



Prairie South School Division No. 210

Annual Report to Electors
September 1, 2007 - August 31, 2008

Learning Excellence



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Dedication

*This year's annual report is dedicated to excellence,
and to a man who embodied excellence:
Dr. George Falk, Superintendent of Student Support Services,
who left us in June 2008.
His vision and spirit live on.*

Cover – There's more than one reason to wear pink!
*Top: Students from Coronach School form a ribbon of pink
supporting breast cancer awareness. Bottom: Peacock Collegiate
students wear pink to take a stand against bullying.*



Message from the Chair

Report of the Prairie South Board of Education with respect to educational developments for the period September 1, 2007, to August 31, 2008

In the 2007-2008 school year, Prairie South School Division continued to bring its vision of *Learning Excellence* to life. Through a commitment to shared values that include continued learning, accountability, caring and respectful environments, unity through diversity and equity, excellence in all we do and transparent communication, the Board of Education worked together to build on its strengths and identify creative approaches to overcoming its challenges.

Strengths

Our major strength is our people. As one of the largest employers in the Moose Jaw and south-central region of Saskatchewan, Prairie South is fortunate to be able to attract and retain the highest quality educators, administrators and support staff. The culture of excellence that flows from our vision comes to life at every level of the organization.

Our geography – while bringing many challenges – is also a source of strength, in that it provides us with the dual perspectives of rural and urban school communities. I believe this has been one of the most significant learning experiences for our Board as our city-based trustees learn more about education in rural areas and vice versa. The ability to mold a strong yet flexible system is enhanced by the variety of perspectives found across the division.

Challenges

We have challenges, as well. Declining enrolment across the division continues to test our ability to deliver quality

education opportunities in an efficient manner, particularly at some of our smallest schools. For this reason, and based on criteria established the previous year, the Board placed Eyebrow School under review for consideration of grade discontinuance or closure. In the end, the Board decided against making changes because of specific student needs at that school, along with changes to school closure legislation being considered by the provincial government.

Maintenance, upgrading and utilization of our 40 schools is another challenge that our Board takes very seriously. Capital expenditures on school facilities are shared between the province and school division. The province has been underfunding such expenditures for years, resulting in an estimated \$1 billion backlog in necessary facility upgrades province-wide. What that means at the division level is that repairs and upgrades are often put off until they reach the critical stage on the provincial priority list.

We don't believe this is an appropriate or efficient way of managing the division's resources, nor is it fair to expect staff and students to work and learn in such environments. The Board hopes to give its facility requests additional credibility and authority by establishing a long-range facilities plan and has submitted a request to help fund the development of such a plan. It is important enough that we will proceed to develop the plan with or without government funding in the 2008-09 school year.

Inadequate funding

Inadequate government funding is also a challenge on the operating side. Changes to the government grant formula, coupled with declining enrolment, have stripped millions of dollars in provincial grants from our division (and other rural divisions) over the past several years. Since restructuring, our trustees and senior administration have spent many hours preparing information and meeting with Ministry of Education officials to share our concerns about these changes and the impact on our division, its students and its ratepayers. We have rural and urban cost information that supports our contention that it costs more to deliver education in a rural setting.

This year, we expanded our advocacy efforts. We submitted a resolution to the Saskatchewan School Boards Association's annual meeting calling for the government to ensure funding is distributed equitably. We joined with Chinook School Division to advocate for improved funding for rural divisions. Still, our grant continued to drop and we were once again forced to turn to local ratepayers to ensure our continued ability to deliver quality educational opportunities to our students. This has put us in the unenviable position of having the highest mill rate in the province.

We will continue to advocate on behalf of our students in this area and in others. Our students are the reason we do what we do. It is our duty and our privilege to set the stage for success; to ensure our students are ready to compete in today's global environment; to inspire a desire for *Learning Excellence* in generations to come.

Respectfully submitted,

Gordon Stewart
Chair, Board of Education



Engaging project: Students at Riverview Collegiate work on a canoe as part of a project designed to engage high school students in Practical and Applied Arts.



Message from the Director

Report of the Director of Education concerning the progress of education in the period September 1, 2007, to August 31, 2008

In Prairie South School Division, we are creating a culture of excellence that encourages staff and students to strive harder and reach further in their quest for *Learning Excellence*. I am so proud of, and often amazed by, the incredible things we accomplish daily in our school division.

Making headlines

Many of these achievements make headlines – sometimes even around the world. One teacher's idea to put technology to use in a learning environment caught the interest and imagination of both conventional and online media across the country and even generated coverage from other continents. The Craik Cell Phone Project, as it quickly became known, turned conventional thinking on its ear, using cell phones and mobile technology in and out of the classroom to enhance learning. It's hard to 'forget your homework' when your teacher sends you a text message reminding you just before you head out the door!

