



Inspiring Success!

TRUSTEE NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2021



BGSD Trustees - Front Row (L-R): Shawna Ofstie, Devonna Klaassen (Chair), Sarah O'Gorman (Vice Chair); Back Row (L-R): Robyn Steed, Esther Eckert, Rebecca Eilander, and Barb Martinson.

Geese have arrived, and when the clouds part, we can feel the warmth of the sun. Signs that there is indeed hope, despite the events of the last week, month, and year. Spring is here! We hope you were able to find some opportunity for rest and recharge during spring break.

March 15 marked the anniversary of school buildings across the province being closed down because of the pandemic, with profound implications. It's doubtful that most thought we would still be where we're at a full year later.

As a Board, we commend everyone for all that has been achieved and accomplished during this trying time. Kudos to how well variables that are in our control have been managed. As we now face the third wave, please continue to focus on self-care and support one another as we continue on this journey.

Thank you again for doing your part to help all of our families and communities remain as safe and healthy as possible.

Community Tragedy

Sadly, the City of Leduc also experienced a traumatic community event on March 15 that happened within the walls of Christ the King School, leading to the death of a student, Jenny Winkler. Our thoughts and prayers are with all those impacted – directly and indirectly.

As a school division, we are doing everything we can to ensure grief and trauma supports are in place for students, families, and staff. We are working closely with STAR Catholic School Division and Wetaskiwin Public School Division to uphold each other as we process this devastating event.

With the leadership and expertise of our community partners, we are setting the groundwork for community healing.

For Black Gold families struggling with this incident or any other difficulties, know that support services and resources are available:

- Community Resources – 211 Alberta
- Crisis Text Line – Text CONNECT to 741741
- Family Violence – Find Supports – 310-1818

- Health Link – 811
- Kids Help Phone – 1-800-668-6868 or text CONNECT to 686868
- MyHealth.Alberta.ca: List of Important Numbers
- Physician & Family Support Program – 1-877-767-4637

Remember, you are not alone. Please reach out: <https://sites.google.com/gshare.blackgold.ca/mental-health/>

Draft K-6 Curriculum

Alberta Education released the new Draft Kindergarten - Grade 6 Curriculum for all six subject areas on March 29, 2021.

As this was during our spring break our analysis did not start immediately; we hoped our staff would be able to experience at least some of the rest and rejuvenation which they so deserved! Post-spring break, the Board of Trustees met with our Superintendent and our Curriculum Coordinator for an in-depth discussion. At this time, we recognized the controversy and politicizing that was taking place and decided it was important to take some time to weigh the many variables, as well as gather perspectives and feedback.

BGSD put out a brief media release indicating our plan on April 7, saying that we would be taking time for exploration and due diligence. To say our intended message was lost in translation is putting it mildly. We hope the following will give you a clearer understanding of our process.

Black Gold School Division has exceptional staff who have strong areas of expertise. We also have a strong history of involvement with previous curriculum development processes. We want to capitalize on this knowledge and experience.

One of the biggest criticisms expressed regarding this draft was the lack of 'teacher voice'. The Division values our teachers and is giving them the voice they were previously denied.

(Continued on page 2)

Draft K-6 Curriculum (cont.)

We invited teachers to participate in a series of facilitated review sessions to critically examine the draft Curriculum for each subject at every grade level (Kindergarten through Grade 6) line by line. They have the opportunity to provide input on whether there are pieces that are even feasible to pilot safely and effectively or not, and comment on things like scope and sequence and cross-curricular capacity, etc.

Our teachers are the experts; informed feedback from them is essential. Their compiled feedback, along with their suggestions and recommended alternatives, will be used as part of the decision making process that will be done collaboratively by the Board and Senior Administration. The ongoing pandemic, and the overlaying impact for students and staff is also an essential angle of consideration.

To be clear, at this time Black Gold School Division has NOT made a commitment to pilot the draft curriculum.

A public board meeting will be held at 11am on Tuesday, April 27, 2021, where our final decision will be made.

Our decision, with solid and explicit rationale, as well as a summary of the report and impassioned accounts from our parents and communities will be shared with Alberta Education and the BGSD school community.

Our sincerest thanks to those of you who have reached out to us to share your thoughts and perspectives. This has given us the opportunity to fully understand your position, and the opportunity to clarify ours. We have so much respect for those willing to engage directly in discussion – we’ve had some great insights! Know we absolutely hear your strong concerns! We not only hear you, but we share many of them ourselves. We too are parents with kids or grandkids in school in Black Gold schools!

That being said, there is a lot of misinformation about the draft Curriculum on social media. While we have no doubt that folks communicating about the Curriculum are doing so with the best of intentions, oftentimes they are only snippets from various sources, and the big picture ends up being distorted.

