valley Gardens Middle School students were visited by Second World War veteran Stanley Mazur, who shared stories of his war experiences; and RETSD board chair Colleen Carswell addressed those gathered for a ceremony at Kildonan Place, where the École Centrale lunchtime choir sang several songs.
Student success: Emmanuel Akot

“When a Grade 10 student to join varsity and play a major role on the team is unique, quite exceptional,” he says. “But he could do it all.”

Akot, who stands at 6-foot-8, was not only a quick defender and shot blocker, but a great shooter as well. He was frequently chosen as MVP and tournament All Star the two years he played with the Reivers. He also honed his skills playing with the Winnipeg Wolves.

In 2016, Akot moved to Utah to complete his high school education and was recruited in 2017 for the University of Arizona Wildcats. The five-star forward is currently projected to be a first-round draft pick for the NBA in 2018.

The RETSD community is proud of Akot and what he’s accomplished, and we look forward to seeing more of him on the court in the future.

If you know of any success stories involving RETSD students or graduates, contact the division at: creatingstudentsuccess@retsd.mb.ca

Volunteer spotlight

School volunteer Brenda Korchoski is involved in both of her children’s classrooms at Bernie Wolfe Community School, as well as the school as a whole. She started volunteering seven years ago, when her son was in kindergarten and she’s now the parent council chair. Ms. Korchoski arranges donations from businesses for the school, organizes fundraisers, and helps with immunizations, hearing and vision screenings, family barbecues, movie nights, craft nights and more.

For more about volunteering in RETSD, visit: www.retsd.mb.ca/Community/Volunteer

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When NCAA basketball player Emmanuel Akot started Grade 7 at Valley Gardens Middle School, he already had his eye on the ball.

Akot transferred to the school in 2011 to receive coaching from Rob Derksen and spent two years under his guidance. When he moved to Kildonan-East Collegiate, he spent just one year playing junior varsity before advancing to varsity in Grade 10, a move that KEC coach Curt Bauer says is unusual.