



# Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools is Inspiring Students



## Using what students say to improve classrooms

Ever feel bored at school? How about disappointed that your marks dropped because you had an off-day and bombed a test? Have you ever felt frustrated that there seemed to be different rules for assignments depending on the teacher?

Teachers at Buck Mountain Central School are working to address these concerns. Their plan comes as a result of a survey that shows how their students feel about their school experience.

... CONTINUED ON PAGE 4 & 5

## Quality education for students through the Learning Cycle

Teachers, parents, trustees and students are proud of what is happening in Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools. Positive changes have occurred over the past few years – and they continue. One of the catalysts for change is the division’s “Learning Cycle”.

The Learning Cycle is a process that teachers follow to help them provide a quality education for students. Teachers:

- Use teaching strategies that have been proven effective with students
- Base their goals, and assessments on standards set by the province
- Employ a variety of methods to carefully observe how each student is doing, and to fairly evaluate students

**The goal of the Learning Cycle is to engage students in their learning, so that students really care and take personal responsibility, and become the best they can be.**

### The Learning Cycle . . . aims to reach ‘all’ students

Terry Pearson, Superintendent, Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools says schools have changed significantly over the past few decades.

“Our students bring with them an enormous amount of diversity. Teachers face the challenge of addressing the diversity more today than ever before,” says Pearson. “I marvel at how successful they are in connecting with students. They are willing to learn from those who know and who have proven what works.”

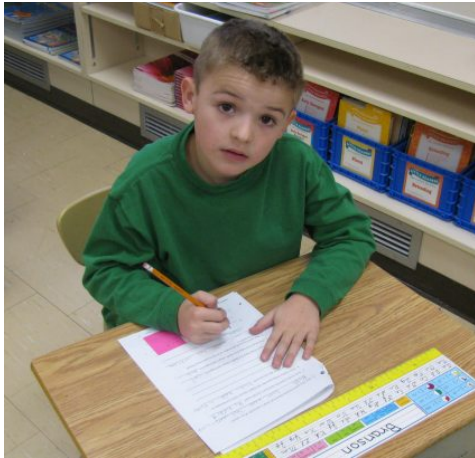


### What’s Inside

Learning Cycle action	p 2
Future steps & results	p 3
What students told us	p 5
Engaging students	p 6
Education week activities	p 8

... CONTINUED ON PAGE 2





## 2009 - 2010 Learning Cycle Action

- The division surveyed 1,450 students about their learning experiences. Each school has been asked to take action based on how their students answered a survey.
- Each teacher in the division has been asked to set a Learning Cycle improvement goal.
- The division is strengthening school administrators in their role as instructional leaders.
- Educators continue to use proven and successful teaching strategies they have put in place over the past few years, and to continue to try new ones. The division provides professional development time and opportunities.
- Schools are focused on engaging students.



## Quality education for students

... CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Pearson says teachers of today must prepare students for a world that has changed as well.

**“Learning in the 21st Century is less focused on providing a student with a set amount of knowledge. Teachers today must arm their students with the skills they need to be critical thinkers and problem solvers.”**

*Dr. Terry Pearson, Superintendent of Schools*

Pearson says the Learning Cycle helps teachers address the challenges they face - both in a changed world and classroom.

**“When we said we want ‘academic success for all students’, we were very specific about using the word ‘all’. We are serious about reaching all of our students,” says Pearson.**

### Learning Cycle brings change

For teachers, the Learning Cycle often means change. Big and small changes are occurring in every school.

Joan Naslund, a teacher at Queen Elizabeth Junior High School in Wetaskiwin, says, “It’s life changing in terms of how I teach.” Naslund says the new provincial math curriculum along with the focus on engaging students has resulted in her needing to do some things differently. “It’s been a struggle. It is so vastly different than from before.”

Naslund says the change has also been something that students have had to get used to. Naslund says now that they are adjusted to it, it is making a difference. “What’s great to see is the kids who were struggling before and not doing the work are doing some of it now. They are more engaged.”