Here are some of the themes of misinformation that we have observed on social media that we would like to clarify:

What we’re hearing from many is that the decision in question is ‘to pilot or not to pilot?’ Ultimately the goal is to have the absolute best curriculum end up in front of our students. It’s about what’s best for our kids, now and for the future.

Regardless of whether we participate in the pilot, BGSD has a lot of expertise, and we want to be part of the solution to getting a solid curriculum. The intention is to take a step back and gather all the feedback, allowing us to give an explicit and comprehensive rationale for our decision – either way.

We’re not looking for ways/reasons to pilot, but rather fighting for ways to give the most comprehensive, detailed, and constructive feedback possible to our ministry.

For clarification, these are the expectations of the validation (piloting) process as stated by Alberta Education: “Through your participation in the piloting process, you can help to ensure the draft curriculum is thoroughly tested in classrooms prior to mandatory provincial implementation in September of 2022.”

The pilot process is very flexible: school divisions have the ability to pilot by school, by grade level, by class, by subject, or even by unit. This means that teachers would have the flexibility to pick exactly what does or does not make it into their classrooms. If Black Gold were to pilot any portions, careful attention would be made to only pilot sections that are beneficial to student learning. Anything disrespectful, harmful or inaccurate would not be considered.

Should we choose to pilot any portions, it would be to help get it where it needs to be. Choosing to pilot is not synonymous with endorsement. Note that the deadline to opt in or out is May 7, 2021.

We’re also hearing that a number of you are feeling a sense of urgency for Black Gold to respond. To put it in perspective, at this time, only 30-40 percent of Alberta School Boards have made a decision; some of whom, for a variety of reasons, publicly announced they would

not be participating in the pilot as early as last fall, unrelated to the Curriculum itself. We see the decision as much broader, which is why we are taking our time.

This is an incredibly complex decision, with overlapping variables and wide-spread consequences. As with any other decision that comes to our table, it is our responsibility to ensure that we have the full picture before making a decision. As elected officials, it is our job to do our due diligence.

Alberta is currently on the world stage when it comes to education. We want to be part of this continued legacy and be part of the solution to ensure that all our kids have the opportunity to learn from the very best curriculum possible, and remain on the world stage.

We have a responsibility, as educational leaders, to do everything in our power to make sure the best curriculum possible ends up in front of our children.

Finally, as your locally elected trustees, we stand as non-partisan politicians. Our focus is not on party politics, but on the kids. Our party is education! Our people are our kids!! We come to the table with the lens of what’s best for kids – first and foremost. This is what guides our decision making.

Over the course of this past year, we have many families and staff reach out to us and thank us, as a Board, for our leadership, guidance, and support as we all navigate this pandemic. Our commitment to doing what is best for students and staff has been acknowledged many times.

We know this is an emotional time, and that this curriculum decision impacts each and every one of you. We do not take the gravity of this lightly! We ask that you trust us as your locally elected leaders. We will continue to prioritize your children — our schools — the future.

- Your Board of Trustees

Strategic Planning



Superintendent Romanchuk hosted the Council of School Communities virtual engagement session.

As you know, Black Gold is working on updating our strategic plan. The majority of school councils across the division participated in at least one brainstorming session to reaffirm our core values of *Relationships, Student Focused Learning, Passion, Supportive Environments*, and *Managing Resources Responsibly* as part of this process.

These conversations were fantastic! Thank-you for your insights, suggestions, and in-depth discussion - they truly helped us understand how our core values are interpreted in our schools and gave us great context for formulating definitions. A summary of our compilation will be shared soon.

On February 23, 2021, we hosted our annual Council of School Communities with representation from school councils, elected officials, principals, teachers, community leaders, and community partners. A BIG thank you to all those who attended and for your valued insights!

Administration will compile the data gathered at the event for us to use in consideration during the development of the Division's new strategic plan and strategic goal (Big Hairy Audacious Goal), which will guide us forward with clarity and purpose.

Our existing BHAG, *By 2020 BGRD is the leading school division in the province*, was established 10 years ago. Whether we have achieved that goal is a matter for debate, but obviously our opinion is of course we did - or are very close. This time, in honour of the 25th Anniversary of Black Gold Schools, we are looking at developing something compelling and visionary, with a clear finish line that inspires and motivates our staff, students and parents.

School Visits

Each year Trustees visit every school in the division in order to have context for the needs and culture of each school, and stay connected to the school communities. March 11, 2021 marked the final group of school visits this year for the Board of Trustees.

While COVID-19 certainly changed how school tours looked compared to previous years, it allowed for new opportunities and creative approaches for schools to showcase their wonderful students and achievements over the past year. The human connection was missed but the chance to see inside the classrooms, and see learning in action, was much appreciated and enjoyed by the Board.



To each and every one of our 31 schools, thank you for welcoming us in again this year. Thank you for your creativity and thank you for sharing with us your successes, your challenges and the many silver linings. The candor and insights shared are extremely helpful to our decision making. We look forward to future tours where we can be there in person again.

