Helping learners who need extra support

“There’s a night and day difference in my son” says Mom, Ashley Makris, about her son’s experience at Gwynne School last year. Lyric came to Gwynne School for grade 1 in 2014-15. “He went into the year struggling a lot,” says Makris. “Lyric didn’t want to be at school and especially had a hard time with letters and language. He had difficulty sounding out words.”

His teacher, Mary Lang, could see immediately that her new student needed to trust her. After observing Lyric, she could also see Lyric’s strengths: math and art. Lang got Lyric to draw pictures for her, praising his good work, and talking to him as she labelled his pictures. Eventually she got Lyric labelling his own pictures, using letters and words.

The year progressed from there, so her student who had once come to school upset and frustrated, had changed. By February he told his teacher, “I really like school”. And, Lyric has been known to choose to write in his journal during free time.

“I really appreciate what Mrs. Lang and the whole school have done for my son,” says Makris. “They found what worked for Lyric. Mrs. Lang adapted to him, rather than making him adapt to her style of teaching. She cares about him.”

That kind of response to a need is something good teachers have done naturally for years. But now WRPS has a more formal way of helping all teachers become highly responsive to student needs. It uses a model called “RTI”. “Response to Intervention” (RTI) provides a “research-proven framework with the potential to create enduring improvement in schools.” It’s an organized and systematic approach that helps educators respond to children who need support in a timely way. See: www.engagingalllearners.ca/sal/rti-in-alberta/

According to the Alberta Regional Consortia, there are specific things that should happen to ensure RTI works well.

RTI happens when educators take these actions:

- Use a process to identify students at risk or who are excelling beyond expectations
- Pinpoint highly effective strategies specifically designed to address students’ areas of need
- Implement the strategies with consistency and clarity throughout the entire jurisdiction
- Use assessment to determine if the strategies have worked, and then adjust the strategies as needed
- Use levels of increasingly intensive intervention to address needs

At Gwynne School, Mary Lang thinks of RTI as “a process of helping children who need a bit of support.” It can be for students who need to better understand a concept, or for students who need more of a challenge.

Tristan Zielke, who teaches grades two and three at Gwynne School says RTI provides a chance for the teachers to work collaboratively in the best interest of students.

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What we’re doing to help your child succeed

It’s back to school time! And that’s exciting! What can you expect? Teachers and school staff dedicated to helping your child succeed.

Schools have always worked to do what is best for students. We’re getting better at knowing what that means, and how to apply it to our work.

“Schools are about learning,” says Brian Taje, Associate Superintendent of Instruction, WRPS, “and, as educators, we are learning too! We’re constantly striving to improve our practices based on doing what’s best for our students. When we discover something effective that can help, we work to share it for everyone’s sake.”

In this publication, you’ll see a number of examples of just that. You’ll read about a variety of tools, approaches, teaching practices and models that educators are using to make a difference.

“There’s lot of evidence we’re moving in the right direction, but when we work together more effectively, we know we can even do better for our students,” says Taje.

“The dedication, commitment and professionalism of WRPS teachers is outstanding,” says Terry Pearson, Superintendent. “Also, our education assistants play a vital role in our classrooms. Together they work hard and continue to exert enormous efforts to ensure student success, and a number of examples of their efforts are contained in this publication.”

In this publication, you’ll read about:

- Engaged students. Students who are excited about and engaged in their learning. When students are engaged, they learn more.

- Project based learning. Educators are designing learning experiences to help students become engaged in the curriculum.

- Response To Intervention (RTI) is a new system that educators use to ensure students who need additional support get it, when they need the support.

  “It’s really impactful work,” says Chris Zarski, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, WRPS. “It’s a powerful tool that has proven to make a difference with a wide range of students at varying levels of ability.”

- Zones of Regulation is a tool that is used to help students learn to regulate their own emotions. It’s important because students who are emotionally ready are also ready to absorb new information.

- Classroom approaches for vulnerable readers. This helps educators ensure young children (especially kindergarten through grade three), have solid reading skills which is the foundation for all other learning.