Blueprint for Learning

Just as often, the successes are behind-the-scenes, but equally significant for their contribution to student learning. One example is the development of a Blueprint for Learning that aligns the work being done at the Ministry, division, school and classroom levels in support of the provincial Continuous Improvement Framework. It visually connects seemingly discrete indicators and initiatives, clearly showing how they fit into the broader, system-wide picture to support the province's four identified priorities:

- higher literacy and achievement;

- equitable opportunities for all students;
- smooth transitions into and through the system; and
- strong system-wide accountability and governance.

The Blueprint is used primarily by our instructional staff, as a tool to improve student achievement and teaching practice. It provides a method of organizing criteria and associated indicators that supplies important feedback in a continuous improvement cycle geared toward improving student outcomes. Beyond that, though, it allows everyone in the division to see how they fit into the larger picture and how their work ultimately supports student learning.

Commitment to Excellence

One of the division’s guiding principles is a shared commitment to *excellence*: we value excellence based upon high expectations for all directed toward student success. This is more than just a statement on the walls in our office. It’s the way we work – and the *why* – every day.

Our staff’s commitment to excellence means that identifying a problem or challenge is only the first step. They don’t stop until we’ve found a solution that works for the students. Whether it is two of our high schools joining together to field teams and give their students an opportunity to play, or our career development team implementing a one-of-a-kind program to help students who are having difficulty transitioning when they leave high school; or our transportation staff working and reworking the routes to minimize ride times for students and maximize efficiency, Prairie South employees continually find creative ways to turn challenges into opportunities.

Leading the way

As Director, I am incredibly proud to share our division’s achievements with others. In many cases, our work is leading the way provincially, and even nationally. Following a Ministry review of division initiatives related to students with intensive, or special, needs, Prairie South’s Student Services team was identified as a leader in all 12 of the assessed areas and invited to work with the Ministry to identify ways to support other divisions in doing similar work. Several of our school community councils participated in anti-bullying training co-sponsored by the division and the Red

Cross, and through their implementation of the training at the community level, are vivid examples of the valuable work SCCs can accomplish in our school communities.

We have high expectations for our students and for our staff. I am privileged to lead a group of people who consistently go above and beyond those expectations to do what is necessary to inspire student learning. From developing tools, to creating programs to putting supports and partnerships in place, to engaging and empowering school communities; each piece – and each person – makes a difference. Together, we keep the focus on our students, and on our vision of *Learning Excellence*.

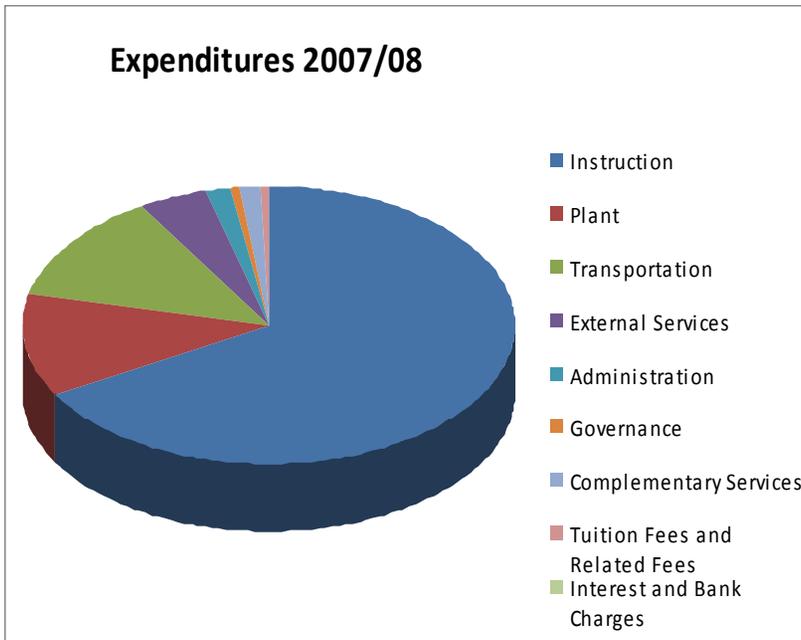
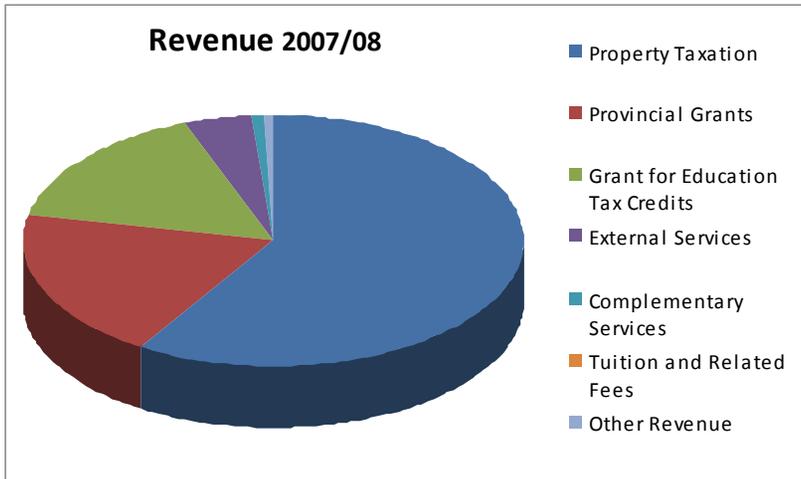
Respectfully submitted,