Planning for 2021-2022

We are gearing up for planning for the 2021-2022 school year. The overall Education budget was announced, and as expected, will remain at the same level as this year. We are in the process of reviewing the full breakdown of funding parameters and how dollars will be earmarked.

Boards across the province, including Black Gold, strongly advocated for a reconsideration of the funding formula which would penalize boards for the sudden drop in enrollment. As a result of the pandemic, enrollment decreased across the province as a result of low kindergarten registration. This advocacy was heard and honoured. We are grateful to be able to redirect those dollars to support students through this pandemic.

Upcoming Board Meetings

- **April 27, 2021** - Special Board Meeting (live-streamed; begins at 11 a.m.)
- **May 26, 2021** - Regular Board Meeting (live-streamed; open session begins at 10:30 a.m.)
- **June 23, 2021** - Regular Board Meeting (live-streamed; open session begins at 10:30 a.m.)

Resources

Board Agendas and Minutes:

<https://blackgold.civicweb.net/Portal/>

Board Member Profiles & Contacts:

<https://www.blackgold.ca/about-bgsd/board/board-member-profiles/>

Reach Out!

Your voice is important - we want to hear from you! You can reach out to your Board of Trustees directly with your questions, concerns, or suggestions.

Please know that all trustees represent the voice of the entire division, please always feel free to reach out to any trustee to address any concerns or feedback:

Robyn Steed:
robyn.steed@blackgold.ca

Rebecca Eilander
rebecca.eilander@blackgold.ca

Esther Eckert
esther.eckert@blackgold.ca

Shawna Ofstie
shawna.ofstie@blackgold.ca

Devonna Klaassen, Chair
devonna.klaassen@blackgold.ca

Sarah O'Gorman, Vice-Chair
sarah.ogorman@blackgold.ca

Barb Martinson
barb.martinson@blackgold.ca

Board Advocacy

A reminder that our advocacy letters are now being posted online: <https://www.blackgold.ca/about-bgsd/board/board-committees/community-engagement-advocacy/>

We are still discussing how to expand this page to showcase other advocacy efforts, however this gives a taste of some of our priorities. At this time, we are preparing advocacy regarding:

Curriculum: In addition to feedback on the draft curriculum, there are a number of related areas of advocacy we are pursuing:

- *Transparency:* There is significant feedback being collected across the province on the Curriculum. We believe that feedback provided should be made public, in line with the process being transparent.
- *Feedback:* School Divisions have tremendous experience and expertise when it comes to curriculum. We would like to see all school divisions respected for their expertise and invited to provide meaningful curriculum feedback, whether they are participating in the validation process or not.
- *Bridging the Gap:* With the rollout of a new curriculum containing different knowledge points at different grade levels, there will be knowledge gaps as a result of not having the previous years of schooling under that curriculum. A plan for bridging this gap does not exist at this time, and is imperative.
- *Covid Overlay:* the impact of Covid-19 on student's well-being and student learning, as well as the significant strain on school staff is immense. We believe this overlay needs to be given a greater level of consideration.

Stable and Affordable Internet Access:

The trials of online learning have made the disparities in internet access, for all reasons, very obvious. We believe all students should have equitable learning opportunities. Stable and affordable internet access is essential for equity.

Vaping: Due to vaping concerns, we will be advocating for stricter protocols when it comes to the sale and marketing of vape products.

Program Unit Funding (PUF): We also have ongoing advocacy efforts to ensure proper Program Unit Funding and resources are in place to adequately address needed early intervention as soon and as effectively as possible.

Mental Health: The mental health impact from the pandemic has shone a spotlight on the many cracks in the mental system in terms of accessibility, availability, and affordability. We recognize that the effects go far beyond individual students and advocate for holistic supports that allow ease through systems and support individuals, families, and communities.

Three-Year Capital Plan 2022-2025

At the March 17 Board Meeting, Associate Superintendent Volkman presented to us the proposed Three Year Capital Plan, which we approved. The plan has now been sent on to Alberta Education for review. A new high school in Beaumont has been added as the second priority in response to significant growth in enrollment projections in that area. According to projections for Beaumont, École Secondaire Beaumont Composite High School will reach capacity and become over utilized by 2024.

Additionally, the new K-9 school in Leduc would act as a replacement for Willow Park School which is in need of a modernization due to age and accessibility issues. Administration has suggested that there are opportunities to consider repurposing this space for the growing Outreach Program. The layout of Willow Park is very conducive to the format of Outreach. The change addresses the space concern, and would save money, as we would no longer need to pay rent for a building to house this program.