Naslund says she has begun using the Smart Board in her classes, as well as pairing kids to work together. “With the new curriculum we don’t tell them how to find the answer... we ask them to explore and find it themselves. When kids work together it’s less risky, so they are more willing to do that,” says Naslund.

Judy Miller, a teacher at Buck Mountain Central School, says at her school she has seen teachers beginning to bring Learning Cycle ideas into their classrooms. “Teachers are trying things that are new to them, and seeing what works,” says Miller. “Everybody has changed and we’re experiencing successes.”

George Ollenberger, Director of Instruction, says he’s really pleased when he looks back over the last few years.

**“What’s come from our effort is a culture of collaboration. We’ve dropped barriers between classrooms and schools. Responsibility for kids belongs to everyone, not just one teacher in one classroom. It’s really a significant shift.”**

*George Ollenberger, Director of Instruction*

### Focusing on relationships

Ollenberger says watching schools experience change really comes down to the basics. “The basics means simply that teachers are connecting with students in a meaningful way.”

Dean Fiveland, a teacher at Queen Elizabeth School in Wetaskiwin agrees. “Teaching is about relationships. I strive to have good, strong relationships with students,” says Fiveland.





**Future steps with the Learning Cycle**

Ollenberger says the next big step is to focus on implementing the Learning Cycle by having teachers analyze student work to identify areas where they have not been successful. The teacher can then plan in advance to set a learning cycle improvement goal to provide a quality education for your children.

Ollenberger says the division will continue to use research supported strategies, and professional development in large groups as well as within schools to help teachers.

Educators in Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools have been focused for several years now on making specific improvements to what happens in the classroom. How can they tell if they've made a difference?

George Ollenberger, Director of Instruction, says, "There are some very clear indicators that tell us we're heading in the right direction." Ollenberger looks at what teachers, students and parents are all saying about the quality of education on annual surveys. "They all say we're getting better. That's exciting."

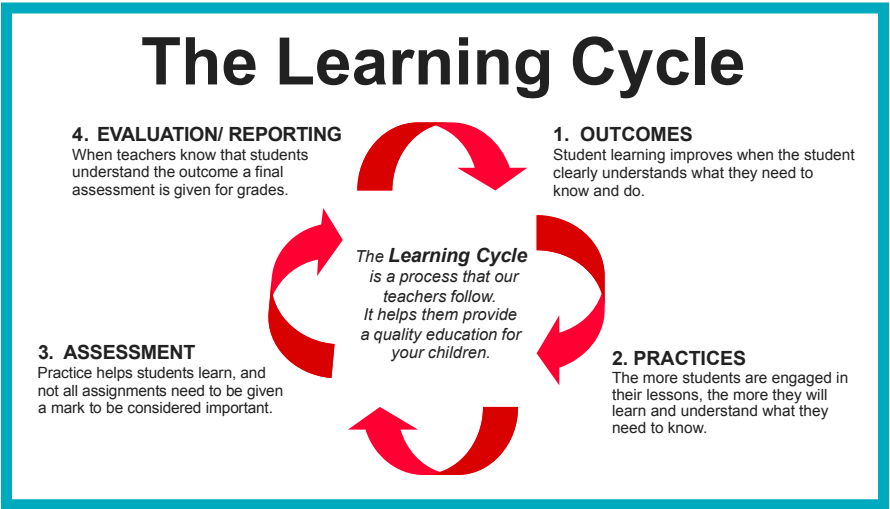
Ollenberger also sees a rise in the math results on Provincial Achievement Tests as important. "In the past we were below the provincial average in math. A few years ago we put significant time and resources into math. We focused on how math was being taught," says Ollenberger. "And now, especially with grade nine, we're seeing results. Nine per cent is a huge leap and it tells us we're doing something right."

Ollenberger says an increase in test scores also is due to other positive things occurring in schools. "We need to have more than good professional development," says Ollenberger. "Kids learn when they feel safe and cared about."

