

Item # 9

**Superintendent Report
January 29, 2025**

To: Board of Trustees, Grande Yellowhead Public School Division
From: Dr. Dennis Parsons, Interim Superintendent of Schools/CEO
Subject: **Superintendent Report - December/January 2025**

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 reports to the Board, knowing the importance of building effective relationships, I have endeavored to give priority to this competency. I believe it is well understood that effort put into building effective

relationships is effort in service to our core work—teaching and learning. Of course, we build effective relationships through our direct and indirect interactions with individuals, groups, and our greater education community. To this end, I have utilized part of our central office leadership meetings, both before and after the Christmas break, to have discussions with staff regarding our Central Office and changes we might like to see in the spirit of service to our education community and the general public. To date, these discussions have revolved around how:

- all parking spaces are marked private,
- there are no designated spaces for visitor parking,
- all doors are locked,
- there is no receptionist to greet visitors or the public,
- there is limited clerical support for senior staff, etc.

Once these internal discussions have run their course, a report with considerations/recommendations for change will be developed. Once developed, the report will be brought to the Board through the office of the superintendent. The Board will then have an opportunity to consider the report, discuss its recommendations, and hopefully consider approving for any recommended changes.

In a similar manner, there have been ongoing direct efforts to build effective relationships with members of our staff, parents, and with our greater education community. For example, on January 8th and 9th, with the help of a Mediator, we held two days of talks with CUPE in the hope of arriving at a mutually agreeable package, and in the process continue building our working relationship.



On January 14th, we arranged a virtual meeting with all principals to debrief our December Board meeting and collectively plan for upcoming events. On January 20th and 21st, we created space and time for all school leaders to present their School Continuous Improvement Plans (SCIP) to the Board and senior staff in Edson and Hinton. These presentations afforded a systems view to Trustees and resulted in rich dialogue around our strengths and our challenges. These insights should help inform future iterations of these plans and further

enable the advocacy work of the Board.

On Wednesday, January 22, 2025, I traveled to Hinton to join Trustee Caputo and approximately 50 other invited guests in a public presentation and tour by Mondi' Hinton Inc. The company, which is traded on the London Stock Exchange, announced how they are in the process of planning a huge expansion that will

impact the community and conceivably our schools in Hinton. Through their presentation and tour we got to meet Mondi's senior leadership team, members of the Chamber of Commerce, the Mayor of Hinton, along with other special guests. Together, over lunch we got to briefly discuss possible community impacts. In conversation with Glen Taylor (Mondi's Health, Safety, and Learning Manage) Trustee Caputo and I were informed we will be invited to future meetings to discuss, in more detail possible impacts specific to education.

Leadership Quality Standard 2 - Modeling Commitment to Professional Learning

Living out this competency can mean different things depending on one's context. However, from my perspective, 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 our commitment to professional learning.



I am pleased to report that, with the work of Assistant Superintendent Aschenmeire, the GYPSD Aspiring Leaders initiative has resumed. The cohort will meet on January 30th to continue building out their understanding of leadership and how their leadership as an administrator can positively impact student learning. We are very much looking forward to our upcoming discussion on Leadership with these aspiring leaders.

In keeping with my previous report, and conversations with division staff in support of their professional learning journey, I have a good news story to report. I was recently informed that one of our GYPSD staff members, who was shortlisted by the ATA, has been selected by the Canadian Teachers' Federation in Ottawa to be part of a team going to Ghana in July to provide professional development for teachers. For this teacher, working in Africa has been on her bucket list. Congratulations! As we know, opportunities to participate in professional learning, network with others, and dialogue on educational issues are all crucial elements to professional growth.

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 focus 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 steadfast in 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 regard, over the past weeks since our last meeting, a number of steps have been taken that will help with leading learning in our division and with keeping our focus on continuous improvement. One such step had me begin meetings with members of my senior team to review their work assignments, look at our structure, review work goals along with what staff might need in terms of support, and to see how our current staff assignments align with system needs and with our learning goals. While these meetings are far from completed, the discussions to date, while difficult at times have also been enlightening. I hope to report further on these continuing discussions in subsequent meetings with the Board of Trustees.