New school and modernization requests:

1. *Leduc:* École Corinthia Park School (2022) – Modernization
2. *Beaumont:* New High School (2022) – New Facility (capacity of 1600 students)
3. *Devon:* Robina Baker Elementary School (2023) – Modernization
4. *Leduc:* Solution for Willow Park School / Bridgeport (New 950 capacity K-9) (2023) – Replacement
5. *Leduc:* East Elementary School (2024) – Modernization

Meet our 2021 Edwin Parr Teacher Award Nominee!



Black Gold School Division is pleased to congratulate kindergarten teacher Kate Myszkowski from Thorsby Elementary School (and previously at Distance Learning) as our 2021 Edwin Parr Teacher Award nominee. Kate will be representing the Division at the zone level.

“Even though she is a new teacher, Kate quickly established a safe, caring, and inclusive environment,” said Distance Learning Principal Denise Harrison, who nominated Kate for the award. “Her purposeful student engagement permitted her to gain a better level of understanding of individual students in relation to personalities, specific learning needs, and instructional preferences. Her caring and empathetic personality endeared her to several students needing that extra level of genuine support and individual contact.”

“On behalf of the Board, I congratulate Ms. Myszkowski as our nominee for the Edwin Parr Teacher Award,” said Board Chair Devonna Klaassen. “Her passion for both teaching and building strong connections reflects the Division’s values and commitment to inspiring success. We could not be more fortunate to have her, along with so many other great teachers in our Black Gold family.”

What is the role of a School Trustee?



Robyn Steed, Trustee - Beaumont

In Alberta, citizens elect school boards to act for the Legislature in their local schools and communities. School boards exist because of the belief that government – and decisions – made closest to the people being governed are the most effective.

On October 18, 2021, Albertans will go to the polls to elect their municipal leaders. This includes choosing their local school board trustees. Over my four years as your locally elected Black Gold School Division trustee in Beaumont, many people have asked: What does a trustee do?

Trustees wear many hats. They are planners, communicators, policy makers, lobbyists, adjudicators and evaluators, just to name a few. An effective trustee is a strong advocate for their community, their school board, and above all for students.

A trustee is part of a team. At Black Gold, there are seven elected trustees representing the municipalities of Leduc, Beaumont, Devon, Warburg, Calmar, Thorsby, New Sarepta, and all areas in between. The trustees have one employee, the superintendent of schools, with whom they work respectfully and collaboratively with to develop and implement the board's direction.

The role of the board of trustees is not operational, but governance. What does that mean? It means the board sets the vision, goals and policies for the division, while leaving the day-to-day administration to the superintendent and staff. It means the board expects accountability with regards to established goals and

respect of its policies. Trustees are committed to the school division's core business of inspiring student learning and success. They act for the greater good of the division, of students and families, and community stakeholders.

What are the traits of successful trustees?

Trustees are prepared to put the needs of students first. They are committed to making things better for Alberta's children. Trustees take an active role in lobbying provincial and federal governing bodies to ensure student needs are placed at the forefront during policy considerations.

Trustees are effective communicators. They ensure that the wishes of their entire community are shared and reflected in the management of the school division. Trustees frequently engage with stakeholders to know what they want and need from the division, and in turn report back to the community about the school board's plans and decisions.

Trustees are team players. They do not have the authority to make decisions individually; decisions can be made only as a board in public session. While many candidates will choose to run due to personal interest or issue, a trustee must act on the best interests of the entire school division. There is no room for personal agendas.

Trustees are not necessarily education experts. Trustees come from all walks of life. An effective board may be composed of individuals with diverse backgrounds and lived experiences; however they are committed individuals seeking to uphold a strong and successful school division while considering the desires of staff, students, parents and communities.

Black Gold School Division's core purpose is "To Inspire Success". This purpose is met while upholding the values of student focused learning, passion, relationships, managing resources responsibly, and supportive environments. We proudly employ over 1200 staff and educate over 12,000 students in 31 schools. If you are interested in learning more about being a trustee, please visit www.blackgold.ca/about-bgsd/board/becoming-a-trustee.

2021 School Board Election

Along with the municipal election on October 18, Albertans will have the opportunity to vote for their school board trustees.

Have you considered becoming a school board trustee? If you are interested in representing your community with a position on the school board, detailed information specific to Black Gold School Division, including ward boundaries, can be found at <https://www.blackgold.ca/about-bgsd/board/becoming-a-trustee/about-nominations/>.

ASCA Conference

The annual conference of The Alberta School Councils' Association is virtual this year: April 23-25. This is a wonderful professional development opportunity for school council members. We are sponsoring a number of school council members to attend. Please reach out to your local trustee and share some of your highlights from the conference!

Poster Contest Winner



We're excited to congratulate Linsford Park School student Kodie Corbeil, who has won the province-wide 2020 School Bus Safety Week poster contest in the Grade 3 category!

The award and contest are sponsored by the Alberta Student Transportation Advisory Council.