Back to School!
School starts September 8*

Our journey continues

The new school year follows three years of growth and positive change in Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools. With 2009-2010 comes more steps along our journey of improvement.

We’re proud of our growth because it tells us we’re even better than we used to be, and that we’re heading in the right direction. It means more success for students - your children!

See survey results that tell us we’re making progress on page 2. Throughout this publication, see how our changes have impacted students, and how we plan on moving forward.

Thinking outside the books

“It’s been a life saving change,” says Laura Lucas, a parent of three Wetaskiwin Regional Public School students. “The changes we’ve seen at school are exciting. They impact our children at home and at school.”

Lucas’s daughter Megan is going into grade nine, and is dyslexic. “Megan is dedicated. She wants to achieve at school. But, with a learning disability she has to work five times harder than most to do that,” says Lucas.

Several years ago Megan would come home anxious and worried about completing her homework assignments properly.

When teachers began using rubrics, which lay out how teachers measure success for each assignment, Lucas noticed a huge shift in her daughter.

“She knows right away what is expected. The anxiety has dropped and her relationships with teachers are better. She trusts them.”

Lucas says Megan is doing very well in school and is happier.

Lucas also likes how her 11 year old son, Josh, has responded to rubrics. “If he gets a lower mark than I think he’s capable of, I can have a conversation with him and he can specifically tell me what he could have done to improve his mark.” Lucas says, “He’s more involved in his education. He understands better how his marks correlate with his work.”

Lucas’ experience is just one of many that indicate Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools (WRPS) is moving forward.

Recent survey results showed 94 per cent of students and 86 per cent of parents are satisfied with the overall quality of education in WRPS. Other survey results show teachers are more consistently using strategies known to result in success for students.

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*C.B. McMurdo School students began classes August 10th
This tells us that what we want happening in our classrooms is really happening,” says George Ollenberger, Director of Instruction, Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools (WRPS). “The result comes from consistent effort and commitment from educators.”

Ollenberger says since 2006, the division has focused on establishing the use of nine high yield strategies, which have proven themselves in classrooms throughout North America. Also, the division has implemented Assessment for Learning. AFL describes what students should know about what they are learning, and ensures assessment of learning is fair. (For more information on the nine high yield strategies and on AFL, see the article “Proven Practices for Student Success”)

A major shift
Describing the journey she’s watched others undertake in the division and at her school, Cordalee Fiveland, Principal of C.B. McMurdo School says she’s seen “a major pedagogical shift on how to approach learning.”

“It’s about everybody succeeding and reaching their potential.”
Cordalee Fiveland, Principal, C.B. McMurdo School

“I’ve noticed that teaching has gone from being an isolated experience to one that is collaborative. Staff in the division have worked hard to establish a culture of trust that allows for the sharing of ideas.”

Some of the other changes Fiveland has seen include:

- more focus on preparing students in advance of testing and other final assessments
- ensuring final assessments are based on what students knew they would learn and be assessed on
- having students know what they are going to learn, how they’ll be evaluated, and how they are doing compared to what they should be able to do.
- teachers working to achieve provincially set outcomes, rather than turning to textbooks or other sources to define lesson content

Grade one students, for instance, are using bulls-eye targets to understand where they are at with their writing, with different rings showing the student how much they have grasped.

Rubrics are another tool teachers use to help students succeed. Rubrics are criteria that show students the difference between beginning work and mastery.

“I like rubrics,” says Charlotte Lemieux, a grade six student. “They give us a better chance to do the best we can the first time.”

“Rubrics are basically a big checklist on what you need to do,” says Elias Buwalda, a grade six student.

Educators are excited about the journey they are on too.

Sandra Wilson, Vice Principal at C.B. McMurdo likes the changes. “I’ve been teaching for 19 years and I have found this to be tremendously valuable.”

Wilson says one example of a change in her own teaching is additional focus on the curriculum outlined by the province.
“No more ‘cemetery style’ teaching
Stephanson is excited about other changes she sees as well. “Cemetery style teaching, where students sat quietly and still in their desks, in rows, was okay once upon a time. It’s not okay for the 21st Century Learner.” Where students of a century ago would have had to be prepared with enough knowledge to run their family farm or work in a factory, students today will be bombarded with opportunities and knowledge. It is not possible for teachers to teach students everything they’ll need to know. Rather, education systems, including WRPS, are recognizing that helping students learn how to learn is the best way to prepare them for a successful future.

