

2016-17 Communications Plan



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1. Introduction & Strategies

Grande Yellowhead Public School Division (GYPSD) stretches from Jasper National Park, east to Evansburg, south of Cadomin and northwest beyond the Town of Grande Cache. The jurisdiction includes 18 schools, five Learning Connection centers, approximately 5,000 students and 600 employees and contractors. The purpose of Grande Yellowhead's annual Communications Plan is to present a clear and concise framework for communicating with our school communities which is critical due to the division's cultural and geographic diversity.

All communications strategies are directed at two types of school division audiences: internal stakeholders including students, teachers, staff, administration and Alberta Education; and external – parents, community members, elected officials, civic groups, media, businesses and other members of the GYPSD community.

Strengthening internal communications is a key objective of all divisional communication strategies. Success of this can be measured when staff becomes engaged in seeking information on current divisional issues and events, and are willing participants in the communications process. In partnership with stronger internal communications, GYPSD staff's support for, and involvement in, the development and implementation of the division's Communications Plan is vital to its overall success: specifically teachers and central office staff who are highly influential sources of information for the public. GYPSD staff then relays the messages of the school division back to their families and friends who in turn form opinions about our schools and division. **Consistent and honest communications must continue to be a top priority in sending a unified message at all times.** Assisting with this strategy, Grande Yellowhead has also seen a significant positive cultural shift in the last few years in building a strong team sense across the division: staff takes pride in their identities as employees of Grande Yellowhead Public School Division as well as being a staff member of their individual school or department.

Grande Yellowhead's communications strategies also target our external stakeholders as a means to communicate the goals and objectives of our school division to maximize student achievement and success through public support of our schools. Two such methods include:

- Parental involvement in education: Grande Yellowhead believes that engaged parents will provide increased survey results which will help improve school functionality and the division as a whole. As well as GYPSD's priority, increasing, meaningful family involvement is a target of the Province of Alberta.
- Increasing community engagement: community members, organizations and businesses can help make school meaningful for students by ensuring that courses are specific and applicable to students' futures, providing work placements and bringing local expertise into schools.

2. Goals and Objectives

The goal of Grande Yellowhead's communications strategies is to improve the internal and external two-way communications and collaboration between the division, its schools, staff, parents and community partners. Communications also plays a vital role in the division's other two areas of focus, improving student learning and building leadership capacity.

Through the development and implementation of a comprehensive communications plan, Grande Yellowhead strives to efficiently meet three communications objectives:

- Provide all staff with timely information about Board and administrative decisions made at the Education Services Centre (ESC), and activities and events across the division.
- Increase the involvement of staff in decision making by improving communications between them, the school-based administration and the division office thereby increasing opportunities for staff and administration to work collaboratively both between schools, and with divisional administration.

- Foster the exchange of information and increase collaboration between Grande Yellowhead and the communities it serves, both formally and through informal channels.

3. Guiding Principles

All of Grande Yellowhead's communications strategies reflect and support the vision, mission and beliefs of the division in content, tone and presentation. In reflecting the professionalism of Grande Yellowhead, all materials created by the division and its staff must:

- Include Grande Yellowhead's logo, full name and contact information, including website address, as directed in the division's *Visual Identity Manual*
- Be edited for correct grammar and spelling, and laid out in a clear format
- Convey professionalism in content, tone and presentation
- Be uniform and consistent with GYPSD's messages in the information relayed

The availability of information continues to be a foundational principle of the division's communications activities and strategies. Communications strategies will continue to create a climate and culture of trust, honesty and respect, thus fostering transparent communications among staff, and between staff and communities.

4. Key Messages

Grande Yellowhead Public School Division's experienced and dedicated staff members offer a range of unique programs and services that ensure students have access to a world class education in small, rural communities. Our priority is for our students and staff to work and learn in a welcoming, caring, respectful, and safe environment that protects students as they develop the skills and knowledge they require to be successful in post secondary institutions, the work place and as citizens.

Grande Yellowhead believes that education is a shared responsibility and welcomes the collaboration, engagement and empowerment of all their stakeholders to inspire all students to achieve and be successful.

Grande Yellowhead subscribes to the vision of public education where public schools are the first choice of communities, providing opportunities for all children to succeed in their learning goals.

5. Target Audiences

Internal Target Audiences

- Trustees
- Education Services Centre (ESC) staff
- School based staff
- System based staff
- Students

External Target Audiences

- Parents, School Councils
- Local business owners and leaders
- New residents of the division
- Neighboring school divisions
- Educational organizations and employee groups
- Community groups and partner organizations
- Alberta Education and Alberta Infrastructure
- Municipal government councils, MLAs, MPs
- Local and provincial media
- General public

6. Strategic Goals for 2016-17

All of Grande Yellowhead's communications strategies continue to support the division's priorities and initiatives with the underlying foundation of two driving questions -

1. *How do we advance our students' educational success?*
2. *How do we communicate our objectives to our stakeholders?*

This philosophy provides the foundation for supporting all communications strategies in order to:

- promote Grande Yellowhead Public School Division and its schools;
- highlight the diverse offering of its unique programs and services;
- assist schools in raising their profile in their community as well as the student accomplishments; and
- complement the division's initiatives in addressing its three priorities of improving student learning, building leadership capacity and succession planning, and improving internal and external communications.

The division will continue to focus on communications strategies that continue to improve communications with both our internal and external stakeholders. Fostering stronger relationships with all key stakeholders will greatly assist the division and its schools in presenting itself accurately to the communities it serves.

Through the implementation of this plan and the successful realization of the strategies, the following desired behaviours and attitudes will be achieved:

Internal Audiences

- Take pride and ownership in the division
- Become active and engaged participants in seeking information about the division and its key issues and events
- Work together as a high-performing organization whose staff respect and value both internal and external feedback
- Exhibit divisional values of caring, integrity and collaboration

External Audiences

- Feel involved and engaged in their public schools
- Exhibit community pride and trust in their school and in the division
- Support Grande Yellowhead Public School Division in its goals and objectives

Strategic Goals

1. **Direct Communications with Staff** Grande Yellowhead will continue to provide a variety of tools to ensure that clear and effective communications with staff is available using the most efficient means such as
 - a. **Division Website**—The division's and individual schools' websites are the main communications tools for both our internal and external audiences to keep informed about matters of mutual interest.
 - b. **Survey Tools** – The division will continue to use surveys as a quick and effective way to receive concise information and ascertain people's opinions on a specific issue or concern. For example, the division reviews the feedback provided from the annual Accountability Pillar Surveys to provide direction in supporting educational initiatives. Other important survey tools currently being utilized include the Tell Them From Me survey and the Thoughtexchange Process.
 - c. **Department Newsletters** – Internal department newsletters are published to provide current information on division-wide items with positive results such as the monthly DLT News and Monthly School News.

