

Monitoring Report Takes A Look At New Circumstances

September 16, 2020 Regular (Public) Meeting of the
South East Cornerstone Public School Division (SECPSD) Board of Education



Submitted by Norm Park, Contracted Reporter for SECPSD

Trustees of the South East Cornerstone Public School Division met in the head office conference room in Weyburn on September 16 while respecting social distancing, wearing masks and dining on prepared boxed lunches during a noon hour break.

The general open business session began in the early afternoon with a full review of the division's first monitoring report that addresses learning opportunities in every school. The report had an additional caveat this time however, with the additional phrase added "or at home – during a pandemic."

And, that was the theme of the report as Director of Education Lynn Little, and Superintendent of Education, Aaron Hiske, led a video and oral trip through the new division outlooks. This was their first opportunity to formally address the newly added elements of education delivery with the trustees since the re-opening of public schools in southeast Saskatchewan on September 8. Schools throughout the province had been shut down since mid-March due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Little noted that with 29 million COVID cases reported around the globe having claimed nearly one million lives, there was the need to adhere to a new order of business for the southeast region, even with this corner of the globe having been able to dodge most of these outbreaks. She noted the first Saskatchewan COVID-19 case surfaced on March 12.

"It's crucial that Maslow's hierarchy of needs are met, and then we can move to addressing the learning," said Little, noting that safety and mental health are large components in the various stages of learning and therefore, there was the need to build a four-level plan for SECPSD's students and staff.

The first level, now entered into, calls for a return to school as close to normal as possible with additional health measures and precautions. The Level Two plan would include the use of masks for staff and students as was provided as guidance to the school divisions by the Chief Medical Health Officer, issued on August 11 following the health officer's numerous contacts with other provinces and global partners in the battle against the virus. Level Three would call for school capacity to be reduced with the establishment of cohorts and a hybrid learning model. The Level Four plan would see the implementation of learning continuity plans, meaning mandatory remote learning, again.

Little explained the safety plan has been, and could be, ever changing as opening guidelines may keep shifting under the lead of the Chief Medical Health Officer and other health experts who he connects with regularly.

The current plan allows SECPSD to operate in a face-to-face delivery model with mental health programming and counselling being a critical component.

So far, she said they realized the practices are not ideal for staff or students as physical distancing, cohorts, limited use of shared materials, masking and limited movements make it difficult.

“But, we are together again, connecting, teaching and learning and we are better when we are together,” Little said. This will improve the opportunities to learn, succeed and grow.

Following this introduction, a video presentation from early learning consultants explained how teachers were supported as they deliver online instruction during supplemental learning. The video showed how connections were made during the shutdown, how more than 100 families were engaged in scheduled speech therapy sessions, and many more picked up community literacy outreach programs for kids up to the age of six. In fact about 40 literacy packages were delivered in person to about 40 families, the trustees learned.

Under the student services flag, community education liaisons opened and operated a nutrition project and mental health consultants developed trauma sensitive modules that included self-care and understanding loss and grief.

Book studies were brought to the fore by education psychologists to foster resilient learners and Hiske noted that remote counselling support teams provided weekly documents that were posted on Facebook, Twitter and the website. There were three working groups that reviewed traumatic events, protocols and supports.

Response to Intervention coaches held group meetings and did group studies and noted that 39 per cent of all students engaged advanced at least one grade level in the interim period.

Instructional technology contributions were outlined through Webinars using tips and tricks, said technology delivery coordinator Jeff Walters in a video report.

“There was no road map, so we created our own,” the technology team stated in their video presentation.

Weyburn trustee Melanie Sorenson said there might be a silver lining in the COVID-19 cloud and that could be the strengthening of technology skills and increased connections between technology staff and teachers with the educators picking up increased technology skills.

The report also dealt with education assistants and their roles along with learning support teachers, occupational therapists, driver training instructors and alternative pathways for scholastic credits.

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