Parent, teacher and student surveys say that students are more safe, respected and treated more fairly than in previous years. Ollenberger says that's positive because "successful students need a partnership between teachers and students."

"Students need to feel they are listened to, and that they are safe talking to their teachers about how they learn," says Ollenberger.

"Kids have to feel the teacher cares enough to help them figure out what they might be having problems with. Then students can take responsibility for their own learning."



- Percentage of WRPS teachers, parents and students satisfied with the overall quality of education:  
85.5% in 2005  
88.5% in 2009
- Grade Nine Provincial Achievement Test scores in Math:  
67.0% of students achieved acceptable standard in 2005  
76.4% of students achieved acceptable standard in 2009
- Grade Nine Provincial Achievement Test scores in Language Arts:  
89.8% of students achieved acceptable standard in 2005  
91.3% of students achieved acceptable standard in 2009
- Percentage of teachers, parents and students that agree students are:
  - safe at school
  - learning the importance of caring for and respecting others
  - being treated fairly in school81.8% in 2005  
85.7% in 2009





# Using what students say to improve classrooms . . . CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

## Learning by doing, seeing and working with others

“Our students told us that they learn best by doing, seeing and working with others.” says Kris Denney, Vice Principal, Buck Mountain Central School. Denney says over the past months teachers have participated in professional development and worked together to develop lessons that emphasize hands-on learning and cooperative learning. They are also using technology such as smart boards. Also, the staff worked together to develop criteria of what a good lesson looks like, and have been putting these ideas into use in their classrooms.

Denney says a classroom in the past would have had students in desks, individually working out of a text book. Now, more often you’ll find students and teachers using technology, students working together in a group, and getting up and moving around.

Erin Woods, a grade 12 student at the school says she’s noticed a difference. “I’m enjoying the group work. Rather than doing it on my own, I get to hear other people’s opinions.”

Erin also appreciates that there is less note taking. One of her teachers photocopies her Power Point presentation for the students, and then has them follow along as she teaches. “That way I’m not thinking about writing everything down. Instead, I’m thinking about what the teacher is saying,” says Woods.

Erin’s mother, Christine Cripps-Woods, has also noticed some positive changes. She appreciates that teachers are encouraging creativity in student work. One example was in English, where students had to give a book report after finishing a book. Their reports could come in various formats, as long as they met certain criteria. Erin chose to make a quilt, after reading “The Old Man and the Sea” by Ernest Hemingway. With the help of her mother, Erin chose specific fabrics that each had relevance to the story.

“It makes the book more interesting to Erin,” says Cripps-Woods, “and she doesn’t mind doing the write-up that goes with it, either.” Cripps-Woods said her friend was also impressed with the assignment, saying if school had offered creative outlets like that when she was in school, she would have actually read her assigned book.

Cripps-Woods says many teachers work with students to develop a marking system. “I like that because it challenges her and makes her think,” says Cripps-Woods. “The more she has to think the better.”

**Erin says seeing the changes “makes me feel confident that the teachers care about us.”**

## Consistent Approaches

Another change at Buck Mountain Central School came with the policy on whether a student can receive a zero for a mark, and the policy on whether teachers will accept re-do’s on tests and assignments.

“Students told us they wanted to know what to expect,” says Kris Denney. “They asked for consistency from teacher to teacher.” Denney says staff discussions focused on finding a balance between having students be accountable, as well as allowing for second chances.

**“Re-do’s are a nice opportunity if students make a mistake. It gives them a second chance to improve.”** *Kris Denney, Vice Principal, Buck Mountain Central School*

According to Judy Miller, a teacher, “a re-do is not a re-write.” Miller says students have to come up with a plan on how they’ll be able to improve their mark, which the teacher and parent must approve. “When students do the work of re-learning the material, they are more successful,” says Miller.

Generally, grade eight student Kiara Hare doesn’t need to ask for re-do’s, but in the last two years she asked twice for chance to re-do tests. The first time, the teacher said no and that was frustrating to Kiara.