- d. Increased Visibility of Senior Administration – Senior administration visit schools across the division on a regular basis to keep apprised of any issues or concerns as well as provides one-to-one assistance to school administration when needed. Other communications include a monthly message from the Superintendent to all staff in the DLT News; and increased attendance at school events and planned classroom visits by senior administrators. Divisional public and internal events calendars will continue to be updated to keep ESC staff and the Board of Trustees apprised of upcoming school celebrations including those of special interest ie Education Week Activities.
 - e. Office 365 – Increase the usage of this platform that is enabled over the internet (cloud services) and which greatly assists in the collaboration between staff when working on office documentation of mutual interest.
 - f. Department Communications Plans - The Communications Manager will review strategies under departments' current communications plans to ensure that both internal and external stakeholders are kept informed about matters of mutual interest in a timely manner.
2. **Division and school based communications**
- a. School Communications Representatives - Although schools have identified a staff member to be responsible for regular communications with their local media as well as to coordinate with their colleagues for promotion about their school, the Communications Manager will continue to provide additional support when needed including individual assistance and training sessions when required.
 - b. School Communications Plans – As part of the division's communications strategies and School Continuous Improvement Plan (SCIP), schools have annual communications plans to assist them in meeting their objectives in fostering strong relationships with their internal as well as external stakeholders. During the 2015-16 school year a thorough review of all schools' communications plans was completed by the Communications Manager with each school administrator and/or their school based communications team. These meetings included information about internal and external communications strategies as well as a review of school websites.
 - i. For the 2016-17 year, the Communications Manager will work with schools on the sharing of best practices, using more effective tools and assisting them in the promotion and application of current information updated on their website. School Communications Plans are essential in assisting schools in effectively promoting their events and celebrations and keeping communications simple by using a clear and concise style for all general news materials.
 - c. Promotional Materials – School based communications representatives have the responsibility for promoting their school's individual events and celebrations to their local stakeholders. The Communications Manager highlights schools' events and divisional celebrations on a more global scale for promotional purposes for the entire division. To continue to be effective, it is essential that schools continue to inform the Communications Manager of celebratory events and provide an annual collection of student photographs that showcase the great things happening in schools and classrooms.
 - d. Schools must immediately notify the Communications Manager on all matters that may result in inquiries for information, both internally as well as externally, on events that have occurred or may occur, affecting GYPSD students, staff, property or reputation and be guided by same.
 - e. School Websites – Focus will continue to be on training and strategies for schools to ensure their school sites are kept current and of interest to stakeholders.
3. **Use of new media** The goal of this strategy is to increase communications with parents and community members by targeting those who rely on the internet for information and social contacts. The primary objective of online activity is to point users to the Grande Yellowhead website.
- a. Facebook –This social media platform continues to be the focus for the division while more schools begin to develop their own individual school pages. The development

and/or monitoring of them will be a central part of their communications plans' conversation.

- b. **Research Various Social Media Applications** – There are a number of social media applications where the division could invest time and funds, but some may not be accessed by our stakeholders. The division will continue to investigate the addition of social media tools that are relevant to the majority of our potential users for future consideration.
 - c. **Professional Collaboration** – Along with research of social media popularity, discussions will continue with other similar geographic and demographic educational institutions on the successes of their social media platforms.
 - d. **Monitor Social Media Administrative Procedures** – Some schools in the division have developed a presence on Facebook. As representatives of Grande Yellowhead, it is essential that the guidelines on social media protocols are adhered to ensure that a consistent and uniform framework is followed. This includes monitoring of pages associated to the school but currently administered by other users ie School Council pages affiliated with a school. The Communications Manager will continue to work with schools to ensure the successful implementation and management of their use of social media platforms.
4. **Communications Topics and Timelines** Over the last several years, the division has developed various promotional and informative documents for internal and external use. These documents will be continue to be monitored on a regular basis to ensure that they continue to be effective and relevant for our stakeholders including the publication of the annual Community Report, divisional calendar, and other current marketing strategies.
5. **Fostering Strong Public Relations** Building and maintaining strong relationships with our local media and business/community partners is crucial in establishing a positive media relations program to enhance the division's image on local and provincial levels.
- a. **Media Coverage** – An analysis of the current media coverage of school vs. divisional news in the local media of each community across the division is monitored to review any strategic shifts or amendments that may be needed to individual communications plans to maximize awareness and support of the division and its public schools.
 - b. **One on One Story Development** – Collaboration between the division, schools and local media groups will continue to promote positive, newsworthy stories going on within the division.
 - c. **Sharing of Timely and Relevant Information** – Key messages from Public Board meetings, press releases, briefings and photo opportunities will continue to be made available on a timely and relevant basis. The department will also utilize effective operational practices to provide good customer service; increased efficiency and quality print materials.
 - d. **Special Project Updates** – Key projects of public interest such as updates on major capital projects will be posted on a regular basis on the division's website as well as the division's Facebook page.
 - e. **School Websites** – GYPSD schools' websites are used to provide a consistent and up-to-date method to engage their communities through the use of this communications tool. The Communications Manager will work with individual schools to ensure that school websites are kept up to date with current information.
 - f. **Personal Customer Service** – The Communications Manager liaises with media and other community organizations in each community on a regular basis to keep informed of any issues or concerns, as well as provide assistance in building strong relationships between local media and schools.
6. **Student Voice** The Board of Trustees fully supports activities and events that provide opportunities to engage with their students from across the division. These include participation in the annual GYPSD Youth Symposiums and surveys such as Thoughtexchange and Tell Them from Me. Additional avenues to encourage student engagement with the Board and

administration continue to be explored such as participation on a Superintendent Advisory Committee, student trustees, invitations to external events with Board members, encouragement of sharing of student voice at Public Board meetings.

