

Item # 9

**Superintendent Report
December 18, 2024**

To: Board of Trustees, Grande Yellowhead Public School Division
From: Dr. Dennis Parsons, Superintendent of Schools/CEO
Subject: **Superintendent Report – November/December 2024**

RECOMMENDATION

That the Board of Trustees receive the Superintendent's Report as information.

REPORT

Governance Connection:

As per **Board Policy 12**, *Role of the Superintendent*, and the *Education Act*, the superintendent of schools is the chief executive officer of the board and chief education officer of the school authority.

Background:

The superintendent provides the board with information, advice, and support required for the fulfillment of its governance role, and reports to the Minister on all matters required of the superintendent as identified in Policy 12, legislation, and the competencies outlined in the *Superintendent Leadership Quality Standard (SLQS)*. *Quality superintendent leadership occurs when the superintendent's ongoing analysis of the context, and the superintendent's decisions about what leadership knowledge and abilities to apply, result in quality school leadership, quality teaching, and optimum learning for all students in the school authority.*

Key Information:

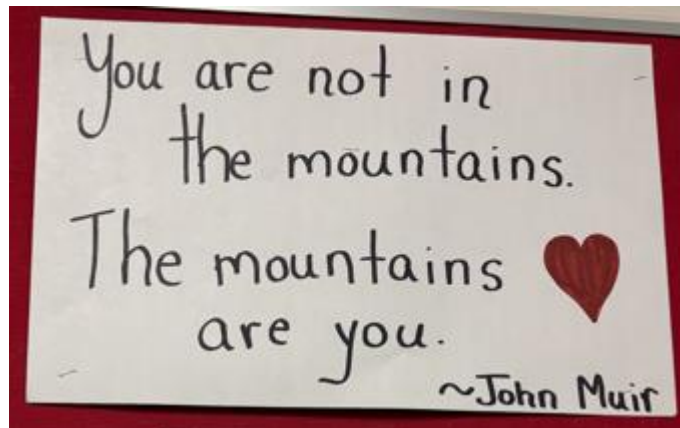
Since arriving in the division on September 15, 2024, and since assuming the position of Superintendent of Schools/CEO on October 1st, 2024, I have engaged with staff members in numerous engagements and activities on behalf of GYPSD. In an effort to bring some semblance of order to my diverse GYPSD activities and work engagements, I will report on my work through the competencies as stipulated within the Superintendent Leadership Quality Standards (SLQS).

Leadership Quality Standard 1 - Building Effective Relationships

As stated in my previous superintendent report to the Board, knowing the importance of building effective relationships, we have given **priority to meeting students and staff in the schools and in our central office area**. Most of these

interactions were in service to our core work of teaching and learning. For example, on Thursday, November 21, 2024 (the day after our last Board meeting), we began the day by engaging virtually in ELT meetings discussing data analysis and school continuous improvement plans (SCIP). The presentations were organized by systems enabling staff to see our strengths and our challenges from K - 12. On Friday, we were back in negotiations with our CUPE local. On Monday we completed our ELT SCIP presentations, debriefed the presentations, and prepared feedback for our ELT. On Tuesday, Nov 26, 2024, four staff members and I reviewed our Grande Cache G-02 process. I then held a meeting with our central office leadership team, and then there was a meeting with our Alberta Education Field Officer, Nicole McNally, where Carra, Dr. Harding and I reviewed with her our GYPSD Education Plan. Wednesday involved hosting a virtual meeting with our ELT members to answer questions arising from our November 20 Board Brief and providing an update on our CUPE negotiations. The next day, Thursday, was a meeting on reviewing a contract with one of my senior leadership team members, while Friday, November 29 revolved around signing off on a contract that had been verbally awarded and accepted before I arrived in the division.

The week of December 2, 2024, was another week full of meetings in support of learning. Monday began with an exploratory discussion involving a neighbouring superintendent who had information to share regarding the possibility of accessing Collegiate School funding. This was followed with the team and I building contingency plans to contend with an uncertain learning environment. Tuesday, involved meetings with the central office leadership team and then off to Jasper for a meeting with the Board of Trustees. On Wednesday, the trustees and I toured the fire devastated areas of Jasper, held meetings with school admin teams, and I toured both schools with school administrators. It was heartbreaking to see the devastated areas of Jasper again, but also inspiring to see how staff were working to make the best of a bad situation. On Thursday and Friday, I was back in the office meeting with another member of my senior leadership team and following up on items that needed attention.



The week of December 9th came with a variety of engagements. Monday morning involved a second meeting further exploring the various elements of a possible Collegiate School application initiative. Tuesday, had me back meeting with my senior leadership team and opening up conversation around how we might transparently dedicate our central office in the spirit of service to students and staff. Wednesday morning commenced with an agenda planning meeting involving

trustees and staff. The afternoon brought forth a meeting exploring how we can engage more fully with municipalities on common issues of concern and how we might better service one of our schools experiencing busing issues.

