

Issue one
2019-20

the torch



Trustees John Toews, Peter Kotyk and Keith Morrison with kindergarten students at École Margaret-Underhill.

Priorities set the board's annual path

Every year, the River East Transcona School Division's board of trustees identifies priorities for the next 12 months. The priorities serve as a guiding path for the trustees, helping them focus their energies and efforts on issues that affect students and schools in the division. Trustees also deal with a wide range of other issues throughout the year, including the annual budgeting process, the use of division facilities, upgrades to facilities, hearing from the public and more.

"The board has become very efficient in the last five years

because we establish priorities and maintain a focus on them," said Colleen Carswell, board chair. "Although we consider a wide range of other issues, having priorities keeps us on task to help create student success and prevents us from simply reacting to any number of issues."

The process for selecting priorities starts with ideas. These ideas are raised by individual trustees and senior administration who also bring their recommendations for discussion to the board as part of their role in keeping the board

informed about opportunities or concerns affecting the delivery of quality education across the division.

Priorities are chosen with care. The board discusses the ideas they have received and look at them from a perspective of how or if they will affect students' education. Generally, the board will then pick three to five ideas and have senior administration research them in more detail. The research can include reviewing how other divisions might be addressing similar issues, programs or policies.

It may also include a literature review to see what findings or recommendations exist.

The senior administration presents the research findings to the board and the trustees then discuss the priorities based on this knowledge. They may ask schools for more information on an issue or meet with the families of schools most likely to be affected by the priority.

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Trustees also work with the senior administration to look at what resources may be needed to act on the priority. Some priorities might need resources to fund equipment, to hire more staff to deliver a program or to create more space (e.g., classrooms).

“The trustees have an important role to balance the wishes of the community with financial responsibility and of course the best interests of the education of our students,” Carswell continued. “Creating student success is the deciding factor in this process of review.”

The 2019–20 priorities are:

- Prepare a facility improvement plan, implementation/transition plan, educational plan and communication plan for the French milieu schools reconfiguration, specifically École Centrale, École Margaret-Underhill and École Regent Park

- Conduct a review of the Transportation Policy as it relates to student transportation services to middle years schools across the division
- Conduct a review of Ukrainian course offerings at the middle year level
- Conduct a review of the current communications plan and develop additional strategies to enhance internal and external communications and increase community engagement
- Conduct a review of existing kindergarten models in other jurisdictions and compare and contrast with the RETSD model

French Milieu Catchment Review

The board is conducting a catchment area review of French milieu schools east of Lagimodière boulevard. As reported in the June issue of The Torch, the division is experiencing a growing population and changing needs in that area.

Trustees have already met with families at three local schools—École Centrale, École Margaret-Underhill and École Regent Park—and will update the community on the division’s website and in future issues of The Torch.

Ukrainian Course Offerings

This year, the board is looking at middle years English Ukrainian Bilingual programming. Last year the board reviewed the early years programming and as a result of that review, the early years program at Bernie Wolfe Community School and Springfield Heights School are being consolidated at one location in September 2020—Prince Edward School.

Delivery of Kindergarten Programs

One of the board’s new priorities this year is reviewing how the division delivers kindergarten programs.

“We are in the second year of offering full-day, every-other day kindergarten and have heard positive feedback both from parents and staff,” said Jerry Sodomlak, board vice-chair. “It is timely now to look at the overall program offerings to ensure we continue to provide excellence in programming throughout the division.”

Communications

The board will be reviewing its present communication plan and discussing new initiatives that will enhance the plan.

“As trustees, we recognize how important communications are, not just hearing from the board but also the board hearing from the community and we want to hear from the community the best ways to do this,” said board chair, Colleen Carswell. ”

Recognition from respect group



Premier Brian Pallister, Respect Group co-founder Sheldon Kennedy and board chair Colleen Carswell at Bernie Wolfe Community School.

River East Transcona School Division is the first division in the province to partner with the Respect Group, an organization co-founded by Sheldon Kennedy and Wayne McNeil to prevent bullying, abuse, harassment and discrimination (BAHD). The Respect Group presented RETSD with a “paddle” award

in recognition of being the first division in Manitoba to have 100 per cent of its employees complete their certification for Respect In School, an online BAHD prevention training tool.

“We are honoured and proud to receive this award,” trustee John Toews commented. “Our division continues work to prevent

bullying, abuse, harassment and discrimination by and against anyone in the division and this award acknowledges the work across RETSD.”

The Respect in School program is designed for anyone who interacts with students. It includes information to recognize, prevent and respond to situations where bullying, abuse, harassment and discrimination arise. It shifts people from being bystanders to people with the ability to “step up and step in.”

In addition to the award, Sheldon Kennedy and Wayne McNeil sent a video message of thanks to the division. View it on the division’s Vimeo site at <https://vimeo.com/363848982>.





Colleen Carswell (chair)



Jerry Sodomlak (vice-chair)



Rod Giesbrecht



Keith Morrison



Brianne Goertzen

River East Transcona School Division board of trustee elections

At the first board meeting of the school year on September 3, Colleen Carswell, trustee for Ward 1, was re-elected as board chair for 2019–20 and trustee Jerry Sodomlak (Ward 1) was re-elected vice-chair.

There are three standing committees of the board that consider in detail issues such as budget, building use, personnel, student transportation and employee remuneration. Each committee is chaired by an

elected board member and their deliberations are presented to the board for consideration and decision-making.