The second time, with the new school wide policy, Kiara had a different experience. That time, when Kiara didn’t do well on a particular test and asked for a re-do, the teacher told her she could try again. The teacher also pointed out if Kiara didn’t re-do the test, her mark would drop by one percent. At that point Kiara decided not to re-do the test because she felt the impact to her mark wasn’t significant. However, having the control over the outcome felt empowering. “I thought it was good that I had a choice,” says Kiara. “I’m happy with that.”

Kiara’s mother says the shifts in school policy have been positive for Kiara. “She’s a happier girl this year,” says Donna Hare. “This year is running more smoothly than last. It’s nice.”







**Listening to. . . and learning from what students say**

Buck Mountain Central School is not the only one to use student survey results to make changes.

In fact, all of Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools (WRPS) participated in the student survey, with more than 1,450 students in grades four through twelve being asked about their experiences in school. Students answered eight questions designed to determine if they have a sense of belonging at school, how they learn, if they participate in activities, and more.

The Division wanted to do the survey so teachers would have the information they need to better reach students. With the information, teachers can build on the strategies they’ve been working on over the past few years, and improve what they are doing to meet the needs of students... to engage them in learning.

“We’re asking and expecting that educators look at the survey data, and find out more. We want them to connect their teaching strategies with what works for kids,” says George Ollenberger, Director of Instruction.

The division plans to re-survey students in the spring of 2010 to see what has improved over the past year.

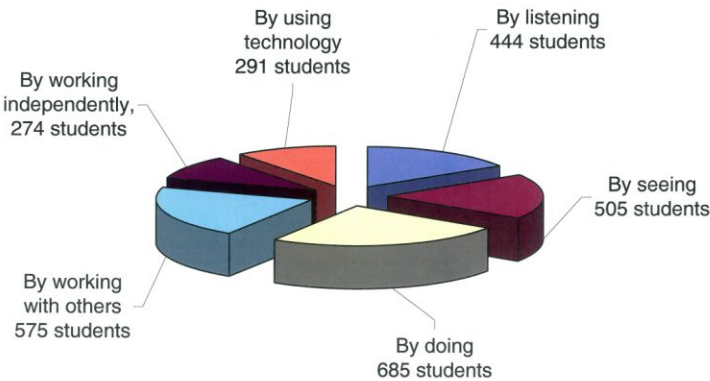
**“If students can see that their teacher has heard their voice then they know the teacher cares. School then becomes a partnership. That’s what we want.”**

*Dr Terry Pearson, Superintendent of Schools*

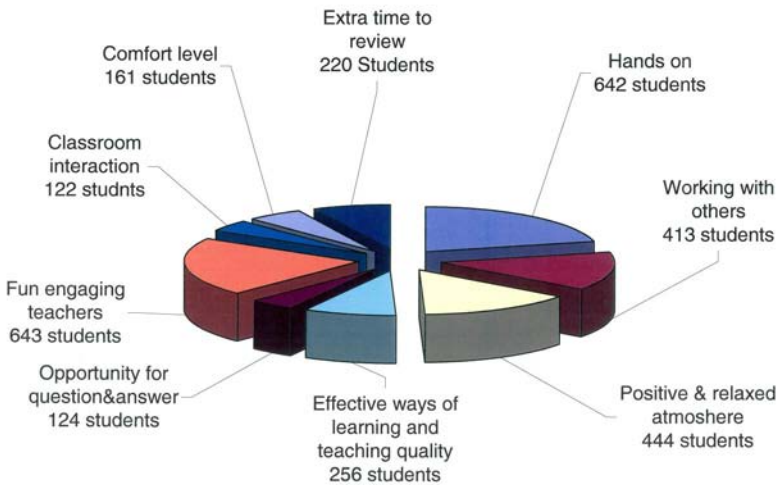


In May 2009, Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools surveyed 1,450 students in grades four to twelve to find out what they experience at school. Students were asked how much homework they do, why they come to school, what holds them back from learning their best, what their learning style is, and what at school helps them to learn. The school division is using the student responses this year to make changes. Each school has been asked to examine the results and respond to them.