Stephanson says, “Teaching today is about recognizing there are a variety of learning styles.”

Eliminating zeros
Another shift in schools is to avoid giving zeros for assignments or tests. “We’re not giving students a choice to make no effort,” says Ollenberger. “If students aren’t doing their work, we need to find a way of engaging them.”

George Ollenberger, Director of Instruction
Ollenberger says this policy has already seen some results. High school students who, in the past, would have been failing, are now attending school. “They can see that they have a chance of passing.”

Chances for success
In addition, schools are developing re-do policies for tests and assignments.

“I like the redo policy,” says Addison Campbell, a grade six student at Clear Vista School. “If you weren’t thinking straight on the test you could study again and retry. It makes you feel better because you know you did well instead of a 60%.”

Emily Gusse, a grade six student at Clear Vista School, appreciates that her teacher works to give her prompt feedback on her work. “Then you know for a test that it’s been corrected in your mind.”

Emily Gusse, a grade six student at Clear Vista School

Mindi Fraser, a High School math teacher at Pigeon Lake Regional School allows her students to re-do assignments a second time, but ensures that the student uses the second chance to really learn the material. She also allows students to re-write the test that they received the lowest mark on, for each section of material.

A new approach to homework
Ryan Mennear, a teacher at Clear Vista School supports the no-zero policy and allows students to re-do assignments and tests.

Mennear also has a no-homework policy. “I think kids are busy. When they have homework, those that didn’t get what I was teaching go home and do it wrong. After lots of practice doing it wrong, there is a lot to undo,” says Mennear. “I’d rather help them get it right the first time.”

Mennear has the students agree, in exchange for having no homework, they make the most of their classroom time.

“These kids come back to school happier and ready to learn,” says Mennear.

Grade six student, Emily Gusse agrees. “I live on a farm and we are often out with the cattle. My Dad loves that we don’t have to spend our time talking about homework. He can just talk to me.”

Mennear has also focused on ensuring each final assessment he uses towards a final mark is done really well.

“In the past it was more about quantity of marks and now for me it is more about quality. Instead of having 50 marks in my markbook I can feel confident about 10 quality marks where I know that I have accurately and fairly assessed the individual objective and the student can use this to prove to me that they can complete the objective,” says Mennear.

Wilson says she always felt rushed teaching so much material until she moved away from covering every chapter in the text book, and instead used only the parts of it that were relevant to the curriculum.

Kathy Stephanson, Vice Principal at Clear Vista School adds it has also been helpful for teachers to write “I can statements,” which are provincial outcomes written from a student’s perspective.

See how we measure up compared to a few years ago. Page 6.
Over the past few years, teachers in Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools have implemented strategies that have been shown, through research, to help students succeed. The division has been working from a list of nine ‘high yield strategies’, as well as on Assessment for Learning.

Nine High Yield Strategies

1. Setting outcomes and providing descriptive feedback
Outcomes often take the form of “I can” statements written from a student perspective. Descriptive feedback from teachers helps students know how much they have mastered and what they can improve on.

2. Learning Groups
Students learn by having to explain the material to others.

3. Reinforcing effort and providing recognition
Students want to try harder when they feel their effort is recognized.

4. Cues and questions
Questions often lead students to find answers, and especially to take ownership of learning.

5. Identifying similarities and differences
Helps with higher level thinking and reinforces concepts that have been learned.

6. Nonlinguistic representations
Students choose various ways to depict what they have learned, including picture journals, power points and other types of formats.

7. Summarizing and note taking
Teachers look for various ways of doing this, so that students are engaged. For example – read this paragraph and summarize it in your own words in one sentence.

8. Homework and practice
Research shows that homework, when given in small amounts and in the right setting, can be effective. Homework should not be new material but rather a review or something else that a student has already learned and just needs to practice.

9. Generating and testing hypotheses
No longer just for a science lab, this technique works and is successful in all subjects.

Information on Assessment for Learning continues on page 5.
and then wear the t-shirt during review times so they all learn from seeing each other’s drawings.

One of Kristjanson’s most legendary and popular lessons is “chlorine girl and sodium boy” which relates the chemical bond between chlorine and sodium to a boy-girl relationship. She has a male and female student dramatize the chemical interaction, and provides animated narration throughout.