- Promotion of Trustees' Role as GYPSD Ambassadors** School Board Trustees have a unique opportunity to network with a diverse number of stakeholders throughout their communities as well as at provincial and national events. As part of the Board's Self Evaluation Process, trustees have identified the importance of taking a more active role in the promotion of possible alternate or unique learning opportunities and partnerships available such as expanding the program delivery model of the Registered Apprenticeship Program.

7. Internal Communications Strategies

Staff Meetings

Division Based – Annual Welcome Back events are held in each zone across the division during the last week before the school year begins. The event is hosted by the Board of Trustees who attends each zone meeting as well as representatives from senior administration. There are five zone meetings where all staff attend their work zone and are also provided alternate breakfast or lunch at the meetings. A separate Welcome Back meeting is also held for all transportation staff in the division as part of their annual back to school meeting. These Welcome Back celebrations also honour the division's staff who receives long service awards in the presence of their peers. This is also an opportunity for all staff to receive the same messages on the division's goals and direction for the upcoming school year: emphasized by both the Board Chair's annual address as well as the Superintendent of Schools.

Staff Open Dialogue Zone Meetings - The Board of Trustees meets with ATA and CUPE representatives in each zone on a regular basis to discuss matters of mutual interest and an important way to facilitate open and informal communication among staff. Two out of five zone meetings were held in the 2015-16 school year, and the balance will be held in the 2016-17 school year.

School Based - Each Grande Yellowhead school holds regular staff meetings to ensure that all staff members are aware of relevant information, both at the local and division level. Staff input in decision making is encouraged through open discussions about topics and questions brought to the meetings by school administration, staff members or divisional administration. In particular, school staff is encouraged to participate in the development of their *School's Continuous Improvement Plan (SCIP)*. Timelines for these meetings are set by individual schools at the beginning of the school year to suit the unique schedule of the school.

The scheduling, purpose and content of regular, school based staff meetings fit the goals of the school, as established by school staff and outlined in the school's communications plan. School principals, or their designate, chair the meetings.

Education Services Centre - General meetings for Education Services Centre (ESC) staff are scheduled once a month. The Assistant Superintendent – Business Services leads these meetings, reviewing highlights from the months past Board meetings, discussing any information or issues specific to the ESC, and taking questions from staff. In addition, health and safety issues or concerns are also addressed at these meetings.

School Based Secretarial Meetings - Secretarial staff meetings are held as required. Although secretaries are invited to send agenda items to the Director of Financial Services, meetings are designed to provide:

- Information about the division
- An opportunity to discuss any concerns that have arisen
- The opportunity to ask questions and make suggestions in regards to improving school division operations
- Professional development opportunities

Departmental Meetings - Division departments hold meetings at regular intervals to ensure that all staff is aware of decisions and events that affect them directly. While these meetings focus on the concerns, scheduling and operations of the specific department, they also provide an opportunity for divisional events and issues to be discussed. Meetings are scheduled and chaired by the supervisor of each department.

Leadership Council - Grande Yellowhead's Leadership Council, comprised of the Superintendent and department representatives, meets twice each month to exchange information and discuss issues of mutual interest or concern. These meetings provide an opportunity to receive feedback from colleagues and ensure that departments within the division are working towards common goals, with the knowledge and support of their colleagues. In addition, leadership forums are planned on a regular basis to give Leadership Council the opportunity to contribute to the division's long-term planning, with the assistance of guest speakers from Alberta Education or other relevant partners.

Division Leadership Team - The Division Leadership Team is comprised of Leadership Council members and School Principals. In support of the division's priority of leadership succession planning, assistant principals are also encouraged to attend meetings to foster succession planning and an increased understanding of the division's goals and objectives. The team meets monthly to discuss items of concern to schools, share best practices, make decisions and/or recommendations on issues raised by the Superintendent or Board of Trustees, and receive information about the strategic direction and activities of Grande Yellowhead.

Meetings alternate between the Education Services Centre in Edson and the Learning Services Centre in Hinton so that driving distances are shared. Each meeting begins with professional collaborative learning time for principals, who are divided into groups with peers whose schools educate similar grade levels.

Highlights from each meeting are distributed to principals and Leadership Council to share with staff in the form of the DLT News which ensures that all staff members have the opportunity to review the discussion topics and decisions made at DLT meetings and understand the direction of Grande Yellowhead through the administrative decisions made.

Documentation

In order to ensure that all staff members have the opportunity to access information about Grande Yellowhead that may impact their daily work, or that they may be interested in, the division has committed to documenting key decisions and making this documentation available to all staff. As far as possible this documentation is both circulated and archived electronically to encourage staff to limit the need for paper copies.

- Divisional planning documents and the minutes from meetings are posted on the division's website, Intranet portal and in DocuShare so that those individuals or groups who are involved are able to share information and track the progress of projects. Such documents include:
 - *Combined Annual Education Plan and Annual Education Results Report*
 - *AEP/ AERR Summary Review*
 - Agenda and highlights from DLT meetings
 - Agenda and minutes from Public Board meetings
 - PAT and Diploma Exam planning documentation and results reports
 - *Grande Yellowhead's Annual Communications Plan*
 - *Grande Yellowhead's Annual Community Report*
- Key messages from Board meetings are distributed to trustees, Leadership Council members, principals, assistant principals and school secretaries by email immediately following board meetings, who then forward the information to their staff, as well as to the local media and other external stakeholders such as government officials and organizations. The key messages are then posted on the Grande Yellowhead website, where they can be conveniently accessed. .

- Press releases are also distributed by email to trustees, Leadership Council members, principals, assistant principals and school secretaries to forward to staff in their buildings, at the same time that they are sent to the local media, to provide staff with an opportunity to review the information and pose any questions they may have, prior to the information appearing in the local newspapers or on the radio. Press releases are also posted on the Grande Yellowhead website.

Professional Development

Grande Yellowhead's professional development opportunities continue to build on the knowledge and skills of staff, in reflection of the division's three main areas of focus.

- **Improving student learning:** Professionals in specific areas are introduced to, discuss and develop strategies to enhance their contribution to this divisional goal.
- **Building Leadership Capacity and Succession Planning:** Employees learn and develop leadership skills by sharing areas of expertise with colleagues.
- **Improving Communications:** Grande Yellowhead's professional development, from formal in-service workshops to the work of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), has a strong communications component as the events foster collaboration between staff from different communities and employee groups.