  “Each school is committed to doing what’s best for our students,” says Taje. “Not only do we want students to finish high school, we want to prepare them to continue their studies into post-secondary education.”
“He has his own friends that I didn't choose for him,” says Amanda Hopper, about her 5 year old son, Liam. Although that may not sound like a big deal, for Liam it is, and his Mom could not be more pleased.

Liam has a syndrome that makes it hard for him to regulate his own emotions. As a result, he has a difficult time being calm when frustrations come his way, and that in turn makes it a challenge for Liam to make friends. But this year, he is starting to turn a corner, thanks to the efforts of a number of adults around him. The Early Education & Family Wellness Centre in Wetaskiwin is a preschool that accepts a wide range of children including those who need help with challenges. Liam has been attending for three years.

One of the school’s main approaches is working with the children to develop the ability to regulate their own emotions. Lynn Hestbak, the principal, says she and her staff started to notice over the past decade that a number of their students were having a hard time with emotional self-regulation. And, knowing that it is important to everything else, they knew it needed to be a focus.

“We have learned through recent research that if a person is anxious or overwhelmed, part of the brain shuts down,” says Hestbak. “That part of the brain is not available to take in new information.”

Hestbak says the idea is to help children become emotionally calm and receptive, so that they can learn new information.

However, for students who have special needs, sometimes self-regulation can be especially challenging. That’s where co-regulation comes in. Co-regulation is when the teacher models and / or prompts a child in knowing what to do to calm down, and when to do it.

Chelsea Vandersluis is Liam’s teacher. She uses a number of techniques with the children in her class, and with each technique, she first models and offers it to the child, and then works to have the child learn when to use that technique on their own.

For example, when she notices someone getting upset, Vandersluis might go out and stomp down the hall with that child, pretending they are dinosaurs. After modelling that several times, she might say to the child, ‘I am seeing you are upset, what do you think you could do to calm down?’ The child says ‘dinosaur stomp’ and goes to do that.

Moving from co-regulation (teacher prompts) to self-regulation (which the child prompts him or herself) happens later, when the child says without a prompt from the teacher, ‘I am frustrated. I will go dinosaur stomp’.

The dinosaur stomp can help a child take out their frustration in an appropriate way.

“I have watched some of the students master that this year,” says Vandersluis. “It’s so cool! If they can be calm, it’s easier to be successful in school. It’s easier to build friendships, and they feel happier.”

Some other techniques Vandersluis teaches her students to use is a box of fidgets for the child to manipulate. Or kids can jump and crash onto crash mats. Also, Vandersluis has found it helpful to hold certain students on her lap, with her arms around them, breathing slowly and calm.

She was pleased when one day, she gradually removed her arms from around a boy she had held on her lap. The boy pulled her arms back up around him, which was evidence to her, that he understood his own need to calm down. Understanding that within himself is a step towards emotional self-regulation.

Continued on page 4...

LAYING THE RIGHT EMOTIONAL FOUNDATION
FOR SUCCESSFUL LEARNING

Helping a child be emotionally ready to learn is absolutely critical. The right state of mind is a foundation for learning.

Parents, you can help your children be emotionally ready to learn. As you read this article, you’ll learn how one teacher is helping her students. There are some ideas in the article, and a list of tips specifically for you at the end. See page 4.
Being emotionally ready = Successful learning

...Continued from page 3.

Vandersluis, along with other teachers in her school and in others throughout WRPS also use a tool called The Zones of Regulation. The Zones of Regulation help teachers and students use a common language to explain and understand emotions, so that the students can learn to self-regulate.

THE ZONES OF REGULATION

RED ZONE | EXTREMELY HEIGHTENED STATES OF ALERTNESS AND INTENSE EMOTIONS.
- A person may be elated or experiencing anger, rage, explosive behaviour, devastation, or terror
- If a person is in the red zone, they are described as ‘out of control’

YELLOW ZONE | A HEIGHTENED STATES OF ALERTNESS AND ELEVATED EMOTIONS.
- A person has more control in the yellow zone as compared to red
- A person may be experiencing stress, frustration, anxiety, excitement, silliness, the wiggles, or nervousness

GREEN ZONE | A CALM STATE OF ALERTNESS
- A person may be happy, focused, content, or ready to learn
- This is the zone where optimal learning occurs

BLUE ZONE | LOW STATES OF ALERTNESS
- A person may be feeling sad, tired, sick or bored.

www.zonesofregulation.com

“...It is true of any skill that some children are naturally better at it than others,” says Hestbak. “But all children can learn, and some children do need to be taught to self-regulate. Sometimes they get stuck developmentally and need help moving forward.”