The following trustees were elected to the board standing committees:

- Rod Giesbrecht (Ward 2) was elected chair of the Finance, Facilities and Transportation Committee. As its name implies, the committee is responsible for: budget review and oversight; community use of division facilities as well as maintenance

and structural matters for division buildings; and student transportation.

- Trustee Keith Morrison (Ward 3) was elected chair of the Program, Policy Review and Personnel Committee. This committee's responsibilities include: personnel matters; public relations and communications; board policy review and recommendations; and review and recommendations about educational programs and services.

- Trustee Brianne Goertzen (Ward 3) was elected chair of the Negotiations Committee. This committee negotiates with the six unions representing divisional employees and negotiating salaries and working conditions for non-union employees.

More details about each standing committee are available on the division's website at: <https://www.retsd.mb.ca/yourrets/BoardofTrustees/BoardStandingCommittees/Pages/default.aspx#/>

Strategic plan

The River East Transcona School Division board's strategic plan sets the stage for almost every initiative in the division. It connects directly to the division's educational priorities of literacy, safe schools and numeracy and is the backbone of all the school plans. Within each priority area of the plan is a consistent focus to use the division's resources and collective efforts to educate students to become inspired, skilled, responsible citizens.

The current plan is for 2017–19 and, since it is nearing its end, the board is starting to prepare a new three-year plan, focusing

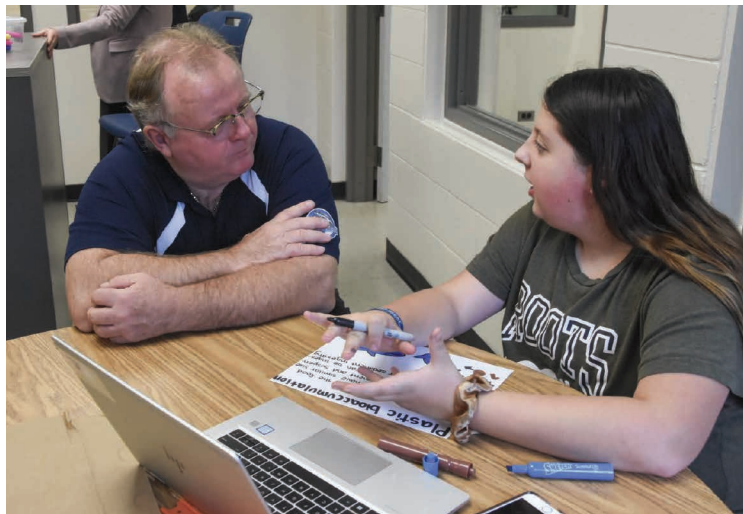
on student success within the division—what that looks like and where the board and division want to see it go.

"In past years, the division has hosted forums for middle and senior years students to hear their perspectives about student success," said Jerry Sodomlak, board vice-chair. "It is essential to bring the student voice to our discussions about student success because they are the ones living it."

Check out the strategic plan at <https://www.retsd.mb.ca/Documents/StrategicPlan2017.pdf>.



Provincial K–12 education review



Board vice-chair Jerry Sodomlak and Murdoch MacKay Collegiate student sharing ideas during a recent visit to learn more about the sTeam incubator.

The River East Transcona School Division board of trustees made a presentation and submitted a written response to the Manitoba Commission on Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education review. The commission had invited feedback from the public, including school divisions and boards of trustees, about the future of Manitoba's education system, particularly regarding student learning, teaching, accountability for student learning, governance and funding. The board's presentation focused on two areas of the commission's interest: Amalgamation/Governance and Student Learning and Success.

The division is one of several

that came into being in 2002 as a result of the amalgamations that took place across the province. Considerable time and money was spent to synthesize budgets, contracts, policies and procedures, taking away from focusing on educational programming. Despite the government of the day saying amalgamations would lead to cost savings and improve education, amalgamation cost taxpayers millions of dollars.

"Amalgamations also cost more money as evidenced in the RETSD experience," said trustee Brianne Goertzen, a member of the board's ad hoc committee that wrote the board's submission. "For example, costs rose due to newly

combined employee contracts and administrative expenses associated with a larger division."

The board's presentation emphasized the need to look at student success differently for every child. The division offers many different programs to make sure each child can be successful, from rigorous academic programs to early interventions and preschool programming to an individualized Specialized Learning Environment or new methods of teaching and learning through a Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) philosophy.

While the division strives to help students succeed, the board expressed concern that the government does not look at the different ways students can succeed. Instead, government uses international test scores as the primary indicator of student learning and success.

"These tests are done on a random number of students and are only a snapshot of a moment in time, not a reflection of a student's overall achievement, knowledge or skills," said trustee Keith Morrison, another member of the ad hoc committee. "The system needs to look at the whole child

throughout their public education, not a random moment in time, and government needs to understand that a more comprehensive, authentic assessment practice is a full, more accurate measure of student learning."

Education is the great equalizer—public education is more than test scores. It needs to be based on individual student and community needs to help students succeed long after graduation. The board concluded its presentation with a call for all groups involved with students and children—including health and justice—to work with education to help students succeed no matter what their circumstances or abilities.

The board's submission was drafted by an ad hoc committee with trustees Goertzen, Morrison, Rod Giesbrecht and Jerry Sodomlak. The board's written submission and presentation transcript can be found under "MB Education Review" in the quick links section of: <https://www.retsd.mb.ca>

The commission is expected to report back to the public in March 2020.

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The board holds its regular meetings on the first and third Tuesday of the month starting at 6:30 p.m. at the RETSD Administration Offices, 589 Roch St. All regular board meetings are open to the public. For more information about the board of trustees, visit: www.retsd.mb.ca/BoardofTrustees