Professional development is supported by the division both through time and funding; staff members can apply for leave of absences as well as suitable funding to support their growth. Furthermore, professional development provides a venue through which information about Grande Yellowhead and strategic planning can be shared with, and discussed among, staff.

The division endeavours to recognize and develop the skills of certificated staff that hold formal or informal leadership positions within the division by providing staff with an opportunity to develop their leadership skills. Participants develop their individual communications skills through their work in a variety of learning opportunities, and also gain an appreciation for the communications needs, challenges and initiatives of Grande Yellowhead. The Leadership Academy is an example of a valuable professional development opportunity that the Board fully supports.

First Nations, Metis, Inuit (Indigenous) Supports and Resources Program

Grande Yellowhead's Indigenous program publishes a variety of resources for students and staff across the division to highlight and promote the activities and curriculum components of the division's Indigenous program. Resources are produced by the Learning Services Supervisor with the assistance of Indigenous facilitators and teachers, and are also available on the Grande Yellowhead's website for public viewing.

The goals of the Indigenous resources are to:

- Ensure that stakeholders are aware of the services available to Indigenous students
- Increase the respect and cultural awareness of all Grande Yellowhead students
- Improve student learning by ensuring that Indigenous students, families and communities are accessing the services available, and finding education meaningful and important to their lives and future

Divisional Calendar

Grande Yellowhead publishes an annual school calendar that it distributes to staff, families, partners and stakeholders across the division at the beginning of each school year, and is used to promote the division at community, provincial and national events. The calendar showcases some of the activities, events and accomplishments of schools, students and staff, and includes relevant dates such as school holidays, staff institute, Board meetings and exam schedules.

The popularity of the calendar as a practical overview of the division's schedule continues to make it one of Grande Yellowhead's most popular communications tool. In order to maintain its effectiveness, the calendar is revised annually: new photographs, text, design and focus are paired with updated dates and scheduling information. Furthermore, the calendar supports the division's other programs, initiatives and



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priorities to make students, parents and staff familiar with educational terminology and the improvement efforts Grande Yellowhead is making in specific areas.

Grande Yellowhead Website (www.gypsd.ca)

In an effort to increase the use of Grande Yellowhead's website by external stakeholders, the web address is included on all divisional publications as the division recognizes the importance of the internet as a communications tool for providing relevant, timely information to staff. For example, press releases are added to the website on the day of distribution. In order to maximize use of the site, while limiting the division's environmental impact, both internal and external stakeholders are encouraged to use the site to obtain information about the division, rather than printed copies of documents being provided. This includes press releases, key messages from Board meetings, divisional policies and guidelines, information about upcoming events, and the divisional calendar.

Information specifically directed towards staff members is also available through the Grande Yellowhead website, including forms, contract information, employment opportunities and access to the Grande Yellowhead email system.

Grande Yellowhead's DocuShare system allows employees to share digital files from any computer linked to the Grande Yellowhead intranet. The system reduces the need for paper copies of student records, protecting student privacy and ensuring that both the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (FOIP) and the *Personal Information Protection Act* (PIPA) are respected.

Grande Yellowhead schools create school-specific sites that are accessible from www.gypsd.ca. Elements of school websites, such as the posting of School Continuous Improvement Plans which include Provincial Achievement Test and Diploma Exam results, are mandated as a division standard.

Grande Yellowhead also strives to create links to the division's website through the sites of community partners, such as local municipalities and real estate agents, recognizing that choosing a school is one of the primary concerns of new families in our communities. These links to Grande Yellowhead's website are reviewed and updated on an annual basis.

Staff Email

All Grande Yellowhead employees have email accounts which allow them to share information and digital files with other staff members. The calendar is also available to staff, as well as online chat rooms and other email capabilities. Xerox document centers have been linked to Grande Yellowhead's intranet to facilitate the ability to scan and email documents, increasing the efficiency of information sharing and storage across the division and decreasing the need for printed documents.

Videoconferencing

Videoconferencing has been implemented across the division to improve student learning by increasing the availability of courses at Grande Yellowhead schools. Furthermore, videoconferencing increases professional development opportunities and reduces the need for travel to administrative meetings. The popularity of this communications and educational medium has greatly increased as staff and students attend workshops and become increasingly experienced in its use.

Education Services Centre Showcase

To encourage staff pride in the division's schools, the Education Services Centre's front reception area includes a showcase for students and schools. Art work, newspaper articles, photographs and communications materials are provided by schools to display in cabinets on a rotating monthly schedule. The public reception area is stocked with current promotional materials to give visitors to Grande Yellowhead a sense of the division's priorities. Current news articles from across the division are also posted weekly in the public entrance area and school photographs are broadcast on a large monitor by the waiting area for guests to enjoy.

Picture Philosophy

All of GYPSD promotional material and communications tools endeavour to showcase GYPSD students participating in educational activities and celebrations. This also includes the printing of selected photos chosen from the annual divisional calendar that are hung in the reception area and Boardroom at the Education Services Centre. This 'picture philosophy' is a visual communications reminder to GYPSD staff and the Board, about our division's purpose and what is best for our students. The school photo that is chosen to be on the front cover of the calendar will also be printed by the Communications department and provided to the school.

8. External Communications Strategies

Media Relations

The local media (newspapers, radio and television) are an important partner of Grande Yellowhead, providing relevant, timely information to the division's communities regarding decisions, activities and concerns. Grande Yellowhead therefore strives to maintain a positive, cooperative relationship with local media representatives.

The local media is informed of school and board news through press releases, invitations to events, the availability of Board meeting packages prior to meeting dates, key messages from Board meetings, photographs and informal notifications. These avenues provide a low-cost means of communicating information to the public on a proactive, as well as reactive basis. In recognition of the use of provincial radio and television stations by some of Grande Yellowhead's stakeholders, the division also seeks to inform these media organizations about special events and unique features of the division. Opportunities to profile Grande Yellowhead provincially and nationally support the division's efforts to engage the broader community in public education.

The division responds to inquiries from the media in a timely fashion through the provision of documentation, information and interviews. The individual who has the information required may vary but media inquiries are handled by one individual, who responds, researches the information, or passes questions to the appropriate source. This streamlines communications activities, ensuring the consistency of messages and increasing the responsiveness of the division and individual schools.

At the Education Services Centre, inquiries are handled by the Communications Manager. The Communications Manager also provides guidance and support on communications concerns to divisional staff and administration when required. Inquiries directed towards specific schools are handled by the school principal, or their designate.