As I write this report, I am cognizant that tomorrow morning will bring together the Superintendent's Youth Council in a meeting at Parkland Composite High School. Youth from across our division will come together with their teacher advisors to discuss issues of concern to them. Yet, another important meeting. One designed to empower young people through the potential arising from building effective relationships and through the work of teaching and learning.



The various meetings and school tours detailed above make possible a clearer understanding of our strengths and a deeper understanding of our challenges. More importantly, the many school visits and numerous meetings afforded multiple opportunities to meet and speak with staff and facilitated the process of building effective relationships through the work.

Leadership Quality Standard 2 - Modeling Commitment to Professional Learning

Living out this competency through the office of superintendent can mean different things depending on one's context. However, to me it means engaging in career-long professional learning, being critically reflective, and acting on research-informed opportunities for enhancing leadership, teaching, and learning. Modeling these beliefs through conversations and through actions conveys to others my commitment to professional learning.

While relatively new with GYPSD I have already had conversations with division staff members regarding their professional learning journey and have approved for others their request to conduct research within our school division.

In the same way we expect our doctors to remain current, parents can rightfully expect teachers will act to remain current. That is why participation in PD through organizations like the College of Alberta School Superintendents (CASS) and through university course work is so crucial. The opportunities to participate in professional learning, network with others, and to dialogue on educational issues are crucial to professional growth and to staying current.

Leadership Quality Standard 3 - Visionary Leadership

Under the competency of Visionary Leadership, a superintendent is expected to, *“engage with the school community in implementing a vision of a preferred future for student success based on common values and beliefs.”*

In my short time with GYPSD, I have spent the majority of my time engaged, as detailed above, meeting people with the goal of seeking to understand the work they do and their vision for student success. In the process, I have used the opportunity to promote across our division a shared understanding of and support for our GYPSD goals, priorities, and strategic initiatives. While there is a desired state, as articulated in the GYPSD Education Plan, we also know, based on our AERR, that work is needed to realize the level of student success we want for our students. To this end, I have given time and space to focusing on “learning is the work,” on our processes that support learning, on building trust, empowering staff, and on building common understandings across our leadership team. In reality, a strong and vibrant school division is not many different boats going in multiple directions, but rather coming to know and understand we are in a boat we built traveling in an agreed upon direction. Thus, we must be clear on our vision, know our course, and be fastidious in our commitment to committing our time, energy, and resources to achieving it.

Leadership Quality Standard 4 - Leading Learning

Under this competency, *“A superintendent establishes and sustains a learning culture in the school community that promotes ongoing critical reflection on practices, shared responsibilities for student success and continuous improvement.”*

In this, my third report to the Board, I will reiterate with respect to leading learning my belief that the ongoing school visits/tours, the leadership team meetings, the many conversations with staff/students, and the review of processes in support of learning have been geared towards understanding our division, inclusive of our strengths and challenges. With understanding comes an increased ability to support our staff and to help build capacity in our administrators and staff for the purpose of fulfilling their educational roles. One major aspect of our shared learning responsibility, and my responsibility in terms of leading learning, is to ensure that all instruction in our school authority addresses learning outcomes and individual learning needs.



Recently, the staff and I worked with our schools on their School Continuous Improvement Plan (SCIP). At one point in the process, we felt there was a need to clarify both process and expectations

surrounding their SCIP. Consequently, we issued the following one pager to help provide focus with respect to GYPSD process and expectations:

Our SCIP

As educators, our core purpose is to ensure our students succeed in their learning journey. High-quality teaching includes a deep understanding of the curriculum, a deep knowledge of the learners in their class, and a comprehensive range of instructional approaches to engage students in a safe and welcoming space. The evidence teachers collect to assess the impact of their decisions on student learning informs their next steps. The commitment to reflecting on their impact on improving student learning is at the heart of effective teacher practice.

School leaders build capacity and make commitments through learning-orientated improvement. They ensure that every student in their building has effective practitioners to guarantee their learning. Leaders reflect on the evidence of student achievement, the impact of the actions taken to improve and ensure student learning, and the effectiveness of teacher practice.