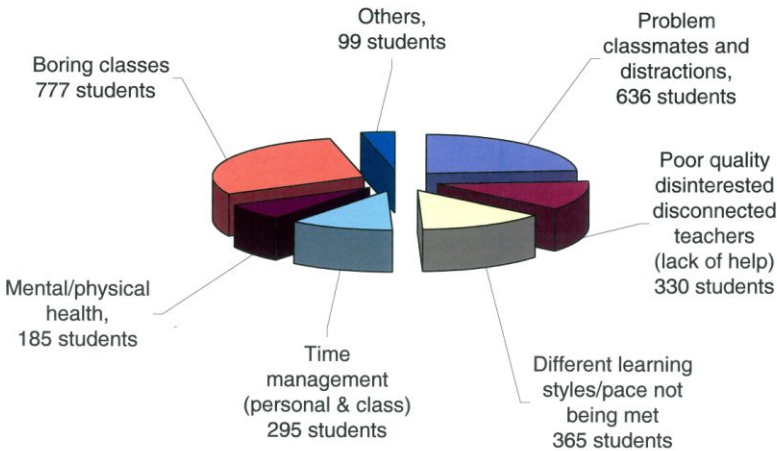
**What students told us about how they learn**



**What students told us about what helps them learn**



**What students said about what blocks their learning**





## Engaging our students

Research and experience show us that students who are interested in and engaged in their own learning are motivated to do well. That’s why each of our schools are emphasizing student engagement. Student engagement takes on many forms in our classrooms. It has many different looks depending on the personalities, skills, abilities and interests of each student. Here are a few pictures and comments which show how schools are engaging students.

### New e-teachers page captures students’ interest

Nicole Cote and Marcia Oster, teachers at Parkdale School in Wetaskiwin, have embraced the division’s new e-teacher page. Linked through the division and school website, e-teacher provides each educator with their own page, allowing them to post information and links to other sites for students and parents.

“I post homework assignments, spelling words, newsletters, field trip information, activities for parents to do with their children, and more,” says Cote. “Parents tell me they want to know what’s happening. E-teacher is a connection for them; they feel involved.”

Marcia Oster posts links on her e-teacher page, for her grade three to four students. During class time they visit the links to do research or to participate in learning games and activities.

“I like it because I know the quality of the links I’ve posted. Students like it because they don’t have to spend time googling. When the bell rings and students say awww! – then I know they’ve been engaged,” says Oster.

Oster and Cote feel technology is a strong tool when it comes to capturing the interest of students. “Kids want to know how technology works, and they’ll need to use it in the future,” says Oster. “The more we can infuse it in learning, the better.”



### Student leadership activities motivate students

Queen Elizabeth leadership students organized this event to collect donated jeans for charity. Lawrence Semeniuk, Principal, Queen Elizabeth School says, “This is just one example of the excellent leadership abilities our students have. We’re really proud of them.”

Semeniuk says these types of efforts of students to reach out to the community show that students care about school, and are engaged. “We want to see students engaged in academic work, certainly and we’re working on that too, but these types of efforts are just as important. They help kids look forward to being at school and to being contributing members of their community.”



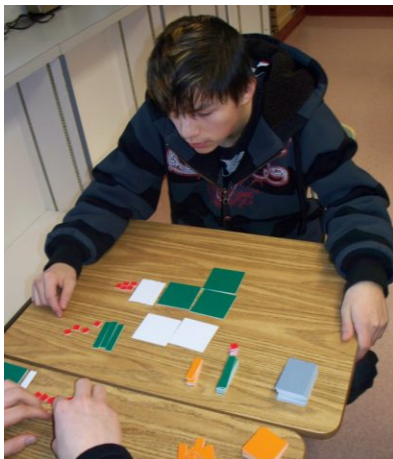
### Creative assignment gets kids excited about learning Canadian history

How do you make Canadian history exciting for 13 year olds? How about an assignment from social studies teacher Randy Bailer . . . that had students making trading cards, just like sports trading cards, featuring early Canadian explorers such as Samuel de Champlain.