Monthly School News Columns

Schools submit a monthly synopsis of school events and activities to the Communications Manager who compiles the submissions into a monthly column. This initiative is targeted at Grande Yellowhead's emphasis on profiling individual schools in their communities. Ensuring that communities are aware of what is going on in their local schools, and providing an opportunity for schools to highlight their unique attributes and various accomplishments, are integral to building support for local schools.

Schools are encouraged to assign and schedule responsibility for the articles to different staff members as they provide unique, unexpected perspectives and insight that can be applied to other areas of the school's improvement process, such as School Continuous Improvement Plans (SCIP). To ensure that the time spent developing the columns is valuable schools are also encouraged to draw their submission from other text, such as their school's SCIP, and to use their submission in other publications, including their school newsletter.

Schools submit monthly news highlighting events in their buildings or can focus on division-wide topics provided on a set schedule. An upcoming monthly calendar of events is also included by each school.

Community Meetings

Grande Yellowhead's Board of Trustees hosts meetings with other political bodies, and community focus group meetings to ensure collaboration with community partners, and as required by the Board to address specific needs in local communities. Meetings may include:



Community Focus Group Meetings Grande Yellowhead hosts community focus group meetings, and/or round table discussions where Grande Yellowhead provides a question or discussion topic and requests that participants gather in small groups to provide input. The meetings also provide an opportunity for parents, community members and other external stakeholders to meet with divisional administration and trustees, participate in a question and answer period, and engage in informal discussions.

Council of School Councils' Meetings The Board hosts a joint meeting of the division's School Councils on a bi-annual basis in May; providing an opportunity for parents to meet with Board members to exchange valuable information on educational topics and to encourage the development of effective School Councils. The meetings encourage parents from different schools to work together on common issues and learn from one another. Representatives from the Alberta School Councils Association are also invited to these meetings to serve as a resource for schools as the division purchases a membership to the association on behalf of each school.

Indigenous Partnerships In order to strengthen relationships between the division and our Indigenous communities, the Board encourages informal gatherings with local Elders, community members, and Indigenous agencies to gather information from these important groups as to how they view education and success for their children. These gatherings assist the Board and individual schools to develop initiatives for the success of Aboriginal students. Community focus groups also help to address the needs of and honoring the gifts and talents of Indigenous learners in all communities by partnering together to develop strategies to embed Aboriginal culture and history in curriculum, establish a shared vision statement and develop an engagement strategy with the Indigenous communities to support dialogue and collaboration around the best interests of children and youth.

Meetings with Applicable Government Stakeholders Grande Yellowhead's Board of Trustees requests periodical meetings to discuss matters of divisional urgency and concern with applicable government stakeholders when situations arise. Divisional administration regularly meets with representatives of Alberta Education, Alberta Infrastructure and Alberta Transportation on various issues. In addition, the Board hosts meetings with local municipal and county councils, as well as provincial and federal elected representatives to discuss issues of mutual interest. These meetings provide elected representatives with opportunities to share information regarding strategic planning, with the goal of coordinating activities and ensuring that community needs are met with the limited public resources available.

Networking Opportunities and Events Administration along with Board members attend local events and meetings on a regular basis to interact with local community stakeholder groups about public education matters and the priorities of the division including attendance at local Rotary Club meetings, Business Support Networks and local Chamber of Commerce meetings. Division representatives also attend a diversity of job and recruitment fairs at post-secondary institutions as well as participate in a number of international education events for the recruitment of international students.

Attendance of school based staff and division based staff or trustees at local community events is also encouraged to promote division goals/priorities and encourage enrolment at local schools with the target audience of new families in communities.

Advertising

Grande Yellowhead advertises in specific media markets throughout the year. Advertising decisions are made as needs arise, and annual advertising is scheduled to allow for a more strategic use of advertising resources. Advertisements tied to particular themes throughout the year may include:

- Welcoming staff and students back to school (August, September)
- Announcing school bus schedules (August, September)
- World Teacher Day (October)

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- Substitute Appreciation Week
- Wishing communities a Merry Christmas (December)
- Teacher Appreciation Week (February)
- Announcing Kindergarten Registration (March, April)
- Education Week (April or May)
- Congratulating high school graduates (June, August, September)

Grande Yellowhead seeks to maximize the benefits of advertising by tying all advertisements to divisional themes and key messages. Individual departments and schools also advertise as their needs require including job postings, contract tendering and announcements of community interest.

Promotional Materials

Grande Yellowhead uses promotional materials to promote the division both internally, and at events outside the region. The Grande Yellowhead calendar has proven to be the most popular product produced by the division; other promotional items are used to thank volunteers and special guests, and to encourage people to think about Grande Yellowhead.

- Promotional materials are ordered by individual departments for specific events and departmental use, and through the communications department for more general activities.
- Schools also order materials which illustrate the school's logo and character. These materials are funded and used by schools for their specific promotional activities.

Community Ambassadors

Grande Yellowhead collaborates with community ambassadors to create a positive first impression of the division and local schools for visitors and new residents. This collaboration is reflected in links and information found on partner websites, printed information distributed by local organizations, the knowledge about Grande Yellowhead held and shared by individuals when speaking about schools, the division and specific programs, and through other communications channels used by partner organizations.

Community ambassadors include:

- Realtors
- Welcome Wagon/Hinton Hospitality representatives
- Local tourism centres and operators
- Local municipality staff
- Grande Yellowhead trustees, staff, parents and students, whose knowledge and experience with the division make these individuals Grande Yellowhead's most important advocates

Increasing the knowledge and pride of Grande Yellowhead's ambassadors regarding the division will continue to be a goal of Grande Yellowhead, and new opportunities will continue to be sought to establish connections with current and potential community partners.

Special Publications

Grande Yellowhead develops materials as required to highlight specific projects or to target specific audiences. Examples of such publications include:

- Student Support Services brochure for community information
- International Education student recruitment letters and brochures for international agents and potential students
- Grande Yellowhead's trade show display board, used to highlight the division at special events and conferences
- Brochure packages introducing Grande Yellowhead with promotional materials for staff recruitment
- Threat Assessment brochures to provide families with fair notice regarding the division's Threat Assessment Policy
- Develop School Information brochures with similar design and format to hand out to external stakeholders
- Kindergarten brochure A division French Immersion brochure will be designed and published

School Board Trusteeship Election Communications Supports

Every four (4) years Grande Yellowhead conducts **School Board Elections**, along with **Special Elections** if an elected position needs to be filled between elections. GYPSD is comprised of seven (7) elected members by **eligible voters**. The Alberta School Act and Local Authorities Election Act outline the eligibility to vote in School Board Elections.