“As these children learn the skills of regulating their own emotions, it is something that will help them in school and throughout their lives,” says Hestbak.

Amanda Hopper is sure noticing a difference in her Liam, as he becomes more able to regulate himself. Instead of hitting people at home when he’s mad, he uses words. And, this year, Amanda was able to put Liam on a community baseball team, where he has done well and made friends.

“He loves school. He wakes up every day – even Saturday and Sunday and holidays – wanting to go.”

“It’s absolutely wonderful,” she says. “I didn’t know if I would ever see it, but now he’s made his own friends. That’s huge.”

How to teach your child to self-regulate

Tips for parents:

- Look after yourself. Managing your own anxiety and stress will make for happier, calmer parenting. Go for a walk, have some quiet time, read a book, etc.
- “Children can feel your stress and anxiety,” says Lynn Hestbak, Principal, Early Education & Family Wellness Centre.
- Unplug from electronics including cell phones regularly. Talk and interact with your children face to face, and often, without any distractions.
- Do things in nature together, and also let your child explore nature independently. Children learn a lot from nature and free play, and it’s calming for them.
- Model for your child how to calm down when either of you are frustrated, gradually working to help the child know what to do for him / herself in those situations.
- Ask your child’s school for more information about the Zones of Regulation and what you can do with your child at home.

The real world comes to life now and again... at Clear Vista School, and that’s intentional. “When students can connect what is happening in the world with what they’re learning, it becomes meaningful,” says Char Fraser, grade nine teacher at Clear Vista.

Seeing the inner workings of government

Fraser has her grade nine social class learn about government by experiencing a government themselves. Each student gets to take on the role of someone in Ottawa, such as a Member of Parliament, the Queen’s Representative, or the Prime Minister. They even have costumes.

Fraser then gets the students to debate and go through the process of considering a bill, following the same procedures as the government would. Last year Fraser’s class took on the school’s dress code.

The students wrote a dress code, debated it, and then passed a final version of it by vote. The principal approved the dress code for their class to use for the rest of the year.

“I learned that sometimes hard decisions don’t make you very popular,” says Jena Peterson, in grade nine last year. “We learned how hard it would be in real life.”

“I learned how complicated the system is, and how people making the laws have to see where people will find loop holes,” says Shayden Zielke, grade nine.

“It took a long time to figure out how to make everything work,” says Lincoln Jensen, grade nine. “It’s way better than the text book.

“It’s easier to understand than the text book because it’s real life,” says Shaylea Mohr, grade nine.
Why Project Based Learning is good for students

When your teacher hands you lemons… make a lemonade stand?

Who knew the summer project of kids on your block could teach you about social studies? Well, those lemonade stands have some valuable knowledge to impart. Fraser’s students at Clear Vista learn the ins and outs of a market economy as they work to compete with each other and sell the most lemonade.

Each group is assigned to make their own stand, and develop a marketing and sales approach. On the appointed day, the students choose where in the school to place their stand. Then grade six students are each given $2 in pretend money provided by the school, and they are given the choice of where to purchase their lemonade.

“Students learn all sorts of real life lessons like location is important, sales gimmicks and strategies that are effective, and how important presentation is,” says Fraser.

“It taught us how to appeal to people,” says DJ Solomon, in grade nine last year. DJ’s group tried to stand out from other groups by making their lemonade purple. Although it was only food coloring, it was an effective technique. “Kids are gullible,” laughs DJ, “and I am probably just as gullible as a consumer.”

“I learned that it mattered where we put the cart. Also, I liked having to interact with other kids,” says Lexi Pearson. “It helps things stick in my head better.”

“Yeah, you remember things better,” says Elise McFadzean. “I’m a very visual, hands-on learner. I need to see something. I like interacting with the other kids.”

Students at Centennial Elementary School also enjoy opportunities for hands on learning.