The students even got dressed up in old time costumes to pose as various explorers. After digital images were taken, students used designed trading cards that also featured the names, birth dates and countries, and accomplishments of early explorers.

“As unorthodox as it might sound, assuming the personality of the person they were posing as, I think made the real historical people more real for students,” says Bailer. “When they started writing about explorer’s accomplishments, I could see students felt like they knew something.”

Bailer says, “When students are asking ‘do we get to work on this today?’ you know they’re excited about the project and interested in learning,” says Bailer.







## Teachers embracing change = students motivated to learn

When teachers at Pipestone School examined the results of Provincial Achievement Tests from spring 2009, they were surprised to see a dip in their grade three math results. Principal Wendy Maltais, says they flagged the concern and looked at the results closely, knowing they needed to do something.

As a part of their consideration, the staff knew the province was changing the grade three math curriculum. Also, in the fall of 2009, Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools asked each teacher to set a Learning Cycle goal (see page 3 for more information about the Learning Cycle).

“Knowing this, we decided as a staff we would all have the same goal which is ‘improving academic success of all students in math,’ says Maltais. “We also decided to take on the new math curriculum even though it wasn’t mandated for this year.”

Pipestone staff have used their professional development time and called on division curriculum specialists for help. Maltais says it was difficult in the beginning to focus on their teaching methods and on implementing the new curriculum.

“The focus in the new math is getting students to understand the process of how they arrive at a solution, rather than just knowing the solution,” says Maltais. “Teaching this math requires an entirely different approach.”

“At first I didn’t like it,” says Linda Erhardt, a grade 4-5 teacher at Pipestone. “But I worked at it, and now it’s so cool. The kids love it,” says Erhardt. “It’s really getting to be fun.”

One example of old verses new is with learning multiplication tables. When most of today’s adults were in school, knowing that  $8 \times 6 = 48$  was strictly a memorization exercise. Today, students are expected to figure out different ways of arriving at the answer. Some might add six groups of eight in their heads, or use their fingers. “It’s less about memorization and more about strategies,” says Erhardt.

**“I have found the students are getting a deeper understanding of math concepts. After all these years of teaching I am getting a deeper understanding too.”**

*Linda Erhardt, Teacher, Pipestone School*

According to Maltais, parents appreciate the change as well. “One Mom told me that with the new way we’re teaching math – she understands it for the first time and can help her children,” says Maltais.

### Focus on engaging students

Maltais says the new curriculum lends itself well to the division’s focus on engaging students in learning. Also, the staff at Pipestone are using more strategies that catch students’ interest, and that makes learning math a more hands-on experience.

Maltais says last year a typical math class looked like students sitting in desks, working on a worksheet to hand in. This year, observers in a math class might see discussion, students partnered together, and the use of math objects – called manipulatives.

Students in Erhardt’s class have noticed the change and they like it.

“I like the reflection mirror,” says Montana Harden, a grade four student. “It helped me understand lines of symmetry and octagons.”

Jen-Ann Thomas, grade four student, also appreciates using manipulatives to learn math. “I’m sort of a fidgety girl. I need to touch things to pay attention. When I can, I learn better.”

Although the school has yet to see if their efforts will positively impact the school’s results on the Provincial Achievement Test, teachers feel the goal they set and their efforts to achieve it are paying off.

**“What I see is that our students are far more engaged. That’s good, because research tells us students who are engaged in learning are students who succeed.”**

*Wendy Maltais, Principal, Pipestone School*





## Education: The Heart of Our Communities

Education Week is April 25th to May 1st

Alberta has been celebrating education week for over 75 years.

Students need a broad range of learning experiences that go beyond the basic subjects of math, language arts, science, and social studies. Schools, while preparing students for a diversity of possible futures, must also ensure students experience the joy of learning while at school. Parents are encouraged to join in the celebrations by visiting a school and attending Education Week events or visiting their child’s classroom.