“It makes you remember more,” says Anna King, a grade 12 student at Pigeon Lake Regional School. “I understand it more because I’m a visual learner.”

Kristjanson supports and is excited about the division’s goal of increasing student engagement. “It’s recognition that no one learns inside a box. It means allowing teachers and students to become more creative. I’m thrilled about what it means for students.”

A focus on student engagement

Over the past few years Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools focused on strengthening teachers in their ability to use methods proven to be successful. Also, the division worked to change the way students are assessed.

The division’s next step is to improve student engagement.

Student engagement means:

- teachers design learning activities to address individual student needs
- students are given choices and responsibility for their own learning
- lessons actively involve students

“Research tells us, when students are engaged, there are measurable gains in student achievement, and for students who were not succeeding, there are even greater improvements,” says Ollenberger.

“Additional benefits include higher order thinking, greater self-esteem and resilience, and development of life-long learning skills.”

“We also know getting students to take an interest and responsibility in their own learning is increasingly important for their future,” says Ollenberger.

“It used to be that the teacher’s purpose was to share his or her knowledge to the pupils in his or her class.

With the information age we live in, it’s impossible to teach students everything they’ll need to know.

Instead we’re helping them know how to learn and how to think.”

George Ollenberger, Director of Instruction.

Proven Practices

... continued from page 4

Assessment for Learning in the classroom means students:

- can explain what they are supposed to know and be able to do
- understand how they will be evaluated in advance of them doing the assignment, and participate in developing the criteria
- are able to assess their own learning, and can explain what their next steps are
- are actively involved in learning
- have time to improve during class

A teacher who employs Assessment for Learning:

- shares with students what they will learn, and how they will be evaluated at the beginning of the assignment
- develops and shares “I can statements”
- collects a variety of examples of student work
- teaches students how to self assess and peer assess
- provides on-going, frequent and descriptive feedback
- adjusts teaching to meet the needs of students

When AFL is operating, students experience success.

Your child will see his or her teacher as a coach most of the time, meaning it is the teacher’s role to ‘coach’ your child in understanding what he or she must do to improve.

Your child will also be aware and understand that the teacher’s role shifts to that of ‘judge’ when the teacher is giving a final test at the end of a unit or portion of learning.
What are Professional Development Days used for?

Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools has scheduled five full professional development days, and four half days for the coming school year. With such a significant amount of time spent, parents might wonder the benefits.

George Ollenberger, Director of Instruction, Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools says “We’ll use these days to plan how we’ll help students become more engaged in learning, as well as other skills teachers can use to help students be successful.”

This year’s plans include:

- 2 division wide PD days – to help teachers effectively engage students, and help students take responsibility for their own learning. (September 1, 2009 and March 22, 2010).
- 2 school based PD days – to discuss and develop plans focused on student engagement at each school. (September 2, 2009 and April 30, 2010).
- 4 half days – for teachers to work on their own individual teaching practices. Teachers will be asked to commit to, identify, document and implement an improvement goal for the year. (September 25, 2009, October 30, 2009, November 26, 2009, February 26, 2010 – all afternoons).
- 1 division wide day – for a variety of inservices, training sessions, collaborative sessions and more. (September 3, 2009).

Measuring Our Success

So... there’s a lot of information in this publication about what we’ve been working towards over the last few years. How have we done? See for yourself! Here are recent survey results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measures of Success</th>
<th>Fall 2006</th>
<th>Spring 2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of teachers who say they know the outcomes set by the province</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of students who say they can rewrite the outcomes into “I can” statements</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students say they can verbalize what they need to know and do, before they move on</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers say students are able to verbalize what they need to know and do before they move on</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers say they repeatedly give students a chance to redo a task or test</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Survey included 1,700 students and 165 teachers.
The Learning Cycle

1. Outcomes

Outcomes are goals set by the province. They describe skills and knowledge a student is expected to have at the end of a particular grade.

2. Practices

Knowing the outcomes, teachers choose how they’ll teach each concept. In WRPS, teachers are encouraged and supported in using practices that have been proven effective (see Proven practices for student success, p.3).