Another step with respect to leading learning involved a meeting on January 10th to explore the possibility of bringing a CASA classroom to GYPSD. Assistant Superintendent Aschenmeier and I held a meeting with provincial officials working with setting up CASA classrooms across Alberta. In a CASA classroom students receive individual and group therapy, psychiatric care, medication and schooling according to their individual needs. This care is provided by a team of mental health professionals, a specialized teacher, and support staff. Students remain in the program for approximately half the school year, followed by another half-year of transition support. Caregivers receive mental health education, connections to community support, and resources to better support these students. In short, CASA Classrooms provide individualized mental health treatment for selected students in grades 4 to 12. These students struggle with persistent mental health symptoms impacting their home, peer, and school life. There is still more work to be done before arriving at a final decision on whether a CASA classroom is a fit for

GYPSPD. Currently, there are seventeen CASA classrooms operational across this province.

With respect to leading learning, on January 15th Assistant Superintendent Aschenmeier, Dr. Harding, and I held a meeting with Nicole McNally, our Field Officer from Alberta Education, to review our Annual Education Results Report (AERR). Through the meeting, we learned the Ministry had no concerns with our submitted report and praised the division for a number of changes invoked this year to help represent our results. The discussion was fruitful and also helped identify a few changes we may institute next year. I want to thank Assistant Superintendent Aschenmeier, and Dr. Harding for their work on pulling together our AERR report.



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.”*

In my short tenure with GYPSPD, I have witnessed that structures are in place to support building out this competency within our staff and within our division. To this point, I provided several examples in a previous report illustrative of how we are living out this competency within GYPSPD. Additionally, we can look to our PATs, DIP, and local measures to see areas of improvement for our First Nation, Metis, and Inuit students. While we are making progress, much work remains to be done to ensure all students acquire the requisite skills needed to achieve their goals and become contributing members in their communities.

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 previous reports, I have placed priority on getting to know our people and our division. With a greater understanding of our strengths and challenges, I shared several examples in my December report of how I have started to strategically allocate resources in the interest of all students and in alignment with our school authority’s goals and priorities. In this report, I will once again provide several examples of our ongoing work in this area.

On January 16th, I held a meeting with senior members of my Central Office team to review and understand the possible impact of the announced provincial school bus distance criteria change from 1.0 km to 1.6 km on GYPSD transportation services. The information reviewed helped illustrate how the impact will be greater in some regions of our district than in others. More work is needed to fully determine the impact. However, we hope to bring forward any recommendations stemming from this review at our next meeting in February. The hope is that by being proactive we can have a plan in place to help communicate the changes and help mitigate their impact.

Another example of work underway in the area of Operations and Resources is work happening in our Finance area. Over the past weeks, our Secretary/Treasurer, Jun Lin, and members of his staff have been working with our Human Resources Assistant Superintendent, Meghan Auriat, to identify and capture needed work in the finance area. Subsequently, we advertised positions to increase our capacity to respond to these identified work demands. This should, in time, lead to a stronger and deeper finance department.

A final example of work happening in the area of Operations and Resources relates to the SCIP presentations to our Board of Trustees that I spoke about above. Through Principals presenting to the Board of Trustees and senior staff, we collectively had the opportunity to work with our principals to identify common trends and common concerns. Understanding our challenge is the first step in the process of finding workable solutions and, if needed, appropriate resources.

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. This week has been busy with a Policy Committee meeting, a meeting to further

discuss community concerns, a Committee of the Whole meeting, and a public board meeting.



On another front, we have school Board elections upcoming next fall. Our Secretary-Treasurer, Jun Lin, is our Chief Returning Officer and is working with staff and a contractor to ensure we are ready.

With respect to new legislation, we continue to follow developments with Bill 27. The Alberta government brought forward Bill 27, the

Education Amendment Act, 2024. The legislation embodied 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 continue to require considerable work to implement across GYPSD and our province.

In summary, it is easy to see how the work involved in K-12 education involves simultaneously working on many fronts by many dedicated staff. I want to thank the Board and all our staff for their work and support. Without their work and support, none of this would be possible.