Field trips are more than just fun!

When Joann Murphy is their teacher, you’ll find her grade six students making Pasanka Eggs, traditional for Ukrainian Easter celebrations. Also, students will travel to Edmonton each day for a week so they can participate in a hands-on program at the legislature helping them see how things work in real life.

Murphy also takes her students to an observatory at the University of Alberta so students can get a really good look at constellations, which they study in science.

Murphy sees many benefits of these types of experiences. One is that students’ vocabulary about the topic expands.

“You get the students using the vocabulary and applying it,” says Murphy, “and it sticks. It’s amazing how fluent the students are even a month later.”

Also, “the students find experiential learning very motivating,” says Joann Murphy. “They love it. When you see them leaning out of their seats to hear what you’ll say next, you know they’re engaged. Having that kind of experience helps them ‘hang-in’ there through material that might be less interesting to them, and it helps them take more responsibility for their own learning.”

Murphy sees less behavior issues and students being more ‘on task’ when they are involved in a hands-on project. “It’s great to see them being willing to work towards a goal, attack problems and solve them so they can achieve their goal,” says Murphy.

“We’ve been very fortunate to be able to provide these opportunities for students,” says David Luck, Principal. “We’ve creatively worked at ways to come up with fundraising and applied for grants, etc. because we know these kind of experiences are valuable for students.”

“Having students engaged in the classroom is key,” says Luck. “In addition to engaging students in the classroom, the next big way to impact learning is to have experiences in different settings.”
‘Internalizing’ learning

Biology T-shirt assignment gets students engaged

At Pigeon Lake High School… saying the Biology students are engaged would be an understatement. Just look at the pictures of what they’ve designed on their T-shirts (left) and you can see the amount of work they’ve put into their project.

“This is the sixth year I’ve given this assignment,” says teacher Nadine Krisjanson. “These kids have raised the bar significantly. They’ve taken their work to a new level. It’s exciting!”

The project was a Biology 20 assignment, but if the students wanted, they could get extra credit for an optional course, if they added additional information and presented it to their teacher. Look closely at the photos and you’ll see a number of human systems such as digestion, circulation, respiration, excretion and muscle systems. Students learn how all of the systems operate together.

“I think it’s a great opportunity to show what you know,” says Bethany Peters, a grade 11 student last year. “I like it because it helps you visualize what you need to know for tests. And I like that I got to add my own creativity.”

Peters says, “It really made me think about the foods I was eating and how it was benefitting my body; what my body was using the nutrients for.” Shelby Van den Brink, who was in grade 12 last year, says “I like how it looks all together. It helped me solidify and organize my thoughts. There’s so much information.”

“Yeah, too bad I couldn’t wear it during the exam!” jokes Jolt Wiersma, also in grade 12 last year. “But I will keep it as a keepsake to look at sometimes. I enjoyed learned how everything is linked together, and about how muscles move. It made me realize how complicated the human body is.”

How the “Flex” program gets kids engaged

Students who wanted the extra credit in Krisjanson’s class were able to take advantage of a new tool at the school, designed to make life better for students. It’s called “flex” and is happening in many Alberta middle and high schools as a part of redesigning how high schools run.

Flex operates differently at each school, but basically provides a specific block of time each week where students get to choose what to do with the time. It allows students to catch up on homework, review a concept that they are struggling with, or receive additional instruction if they are interested in a greater challenge.

The idea is to allow students to have a say in their own experience, allowing them to personalize their own learning.

At Pigeon Lake, staff have found the extra time for flex each day by trimming 5-10 minutes out of each class period, and using that to form a 40 minute flex period at the end of the day. This option was developed by talking with staff, students and parents. Flex and high school redesign is “challenging existing practices,” says Kris Denney, Principal of Pigeon Lake High School. “But, we believe there is a collective responsibility to help students be successful, and that happens if we help all students graduate.”

Denney says he sees the evidence of this at work in Krisjanson’s class, where all of her students passed the provincial diploma exam and 37 per cent went on to achieve the standard of excellence (compared to 85 per cent passing in Alberta, and 32 per cent achieving standard of excellence).
Boosting student engagement

In grades three and four, students got to entirely redesign an outdoor courtyard in the middle of their school.