### Alder Flats School

- March 25 “Raven Stole The Sun” – a native cultural performance
- April 19-29 Grade 3/4 Swim Program
- Other activities in March included the 2nd Annual Photo Contest, Book Fair, and Music Alive for the Grades 4-6

### Buck Mountain Central School

- April 27 Annual Pancake Breakfast for students, staff, bus drivers and parents

### C.B. McMurdo School

Contact the school for more information regarding Education Week activities

### Centennial School

- April 26 Student-Staff Sports Challenge @ 1:30 pm
- April 27 Geography Challenge @ 2:00 pm
- April 28 Spelling Bee – Grades 4-6 @ 2:00 pm
- April 29 Centennial School Spring Concert @ 11:00 am
- April 29 Oratoricals Competition @ 9:00 am
- April 29 Volunteer Appreciation Tea @ 10:30 am

### Clear Vista School

Clear Vista School enjoys a wonderful relationship with it’s parents and the community in general. We are truly fortunate to have the support of businesses for a variety of activities. This year’s theme “Education: The Heart of Communities” speaks to the importance of education to all and that it is a path of life long learning. Education is a life long journey and we grow in supporting and enriching each other daily. We will welcome the HUB Community to our School as well as provide an opportunity for some of the junior high students to explore careers in Red Deer. The dates of other specific activities will be confirmed in our Newsletter and on our website.

### We want to hear what you think!

Complete our online survey at:  
<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/9KR2NGB>

and your name will be entered into a draw for a:

**\$50.00 GIFT CERTIFICATE** from  
**BLURBS BOOK STORE** in Wetaskiwin.

Draw date: **MAY 14, 2010**

Your feedback helps us improve our efforts to communicate with you. Complete the online survey or telephone suggestions to: 780-352-4153, ext. 225.

### Early Education & Family Wellness Centre

- April 26 Planting seeds to watch them grow
- April 27 What do you want to be when you grow up?
- April 28 BBQ Lunch for parents and Seeds of Empathy moms and babies

### Falun School

Open House for students to showcase their talents, skills, and projects to parents, staff, visitors and other students  
Focusing on careers with guest presenters  
Assemblies to highlight and celebrate student successes

### Griffiths Scott Middle School

Contact the school for information regarding Education Week activities

### Gwynne School

- April 22 Open House and Kindergarten Registration

### Lakedell School

- April 26-28 Mini “Try”athon – Fun Team Alberta
- April 28 Pancake Breakfast for students
- April 29 Science Fair
- May 12 Bach to the Beatles Music Presentation

### Millet School

A variety of activities are planned to accentuate our theme “Reading is Thinking”  
April 29 Volunteer Appreciation Assembly @ 9:45 am

### Norwood School

- April 27 Musical concert @ 2:00 pm
- April 27 School Open House @ 7:00 - 8:00 pm

### Parkdale School

Contact the school for more information regarding Education Week activities

### Pigeon Lake Regional School

- April 26 School Council Meeting
- April 27 Pancake Breakfast for the students prepared by the staff

### Pipestone School

Math Madness at Pipestone. Check our website for more details

### Queen Elizabeth Junior High School

School tours by appointment

### Rosebrier School

- April 16 Career Day for all students
- April 21 Open House @ 6:00 - 7:00 pm  
7:00 - 8:00 pm “Rosebrier Has Talent” everyone is welcome to come and see Rosebrier at it’s best

### Wetaskiwin Composite High School

Conducting tours of the school while school is in progress

### Winfield School

Contact the school for more information regarding Education Week activities

## Wetaskiwin Regional Public School Board

Back row left to right - Clint Neis, Barb Johnson, Glenn Norby  
Front row left to right - Donna Hogg, Ed Zacharko Vice-Chair, Rob Reimer Chair, Deanna Specht  
(missing Caroline Buffalo)