With the assistance of resources provided by the Alberta School Boards' Association, the Communications Manager collaborates with the Assistant Superintendent-Business Services in raising awareness of upcoming school board elections with the focus on four objectives:

1. To ensure that interested parties have access to the most current information and resources about school board trusteeship. These supports may include public advertisements of upcoming information sessions and candidate handbooks about GYPSD;
2. To communicate the roles and responsibilities of the School Board Trustee and the rules of eligibility;
3. To promote the elections and support opportunities for more people to run and be active in public education matters; and,
4. To encourage more people to vote.

9. School Based Communications

The improvement of school-based communications continues to be a focus of Grande Yellowhead's communications activities as local schools are the only direct contact many families and community members have with public education. In reflection of the importance of school-based communications, and the progress that Grande Yellowhead has made in improving communications at the division level, the division has delineated the responsibilities of divisional and school based communications.

Schools have identified a number of specific needs that effective communications can assist in addressing. Among these is the important role that effective communications with local families can play in sustaining small schools. A key component to the success of this focus is helping school staff understand the importance and role of strong, effective communications with stakeholders both within and beyond their school and community.

School-based Communications Contacts

All schools have been encouraged to identify a staff member responsible for regular communications with the local media and to coordinate with their colleagues to promote the school. This does not change the responsibilities of the School Principal for being the school's spokesperson, particularly in emergency situations. In order to build the capacity of these individuals the division will provide opportunities for staff to learn about the division's approach to communications, as well as strategies for successful community engagement. Furthermore, the division will develop a repository of resources for schools that will include examples of communications documents, outlines for communications planning and media contact information.

School Communications Plans

Grande Yellowhead schools must annually review their individual Communications Plan to outline their goals, objectives and planned activities. These plans do not require schools to make significant changes to their daily activities but encourage schools to be more strategic and efficient in their communications. Developing and updating their plans assists school staff in identifying specific challenges faced by their school, and setting a strategic direction for school based communications that will allow them to work together to address these challenges. School based communications plans align with the division's plan: schools are encouraged to focus their communications plans, goals and strategies on the guiding principles and key messages of the division.

The Communications Manager serves a supporting role during the creation and maintenance of school communications plans:

- Providing information and feedback throughout the development and subsequent updates;
- Answering any questions that arise from school staff or administration; and
- Upon request, attending planning meetings to assist staff with their plan, or specific strategies and activities.

One area of focus in regards to the communications activities of schools is increasing the contact between schools and local newspapers and radio stations. Schools are encouraged to forward their school's newsletters to the local media, in addition to the monthly *School News* circulated divisionally.

10. Divisional Projects with Communications Component

INDIGENOUS Program

Grande Yellowhead strives to promote Indigenous culture for all students across the division through special events, art projects and leadership activities. Part of this initiative is aimed at encouraging Indigenous students to identify with and increase their pride of their history and culture. A self-identification brochure is made available to students at all schools. A key priority for the division's *Annual Education Plan* is increasing the graduation rates of Indigenous students; strategies for which focus on self identification and cultural programming.

Job and Recruitment Fairs at Post-Secondary Institutions

Representatives from the Division regularly attend job fairs at a number of post-secondary institutions throughout Alberta for education students that may be interested in a career at Grande Yellowhead upon graduation, as well as Division representatives may participate in other fairs across Canada when required for the recruitment of French Immersion teachers. Marketing information about the Division is prepared by the Communications Department as well as Human Resources for these valuable events.

International Education Program

Grande Yellowhead has actively promoted its International Student Program for a number of years and has established a part-time administrator to coordinate the program and to promote Grande Yellowhead internationally. A number of documents have been developed to support this process, Grande Yellowhead high schools advertise in a Canadian International Student Program publication which is circulated to Canadian Education Centres around the world, and division representatives may attend International Agents Fairs to highlight the programs and services offered by Grande Yellowhead schools.

Grande Yellowhead believes that a divisional approach will ensure that international student recruitment benefits all schools, both through the cultural contributions made by international students to their host school and family, and the financial benefits of an efficient and successful recruitment program.

Government of Alberta Accountability Pillar Surveys

Grande Yellowhead has identified the Alberta Education Accountability Pillar Surveys as one tool through which the division can measure its strategies and programs, both at the school and division levels. The focus of improving the division's survey results is, first and foremost, to ensure that the division and individual schools are striving to meet the needs of students, staff and parents in each of the areas surveyed. The second focus is to ensure that those answering the surveys are aware of the importance of their participation, understand the questions being asked, and are cognisant of the programs and services offered at the school they are being surveyed about.

Communications plays a key role both in the division's focus on ensuring that the surveys provide an accurate gauge of the division and individual schools, and improving the results of these surveys. Information about the importance of the surveys and its purpose is provided to parents through school newsletters, divisional promotional material, the division's and schools' websites, and the local media. These same avenues are used to highlight the results of the surveys, and efforts being made at both the division and school levels to address any concerns identified.

Emergency Preparedness

As part of Grande Yellowhead's commitment to providing a safe and caring learning environment for all students, the division has an emergency preparedness plan to address pandemic preparation, threat



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assessment and the range of other possible situations that schools and the division must be prepared to handle efficiently, and effectively.

Communications plays a large role in the success of this initiative as the primary focus of the plan is preventing emergencies from developing. Both the prevention and reactionary elements of the plan require the support and involvement of staff, students and parents in order to be successful. For example, Grande Yellowhead developed a comprehensive plan to reduce the impact of an expected pandemic influenza. In order to ensure the success of this plan, communications strategies must be in place to ensure that students, parents and staff are aware of the division's plans to prevent and respond in the event of a pandemic influenza. In all emergency or crisis situations, the Communications Manager must be immediately informed, along with the Superintendent of Schools and the Division's Incident Commander, of what has/or is transpiring.