“We started by walking around the outside of the school, asking the kids what they could do to improve it,” says Caitlyn Klinger, teacher. “Most said the courtyard and so we’ve focused on that.” The students came up with ideas about what could make the courtyard better, and they even created a list with criteria to evaluate their own ideas.

The criteria included: cost (it had to be affordable), everyone in the school can use it, it had to be something that students can learn from, it had to physically fit in the courtyard, and it had to be okay in the existing outdoor climate.

Original student ideas like a hot-tub, nacho bar, vending machines, etc. that had been high priority items, made their way off the list once students developed the list of criteria.

“It was good for them to dream big and then have to focus on making their project viable,” says Lois Maplethorpe, grade four teacher.

Once students had a plan, they discussed how they would come up with the money to fund their project. They decided to hold a bake sale over a three day period, and wrote a letter to the principal to ask for permission to do so. They brought their own baked goods from home, and raised $600 to purchase supplies.

Similar to the grade one flower bed, students on this project learned a variety of lessons that crossed into multiple subjects. They learned about plants and light / shadow (science), money (math), fundraising (math, social studies, language arts), online research skills (language arts), and writing a letter to the principal to request permission to hold a fundraiser (language arts).

They also learned about good nutrition and how to grow food. Another highlight was inviting a First Nations Elder to help them plant traditional First Nations herbs in their courtyard. Also, the student art club at the school was planning to paint a mural on the courtyard wall.

“If the kids can’t see real life applications, they wonder why they’re doing it,” says Sandra Wilson, Principal of Ecole Parkdale. “But, if they find value in what they’re doing, they’re more likely to do it and willingly, even to levels beyond expectations we’ve set for them.”

With this project, we learned to let students take the lead, and we’ve seen how that makes them more interested. It’s our job to ask questions,” says Klinger.

“If students find value in what they’re doing, they’re more likely to do it, and willingly, even to levels beyond expectations we’ve set for them.”

Sandra Wilson, Principal, Ecole Parkdale

Students engaged in their learning is a goal of every teacher. If you’ve got a student that’s focused, interested and eager, learning happens more naturally, effectively and successfully.
Klinger says, “I was surprised at how seriously they took their responsibilities.”

“Project based learning is messy sometimes,” says Maplethorpe. “It’s not straight forward and there isn’t as much control. But life is messy and sometimes it’s important to let the students have some control, even if it’s messier for the adults.”

“We’ve never been in charge of anything except our own work before,” says Ayisha Buffalo, in grade three last year. “It made me feel really excited. I am looking forward to enjoying the plants and sitting in the chairs in the sun.”

“I thought it was really fun because I got to think of ways to make money,” says Hailey Paradis, grade three.

“I think the teachers let us do it so we learn how to earn money and garden,” says Tristin James, grade four.

“I liked all of the project!” says Briyana Branco, in grade four, “... getting to garden and make our courtyard beautiful!”

“I liked getting to actually plant,” says Khari Bull, grade four. “I like when you get your hands in the dirt. It feels good.”

“What’s exciting for me with these project is that kids are engaged,” says Principal Wilson. “They are taking ownership in the school.” Wilson sees it in their behavior in school, but also on the playground when students think no one is watching.

“I have seen students stopping to help pick up garbage without being asked, putting it in garbage bags they’ve brought from home. I’ve never seen that before. It’s pretty powerful.”

Lois Maplethorpe, teacher, Ecole Parkdale

“Project based learning is messy sometimes. It’s not straight forward and there isn’t as much control. But life is messy and sometimes it’s important to let the students have some control, even if it’s messier for the adults.”

Ecole Parkdale students put the finishing touches on the mural they painted, for the courtyard they redesigned.

“Relationships are key to student engagement

If a student knows their teacher cares about them, that helps a student care about school. It can translate into student engagement. A good example of a teacher who focuses on relationships is Nicole Liddle at Falun School.

“She uses a variety of ways to get students engaged,” says her Principal, Kristien Holtby. Rather than focus on one thing – such as technology – Liddle looks first at what her students need and finds a number of tools that fit the need.