3. Assessment

While using proven teaching practices, teachers also find methods of assessment to help them understand how students are doing, such as observations of student work in class, homework assignments, group projects, student comments, and tests. Based on this knowledge, teachers adapt their teaching to address areas that might be challenging for individual students.

4. Evaluation

Having adapted their teaching to the needs of individuals, teachers find students are more prepared to face a final exam or project. Evaluations are based on the outcomes set by the province.

In WRPS, teachers have spent the last three years focused on practices and assessment. Armed with various teaching practices, educators are ready to take on some next steps, which are also part of the Learning Cycle.

What you can expect next in our Learning Cycle

Teachers will be focused on engaging students.

Student engagement means students really care and invest in what they are learning.

The division plans to assist teachers to expand their abilities to help students engage, through professional development and time for teachers to share ideas and work together.

Teachers across the division will be discussing and improving instructional design.

This means starting with the outcomes or goals set by the province. From that point, teachers then work backwards to choose goals for units, individual lessons, and plan strategies to help students reach the outcomes.

The division’s leaders will also focus on the Learning Cycle.

Principals, Vice Principals and division administrators will strengthen their ability to support teachers as they work to implement what they’ve learned.

Teachers will continue to use and develop their ability to use proven practices they’ve learned.
2009-2010 Calendar*

September 8  First day of school
September 25 ½ day of school in am  
Professional dev. in pm
October 12  Thanksgiving
October 30  ½ day of school in am  
Professional dev. in pm
November 11 Remembrance Day
November 26 ½ day of school in am  
Professional dev. in pm
November 27 Day in lieu of parent 
teacher interviews
December 21 – January 3  Christmas break
January 4  School resumes
February 4-5 Teachers Convention
February 15 Family Day holiday
February 26 ½ day of school in am  
Professional dev. in pm
March 19  Day in lieu of parent 
teacher interviews
March 22 System wide Professional 
development day
April 2-9  Good Friday & Easter break
April 30  Professional 
development day
May 24  Victoria Day
June 11  Farmers Day
June 29  Last day of school

* Year round calendar information for 
C.B. McMurdo School, and modified 
calendar information for Winfield, Lakedell, 
Pipestone and Gwynne Schools available at 
www.wrps.ab.ca.

Registration Information for new students

If you are new in our community and have a child attending a Wetaskiwin Regional Public School, welcome!

We’re excited to have your child join us for the coming school year. Please have your child attend registration at the times / dates listed below.

August 6
C.B. McMurdo School

August 27 – 28
Pigeon Lake Regional School (9 am – 3:30 pm)

August 31
Buck Mountain Central School (9 am – 3 pm)
Centennial School
Griffiths-Scott Middle School (and September 4)
Millet School (10 am – 3 pm, and September 4, 9 am – 3 pm)
Pipestone School
Rosebriër School (9 am to 3 pm)
Ecole Queen Elizabeth Junior High School (10:30 am to 3 pm)  
Grade 7 orientation welcome  
(September 2, 5 – 9 pm. Please pre-register)

August 31 – September 2
Wetaskiwin Composite High School

Bring birth certificate & grd 9 report card or transcript  
Grade 10 by appointment only. Grades 11 – 12:  
August 31 – 1 to 4 pm  
Sept. 2-3 – 9 am to 12

August 31 – September 4
Clear Vista School
Lakedell School  (8:30 am to 12 pm and 1 pm – 3:30 pm)
Parkdale School

September 2
Gwynne School
Norwood School

September 2, 3, 4
Alder Flats Elementary School
Falun School
Winfield School

Pre-registered Student Information

Ecole Queen Elizabeth Junior High School  
Registration verification - September 4

- Grade 7 – 9:00 AM
- Grade 8 – 11:00 AM
- Grade 9 – 1:30 PM
- Ecole Queen Elizabeth Alternate Program students will be contacted.

Wetaskiwin Composite High School

- Grade 12
  August 26
  Surnames A-L  9 – 12
  Surnames M-Z  1 - 4
- Grade 11
  August 27
  Surnames A-L  9 – 12
  Surnames M-Z  1 – 4
- Grade 10
  August 28
  Surnames A-L  9 – 12
  Surnames M-Z  1 – 4

For information about 
bus routes and times, 
please call  
780-352-8078 
or visit  
www.wrps.ab.ca

Also visit our website to 
find forms, school contacts, school of 
choice information 
and more

Tell us what you think!
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