Occupational Health and Safety

An Occupational Health and Safety Committee, representing the range of employee groups and breadth of the division, revised Grande Yellowhead's health and safety program to ensure compliance with provincial OH&S legislation and guidelines. The committee regularly reviews policies and procedures regarding the health and safety of staff and has implemented an on-line compliance program for reporting employee incidents, hazard reporting and monitoring on-line safety training. The review and implementation of OH&S standards and guidelines requires effective, ongoing communications with staff to ensure that all aspects of OH&S are addressed, and to ensure that staff understand their roles and responsibilities regarding both their personal and their colleagues' health and safety.

11. Communications Protocols

Releasing Information

Whenever possible, information provided to Grande Yellowhead's external stakeholders is first made available to internal stakeholders. For example, key messages from Board Meetings are simultaneously emailed to the local media, the division's Leadership Council, trustees, principals, assistant principals and school secretaries. When sensitive issues are being dealt with by the division, and communicated with stakeholders, effort is made to ensure that trustees and administration who are directly involved with the topic in question are made aware of the issue, consulted and advised as to how the situation is being handled.

Event Protocol

In reflecting the importance Grande Yellowhead places on healthy relationships with its partners and stakeholders it is important that established protocols are followed when organizing and hosting events across the division. Protocol guidelines for the organization and hosting of special events are outlined in *Administrative Procedure 155: Event Protocol*. AP 155 outlines the procedures for inviting and receiving special guests at events, including trustees, other politicians, divisional administration and local organizations who have been involved in the project being recognized by the event. The AP also outlines the protocol for inviting local trustees to school events or celebrations. The Communications Manager develops or consults staff to establish agendas, organize events, invite special guests and promote events at both the school and divisional levels.

Involvement of Families in School Events

In recognition of the importance of the partnership between parents and education, families are invited to participate in events both at the school and divisional level through existing communications strategies including school newsletters, calendars, day planners, personal invitations and other means individual schools develop, or through public communications channels. In particular, when a student will receive recognition at an event school staff contacts the child's family directly, in whatever form deemed most appropriate, to encourage their attendance.

12. Crisis Communications

Grande Yellowhead Public School Division

Grande Yellowhead Public School Division has developed a comprehensive emergency preparedness plan to address possible emergency situations that could arise and to provide strategies for dealing with such situations in order to protect the safety of students and staff, and to secure division property in the case of a crisis. Crisis communications is outlined in detail by the division's *Emergency Preparedness Plan* and Administrative Procedures 130 and 131.

Grande Yellowhead's Threat Assessment Policy requires schools to undertake a threat assessment in all situations where students make a threat to harm themselves or others. Threats may be, but are not limited to, verbal, written, gestures or internet postings. The purpose of the policy is to determine how best to support students considered at risk so that their behaviour does not become hurtful or destructive to themselves or others. A significant aspect of this policy is communications. Students, parents and staff must be given fair notice of the policy and provided with relevant, timely information if any threatening behaviour is observed. The division has developed a brochure outlining the Threat Assessment Policy that is provided to all new families upon registration, including kindergarten and grade one students.

Grande Yellowhead works closely with its municipal partners including the local police detachments to coordinate responses and communications activities during crisis situations. Where provincial legislation dictates, the school division will follow the lead of the related municipal government and their policies.

13. Media Requests

The Communications Manager handles all media requests brought to the Education Service Centre to ensure consistency and timely responses. Likewise, principals handle all media inquiries at their school.

FOIP and Release of Student Information to the Media

In order to efficiently facilitate the use of student photographs, artwork and personal information for the promotion of the division and individual schools, a FOIP release is included in the annual student registration form at each Grande Yellowhead school. A signature on the form indicates that the parent has given permission for their child's image and name to be published as part of regular board operations; forms which are not signed do not give permission.

Given the increased use of digital media by the division, individual schools and the division's key stakeholders the annual student registration form now includes permission for digital and social media. The expansion of the release followed consultation with schools and parents by the Assistant Superintendent-Business Services, the division's FOIP Coordinator.

Photos taken by the media require a separate FOIP form for each photograph which states when the photo was taken and what the photo will be used for, unless the photos are taken at a public event, defined as an event to which members of the community are invited. This does not allow a school to release the names of students to media or the public merely that the taking of the picture is outside of division control. Administrative Procedures 150 and 180 provide clarification on FOIP.

Requests for interviews, filming or photographing students or staff

Interviews with students are not conducted without first obtaining the permission of the student, if they are defined as an "independent student" by Section One of the *Alberta School Act*, or the students' parent or guardian, and ensuring they are aware of the content of the interview. Media requests are not forwarded to the student, but rather, facilitated by the Communications Manager or principal who seeks permission and arranges for the student or their family to contact the requesting media.

Likewise, media requests are not forwarded to staff, but rather, facilitated by the Communications Manager or principal who brief the staff member and arrange for the staff member to contact the requesting media.

14. Addressing Concerns

Concerns brought to the attention of the division are addressed efficiently by the appropriate individuals. Decisions and resolutions are best completed at the source of where the concern emanates. Thus,



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external stakeholders are required to take their concerns to the appropriate staff member yet are encouraged to seek further assistance if they feel that their concerns were not adequately addressed or if they are uncomfortable speaking to a particular individual.

Concerns are confidentially dealt with the goal of seeking the most favourable result for all involved. This requires the concern to be dealt with at the level where resolution can be reached. For example, if a concern regarding a classroom issue is brought to a school principal, the principal ensures that the individual has first sought a resolution with the classroom teacher involved. Likewise, if a school-based issue is raised with a member of the Superintendent's team or with a trustee, the individual is asked if they have discussed their concern with the school principal. Furthermore, this approach ensures that the Superintendent, trustees and others who may be involved in an appeal process are not compromised by receiving too much information prior to an appeal being requested.

These procedures are established to foster amicable relationships and should not dissuade either internal or external stakeholders from communicating with the Board or individual trustees. To meet the responsibility of trusteeship, trustees must effectively interact with many groups who have an interest in education. Grande Yellowhead wishes to ensure that all parties sincerely feel that their concerns and wishes will be heard and informed of subsequent actions in a timely and consistent manner. Prior to the Board making any decision on an issue or concern, all feedback is considered and evaluated.

15. Evaluation

Feedback regarding Grande Yellowhead's communications activities is encouraged and evaluated on an ongoing basis to ensure the continuous improvement of the division. The Alberta Education Accountability Pillar Surveys provide some quantitative data; community members and staff are also surveyed directly by the division to determine if communications between Grande Yellowhead staff, administration, trustees and external stakeholders is improving. Less formal information, including anecdotal feedback, is also gathered at community focus group meetings, during the school review process and through other appropriate channels.