According to her principal, Liddle is a leader in implementing technology in her school. She is great at presenting math in a variety of ways so students have lots of chances to understand. Liddle also uses “Zones of Regulation” (see p. 4), to help students learn to manage their own emotions. She’s great at a lot
of things, according to Holtby. But if you talk with Liddle, you won’t hear as much about these tools. What she’ll talk about is her relationships with her students. That’s her focus.

“Sometimes we get so busy, the relationship piece gets forgotten,” says Liddle. “But I’ve found that building relationships with my students makes the biggest difference.”

Recently Liddle noticed that when information about a girl’s changing body was presented to her female grade five students, in their health unit, the students with First Nations Heritage were uncomfortable. The next year when that unit was presented, Liddle invited a female First Nations Elder to her classroom.

The Elder talked about how First Nations families welcome a girl to womanhood, including learning to cook and sew, and how to take care of her body. Liddle noticed when she welcomed this female Elder, all of the girls were more comfortable.

“The relationship piece ties directly to the division’s focus on RTI,” says Holtby (see cover page). “And it’s where we’re going as a school. We’ve had a significant culture shift in our school.”

The shift has been in examining the parts of education the school can control. For example, although there are students who sometimes come to school not as prepared to learn as staff would like (tired or without having eaten breakfast), the school does its best to address those concerns so the students can get to work on learning.

“We’ve talked about what are the big rocks – or the most important things we need our students to know and be able to do, the ‘gotta knows’”, says Holtby. “And we’re being creative and flexible in achieving those.”

For instance, Holtby is using staffing money to hire a half time teacher to do extra reading support with students in grade one (and sometimes in kindergarten, and grades 2 and 3), rather than just glued to a particular class. Also, he’s built time for teacher collaboration into the daily schedule.

Building stronger readers

Aspiring authors – in grade one

How many sentences could a grade one student write? How about a two-paged, computer typed, story filled with many sentences?

All of the students in Sara Pickering’s grade one class at Lakedell School rose to those heights this year, far exceeding expectations set out in the provincial curriculum for grade one.

Pickering had been to the Vulnerable Readers conference, and one of the ideas she walked away with was raising the expectations for what children can achieve with writing. The idea is that if children become good writers that will also positively impact their reading skills (and vice-versa). And in fact, sometimes ‘reading’ is the classroom bully, with not enough emphasis put on writing.

When Pickering was back from the conference an opportunity came up naturally in her classroom to provide a chance for more writing. Pickering had just finished reading a novel out loud to her students. They really enjoyed the book and asked her to read the next one in the series. The problem was that there was no series. There was just the one book. Pickering turned the challenge into an opportunity.

“Why don’t you write your own sequel?,” she asked the students, and then challenged, “I want a whole story, with a beginning, middle and end. They got really excited about it and they totally rose to the challenge.”

Instead of getting the provincial encouraged one ‘simple sentence’, Pickering received stories with 20 to 30 sentences. And the stories were filled with creative ideas; the character meeting a cowboy, travelling through the woods, visiting a castle with a dragon, encountering a sand monster, going to Hawaii and even becoming a super hero to fight some bad guys. All of them had beginnings, middles and ends.

Myah Becker, one of Pickering’s students, wrote an adventurous sequel, with a rescue from a bear with a bow and arrow. “I like writing,” says Myah. “I like to make up my own words and my own story.”

“Miss Pickering expected her students to do great work and they did,” says Trevor Van Someren, Principal.

Continued on pages 10 & 11..
Helping learners who need extra support
...Continued from page 1.

“We are able to discuss the needs of individual students, and what supports we can put in place for them.”

The supports Zielke refers to might look like multiple teachers in a single school taking a chunk of a particular afternoon to group students with other students who are at their same level in math. While all of the students in one particular group could be in different grades, they would all be at the same learning level.

Alternately, it might look like the principal reading with a small group of students that need a little extra coaching for a week or two. Or, a teacher, knowing a kindergarten child needs to practice her social skills, might take the time to guide her interactions when she is playing with another child at the sand table centre.

“We’re seeing really positive results with RTI,” says Zielke. “The students feel supported, safe and heard. If they need help, they know they’ll get it.”