The SCIP is a living plan that begins with the analysis of student learning and teacher practice to improve student achievement based on evidence. Student learning and achievement must be the central foci of school improvement. The fall Assurance Measures' results and the early screening data identify where students are not succeeding and/or are at risk. Why are they at risk or struggling? Identifying the gap(s) is not enough: educators need to determine why the gap(s) exist. Once the why is known, the team must build a plan to address the gap(s). The plan requires clear goals to improve student learning and clear expectations on what and how educators will address the cause of the learning gap(s). In short, a SCIP includes:

- *specific data/evidence-informed area(s) where students are not demonstrating understanding;*
- *cause analysis to determine why the students are not achieving understanding;*
- *high-quality teacher strategies that will address the gap(s) in learning;*

- *specific evidence to measure and assess the impact of the strategies; and,*
- *timeline of implementation, monitoring, evaluation, reflection, adaptation, and reiteration which is a continuous improvement cycle.*

SCIP Requirements include 1-3 specific goals that the school will embrace to improve student learning and achievement that address the five bullet points.

Leadership Quality Standard 5 - Ensuring First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Education for All Students.

Under this competency, a superintendent, *“establishes the structures and provides the resources necessary for the school community to acquire and apply foundational knowledge about First Nations, Metis, and Inuit for the benefit of all students.”*

While I did not establish the structures within GYPSD, in my short tenure I have witnessed that structures are in place to support building out this competency within our division. To this point, I provided several examples in a previous report illustrative of how we are living out this competency within GYPSD. Additionally, we can look to our PATs, DIPs, and local measures to see areas of improvement for our First Nation, Metis, and Inuit students.

Leadership Quality Standard 6 - School Authority Operations and Resources

Under this competency, *“a superintendent directs school authority operations and strategically allocates resources in the interest of all students and in alignment with the school authority’s goals and priorities.”*

As stated in my previous report, I have placed priority on getting to know our people and our division. With a growing understanding of our strengths and our challenges, I have started to strategically allocate resources in the interest of all students and in alignment with our school authority’s goals and priorities. The steps taken have manifested in several different ways. For example, in our Jasper schools, due to the impacts of the fire, it has involved budgetary adjustments in order to live up to our promise of staffing both schools based on projected enrollments and not on actual student count. In another instance, I have taken steps to ensure equity in resource distribution and equity in educational opportunities. Currently, this has translated into budgetary adjustments, additional staffing, and reconfiguration in staffing assignments for one or more schools.

From an operations perspective, two of our schools (Ecole Pine Grove Middle School and Parkland Composite High School) ran a Mock simulation this past week on dealing with an emergency response situation. The simulation, ran in

partnership with the RCMP and other first responders involved an intruder in the building and was designed to test first responder readiness, systems readiness and communications. The exercise revealed strengths and challenges that will be discussed and evaluated over the coming days.



Of course, we are now experiencing the ups and downs of our Winter season. Consequently, our Facilities Director, Mr. Brian Orge, and our facilities team have been working non-stop to repair or replace any defective equipment so we can maintain a comfortable learning environment for all students and staff. Work in the area of operations and Resources is obviously ongoing. To this end, I have a great team to help with the work. Over the weeks and months ahead, we will work to fully ensure that GYPSD operations and our resources are aligned and working in the best interest of GYPSD students and staff.

Leadership Quality Standard 7 - Supporting Effective Governance

In a previous report to the Board, I detailed my initial work and the work of senior staff in support of effective board governance. My report spoke of policy work, working with the corporate board through Committee of the Whole (COTW), and through our Public Board Meetings (PBM). It also detailed how governance work



involved supporting Chair Karpluk and the corporate board in provincial governance structures and gatherings like ASBA and PSBAA where there is opportunity to interact with the Minister and his staff in the hope of enriching the learning experience for students in GYPSD.

Since our last meeting, the work of supporting effective governance has continued. For example, on the financial

side of supporting governance, staff have been working with external auditors to undertake our GYPSD 2023 - 2024 financial audit. The audited financial report was presented and accepted at our previous public board meeting.

On another front, staff have been investigating the possible governance implications of the Municipal Affairs Statutes Amendment Act, 2024/Bill 20. In this regard, we have sought a legal opinion. Similarly, we have school Board elections upcoming next Fall, and staff are already doing the groundwork and preparing the needed motions for consideration by our GYPSD Board of Trustees. Some of these motions were debated at our November board meeting other motions will come forward during the December 18 Board meeting. All motions with respect to the next school Board election will be compliant with the new legislation - Bill 20.

In terms of new legislation, we are also following the new Bill 27 and the debate around it. The Alberta government has brought forward Bill 27, the Education Amendment Act, 2024. This legislation embodies significant changes in schools, including parental notification for pronoun use, opt-in requirements for instruction on human sexuality, gender identity, and approval from the Ministry of Education for third-party materials. This is legislation that will require considerable work to implement across GYPSD and our province.

In summary, it is easy to see the work of supporting effective governance involves simultaneously working on many fronts by many dedicated staff. The meetings and interactions are crucial to supporting effective governance. I want to thank the Board and my staff for their support. Without their support, this type of groundwork in support of effective governance and learning would not be possible.