16. Conclusion

Grande Yellowhead Public School Division has worked diligently in the last several years to see significant improvement across the division in terms of student achievement and student, parent and staff satisfaction. Communications plays an integral role in these improvement efforts as the division believes that clear, consistent communications with both internal and external stakeholders is critical to ensure that the division is connected with the communities it serves, and therefore able to meet the needs of students and their families.

Part of this communications focus reflects the division's belief in public education, and desire to celebrate the work and accomplishments of the division's students and staff to ensure that current and potential students know what Grande Yellowhead schools offer. This pride must be shared with Grande Yellowhead's stakeholders, both internal and external:

- Students should be proud to attend their school, and be confident that they are receiving an education that will prepare them for current and future success;
- Parents with young children and families new to our region should be informed about Grande Yellowhead and the division's schools;
- Staff across the division should be aware of the practices and accomplishments of their colleagues; and
- Parents and community members should share the division's confidence that Grande Yellowhead is working with them to provide a world class education to all students, within small, rural communities.

To continue to improve, opportunities must be available for all of the division's stakeholders to share their ideas and concerns openly and honestly. Healthy communications is integral to sound decision making across the division and for continued improvement and growth. To this end, the Board of Trustees, administration, staff and students are committed to increasing and enhancing the communications between and among all of the division's stakeholders.

Communications Events and Timelines

August

- Welcome Back
 - Registration Ads, include Bus Routes (divisional)
 - Zone celebrations with staff including long service recognition awards
 - School-based events - invite parents and community
- Bus safety
 - School-based events - invite parents and community
 - Newspaper sections (some communities) - contribute art and writing
- Promotion of INDIGENOUS programs and self identification
 - Information from Learning Services: include in newsletter and registration packages
- Divisional information for staff (*begin, carry through September*)
- Schools' Monthly Event Calendar updated on School Website

September

- Superintendent's Address
- International Literacy Day
 - School-based events - invite parents and community
- Graduation (Harry Collinge High School, Grand Trunk High School)
 - Local media recognition (school based & divisional)
 - Newspaper photos of graduates (school based)
 - School-based events - invite parents and community
- Schools' Monthly Event Calendar updated on School Website

October

- World Teacher Day
 - Local media recognition (divisional)
 - School-based staff appreciation events - invite parents and community
- Thanksgiving
 - Newspaper sections (some communities) - contribute art and writing
- Halloween (Oct 31)
 - Safety Ad (school based)
 - Newspaper sections (some communities) - contribute art and writing
- Schools' Monthly Event Calendar updated on School Website

November

- Take Your Child to Work Day
 - School-based events - invite parents and community businesses to participate
- Remembrance Day (Nov 11)
 - Local media recognition (school based)
 - School-based events - invite parents and community
- National Anti-Bullying Week (Nov. 17-25) – Divisional and School Based
- Schools' Monthly Event Calendar updated on School Website
- Edson Schools' Bully Free Ad Campaigns

December

- Christmas
 - Local media recognition (divisional)
 - School-based events - invite parents and community
 - Newspaper sections (some communities) - contribute art and writing
 - Schools' Monthly Event Calendar updated on School Website
-
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January

- New Year
 - Superintendent's Address
 - School-based events - invite parents and community
 - Newspaper sections (some communities) - contribute art and writing
- Community Report Review
 - Photos and information from schools; information from LC
- Schools' Monthly Event Calendar updated on School Website

February

- Family Day
 - School-based events - invite parents and community
 - Newspaper sections (some communities) - contribute art and writing
- National Flag of Canada Day
 - School-based events - invite parents and community
- Schools' Monthly Event Calendar updated on School Website
- Teacher Appreciation Week
- End of Month/ Beginning of March
 - Community Report Published
 - Hard copies distributed to external and internal stakeholders
 - Posted on division's website

March

- Journée internationale de la Francophonie
 - School-based events - invite parents and community
- Substitute Teacher Appreciation
- Kindergarten Registration (*begin, carry through April*)
 - Local media recognition (divisional)
 - School-based open house and registration events
 - Showcase program and student achievement (school-based and divisionally)
- Schools' Monthly Event Calendar updated on School Website

April

- Education Week
 - Local media recognition (divisional and school-based)
 - School-based events - invite parents and community
 - Newspaper sections (some communities) - contribute art and writing
- Schools' Monthly Event Calendar updated on School Website
- Administrative Professionals Week
 - Local media recognition (divisional and/or school-based)
 - School-based staff appreciation events - invite parents and community
- Volunteer Appreciation
 - Local media recognition (divisional and/or school-based)
 - Teas or other events - invite volunteer parents, community and business sponsors
- Easter
 - School-based events - invite parents and community
 - Newspaper sections (some communities) - contribute art and writing
- Yellowhead Rotary Arts Festival
 - Local media recognition (school based)
 - Schools: showcase student and staff participation
 - Division: encourage student and staff participation

May

- Mother's Day
 - School-based events - invite mothers

- Newspaper sections (some communities) - contribute art and writing
- Community Directories (*begin, carry through June*)
 - Local media recognition (divisional)
- Graduation (Jasper Jr/Sr High School/ TLC in applicable communities)
 - Local media recognition (divisional and school-based)
 - Newspaper photos of graduates (school based)
 - School-based events - invite parents and community
- Division Calendar (*begin, carry through June*)
 - Photos from schools
 - Various collection of information
- Schools' Monthly Event Calendar updated on School Website

June

- School wrap up
 - School-based events - invite parents and community
- Father's Day
 - School-based events - invite fathers
 - Newspaper sections (some communities) - contribute art and writing
- Retirement
 - Grande Yellowhead retirement celebration
 - School-based events - invite parents and community to recognize staff retirements
- Year in Review
 - School-based publications - share with families, community partners and media
- Graduation (Parkland Composite High School, Grande Cache Community High School)
 - Local media recognition (divisional and school based)
 - Newspaper photos of graduates (school based)
 - School-based events - invite parents and community
- Schools' Monthly Event Calendar updated on School Website
- National Aboriginal Day

July

- Summer school ads (school based)
- Announce new staff placements for following year (divisional and school based)