“It translated into positive behaviours too,” says Lang. “We’re taking less time to work through challenges than ever before.”

“RTI makes sense,” says Zielke. “All kids thrive on attention. They respond well when you support their learning needs. They feel cared about, and as a result they can be successful.”

What parents can do:
• Ask your child’s teacher how RTI works in his or her classroom
• Ask the teacher if there are any supports he/she has in place with your child
• Ask what you can do at home with your child to support the teacher’s efforts in the classroom

The classroom is the second teacher
...Continued from page 9.
Ecole Parkdale School also sent a teacher to the Vulnerable Readers Conference. Grade one teacher, Samantha Read, came back really excited about changing the physical layout of her classroom.

The simple changes have already made a huge difference for her students. One boy who had been non-verbal all year had a book in front of him while Read was helping another student. Out of the corner of her eye, and quietly in her ear, she could hear the boy at his desk talking out loud. She turned to look at him and he was reading out of the book he had in front of him.

“If I was going to cry all year, it would have been right then,” says Read, “and then he said to me ‘I’m getting really good at this now.’ It was an incredible moment.”

“The classroom is the second teacher,” Read says. “And it should be focused on literacy. Every aspect of the classroom should emphasize that focus.”

Changes recommended, at the conference, for a classroom include:
• No more than three dominant colors (desks, carpeting, window coverings, wall coverings, etc.) so that it reduces visual distractions.
• Black backgrounds for bulletin boards, with posters that are done with simple black ink on white paper. Again to reduce visual distraction.
• The word wall on the front (not side) wall so it is very obvious to students.

• Everything that hangs on the wall must be a learning tool – and one that is focused on literacy (so no posters of cute ponies, or cats, etc.)
• A carpet area close to the smart board for discussion.
• Desks grouped into pods not rows.
• All learning centers focused on literacy. So a sandbox center could have items for playing in the sand labelled with words

Read made a number of these changes over a weekend. She redid her bulletin boards, removed posters, put the word wall at the front and rearranged the furniture in her room. She purchased some new items for her room, including black fabric to cover the bulletin boards. Her Principal, Sandra Wilson spent the weekend helping her.

Read says, “I think the belief that a child can be successful with reading or writing, is reinforced more easily if he or she has access to the right tools, adequate time for writing as well as reading, and a say over what he or she gets to read.”

“We’ve all noticed a difference,” says Sandra Wilson, Principal. “The students are a lot calmer and more focused. And that’s just a few weeks into this new set-up. I’m excited to see more of the impact in the coming year.”

Wilson is encouraging all of her teachers to simplify their rooms, making them more focused on literacy.
Monica Robins, at Falun School, is another teacher who has restructured her room because of what she observed at the Vulnerable Readers Conference. She has added black backgrounds, simplified the wall coverings, moved the word wall to the front, and moved the furniture.

“The students love that the room is different,” says Robins. “Everything in our room now has a purpose tied directly to learning.”

Robins has noticed a huge change due to a simple change with the way she’s offered books. Rather than have them like a traditional library would, with the spine facing out, Robins has organized them into plastic tubs. The bins are organized according to categories (books about: horses, fairies, insects, etc.) instead of reading levels.

The students can choose their own book, and Robins teaches them how to know if a book is too challenging for them.

“They love picking out their own books,” she says. “It gives them a sense of control.”

The students also have more control, now, over where they read their books. Instead of having them all sit quietly at their desks to read, they are allowed to pick their own spot. So visit the grade two classroom during reading time, and you’ll find children in all sorts of places: laying on the carpet, lounging on a bean-bag chair, or tucked away in a cozy corner.

“I’ve noticed the students’ enthusiasm for reading has increased,” says Robins. “In the past during reading time I’d have a lot of students going to the bathroom or getting a drink. Now those students are coming to show me the pictures, or tell me about something they’ve read. It’s great!”
Thank you!

Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools would like to thank the following for their ongoing support of our students. The funds donated to Wetaskiwin Regional Public Schools are directed to projects, scholarships and initiatives not funded by Alberta Education.