Brenda Edwards
 Director of Education



En Garde: Students at Central Butte School learn how to fence during a student conference where speakers and community members provide educational opportunities for students and expose them to new experiences.

Financial Highlights



Operating Highlights

Total revenue \$77 million (60% property taxes; 35% provincial grant and education tax credit; 5% other revenue)

Total expenditures \$75.8 million (66% instruction; 12% plant; 13% transportation; 9% other)

Surplus \$1,268,437

Total municipalities (cities, towns, villages and rural municipalities) 83

Mill rate 23 (2007); 24.8 (2008)

Total schools 40 (including two associate schools and five Hutterian colony schools)

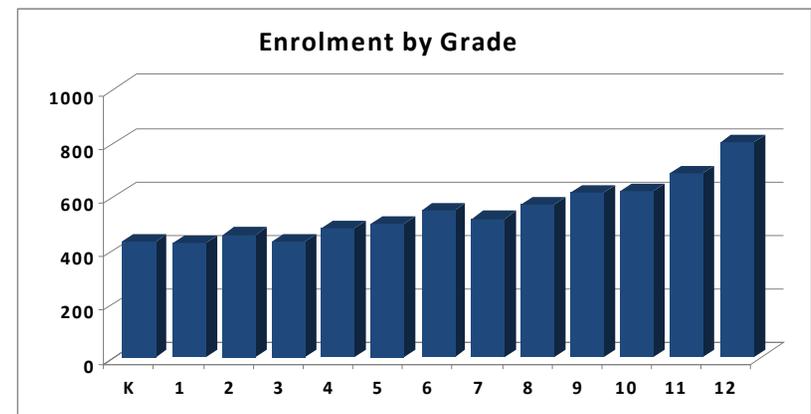
Total students 6,931 full-time equivalents, PreK to Gr. 12 (PreK and Kindergarten students are counted at 50% to reflect the level of program offered at this age)

Total school-based teachers: 488.84 full-time equivalents

Pupil-to-teacher ratio: 14.18

Total non-teaching staff: 796.8 FTE, including bus drivers

Total rural and city school bus routes: 136



Measuring Student Learning

What did you learn in school today?

For years, parents have used this phrase to draw children into conversations about their schoolwork and what they were learning. And for years, it has routinely failed to elicit much of a response.

So how do parents know what their children are learning? And how do schools know that students are learning effectively the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in today's ever-changing world? Taking it one step further – how can school divisions demonstrate their accountability in terms of meeting student needs?

Assessment for Learning

In addition to a variety of classroom measures, students in Prairie South participate in the provincial **Assessment for Learning (AFL)** program, which measures student achievement according to a set of learning outcomes derived from the provincial curriculum. The AFL program focuses on present student achievement and continuous improvement. It's a snapshot of student learning at a particular moment. The goal is to raise the level of learning and achievement for all students in the province.

Assessments are typically done every two years in a particular subject. In April 2008, Grade 5, 8 and 11 students in the division participated in the Writing AFL. The year before, students took part in the Mathematics and Reading assessment. The AFL program also includes student assessment of Science and Personal and Social Skills.

Tests are scored provincially, and the data is used locally by school division leaders as well as school-based teams of educators, working in informal groups called professional learning communities (PLCs), to:

- assess student progress against curricular objectives;
- identify strengths and weaknesses;
- improve programs and instruction;
- support a culture of continuous improvement; and
- strengthen the ability of school divisions to report on student learning.

For detailed information, please see our web site, prairiesouth.ca.

Board of Directors



Our Board: Back - Joan McMaster, Gord Stewart, Ron Gleim, Lew Young, Marion Piché. Front - Neil Buckler, Wilfred Lethbridge, Ray Boughen, Claude Duke, Lance Bean

Foundational Statements

Our Mission Nurturing Communities of Learners

Our Vision Learning Excellence

Our Guiding Principles

- Learning
- Accountability
- Respectful, caring communities
- Unity
- Excellence
- Communication