Platinum $10,000 +
- Canadian Horizontal Drilling Inc.
- Lincoln County Oilfield Services
- SEARIC

Gold $5,000 - $9,999
- Fellowship of Alder Flats School Committee

Silver $3,000 - $4,999
- A&R Grader Services
- Bear Ballz Welding
- Cenovus Energy
- Eric & Julia Wolney
- Erin Klatt
- Falun School Moms
- John Maude & Susan Quinn
- Kinsmen Club of Wetaskiwin
- Leona Zacharko
- Mr. & Mrs. Leslie Ripka
- Parish Energy Services
- Terry Cooper
- Todd and Jamie Befus

Supporter $500 - $999
- 1148656 Alberta Ltd. Steve Hodgson
- Betty and Colin Schoenhofer
- Chris Monea
- Clay Steeves
- ConocoPhillips Canada Resources
- Keyera Corporation
- Philip Nash
- Sherri Gardiner
- Winfield Lions Club
- Winfield and District Ag Society

Levels of financial support

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Platinum</td>
<td>$10,000 +</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gold</td>
<td>$5,000-$9,999</td>
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<tr>
<td>Silver</td>
<td>$3,000-$4,999</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bronze</td>
<td>$1,000-$2,999</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supporter</td>
<td>$500-$999</td>
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<tr>
<td>Donor</td>
<td>$10-$99</td>
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Gold $5,000 - $9,999
- C.B. McMurdo
- Centennial
- Clear Vista

Silver $3,000 - $4,999
- Early Education and Family Wellness Centre (Preschool Program)

Bronze $1,000 - $2,000
- Significant Community Supporters
- Hope Mission
- Canadian Tire Jumpstart

We’d love to hear from you!

Is there a story you’d like to tell us about your child?

☐ How has he or she been successful in their school journey?
☐ Is there an educator who has made a difference?

What do you think of this publication?

For comments, please contact Sherry Knoll at:
(780) 352-4153 ext. 225

2015-16 SCHOOL REGISTRATION DATES

School registration is from 9 am - 3 pm on specified dates, unless otherwise noted.

NOTE: New registrations must bring birth certificate and last report card

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Dates</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alder Flats</td>
<td>September 1-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buck Mountain Central</td>
<td>August 28 (Note: office is closed Aug. 31)</td>
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<tr>
<td>C.B. McMurdo</td>
<td>August 5 - 7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Centennial</td>
<td>August 27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clear Vista</td>
<td>Office open beginning August 24-28 (10am - 1pm)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Early Education and</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Family Wellness Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Preschool Program)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ecole Parkdale</td>
<td>September 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>École Queen Elizabeth</td>
<td>September 1 &amp; 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Falun</td>
<td>August 27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Griffiths-Scott</td>
<td>August 27</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gwynne</td>
<td>September 1 &amp; 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lakedell</td>
<td>August 28</td>
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<tr>
<td>Millet</td>
<td>September 1 &amp; 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Norwood</td>
<td>August 28</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pigeon Lake Regional</td>
<td>September 28 &amp; 31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pipestone</td>
<td>September 1 &amp; 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Winfield</td>
<td>September 1 &amp; 2</td>
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Wetaskiwin Composite High School Registration Information

RLS, ALS and GOALS students will register on September 3, 2015 when they arrive for the first day of school. New students who need to register will be accepted on Sept 1 by appointment. Please call (780)-352-2295.

Students who are already registered will pick up timetables, books, locker assignments and pay fees on the following dates: Note: NO timetable changes occur on these days.

- **August 27 - Grade 12**
  - Last names A-L: 9:00 – 12:00 noon
  - Last names M-Z: 1:00 – 3:00 pm

- **August 28 - Grade 11**
  - Last names A-L: 9:00 – 12:00 noon
  - Last names M-Z: 1:00 – 3:00 pm

- **August 31 - Grade 10**
  - Last names A-L: 9:00 – 12:00 noon
  - Last names M-Z: 1:00 – 3:00 pm

Off-campus students can register for storefront programming on September 3, 2015.

WRPS SCHOOL BOARD

Back row left to right: George Ollenberger, Karen Becker, Dave Gursky, Barb Johnson - Vice Chair, Shauna Bruno.
Front row left to right: Robbyn Erickson, Lynn Ware, Deanna Specht - Chair.