



Making a Difference in Students' Lives

In advance of Education Week, students across Prairie Valley School Division were asked to create posters, write essays and compose speeches about how they can make a difference in their schools.

The posters, essays and speeches were part of an Education Week activity to align with Prairie Valley School Division's theme for 2011-2012.

Called "A Challenge to All... Achievement for All... You Can Make A Difference", the initiative is a challenge to staff at all 38 Prairie Valley School Division schools, says Director of Education Ben Grebinski.

"We believe in learning for all and that all students can learn," says Grebinski.

"We believe all students can learn but the challenge is, will they all learn."

Prairie Valley has worked very hard during the past three years to enhance program delivery models, improve performance measurement tools, build its infrastructure and secure the best people possible to deliver services throughout the School Division.

With that foundation in place, Grebinski says Prairie Valley is now in a much better position to "focus our energies on improving student achievement.

"We must create vibrant learning opportunities and address deficiencies in achievement levels," says the Director of Education.

Grebinski adds that the challenge is a

significant one.

"When you look at taking the children from where they are when they walk into your room at the beginning of the academic year to where they are at the end of the year, that is a pretty significant accomplishment," the Director of Education explains.

"But to get there is a significant challenge."

Grebinski says "A Challenge for All... Achievement for All" is about effort and commitment.

"We are not necessarily going to achieve the outcome we have set out for every single child," he says. "What we want to ensure is that we have evidence of our effort."

Helping students help themselves

Like most elementary school students, Cassie Curtis has an affinity for video games. When asked which games she likes the most, Cassie types the answer into a specially adapted iPod, presses a few buttons and a speaker on the device provides the answer: “the Wii fishing game.”

The Clive Draycott School student relies on her iPod, an assistive technology device provided by Prairie Valley School Division, to communicate.

Born with Moe-bius Syndrome, Cassie is unable to speak but with the use of her iPod, can communicate with her classmates, her teachers and others.

After a few minutes of conversation, Cassie explains she is in Grade 7, her favourite subject is math and she helps out at school doing chores such as taking recycling to the computer lab. The best thing about the iPod, she says, is that it helps her to talk.

Cassie, who can either use a touch-pad to type words or access a series of symbols on the screen, began using her iPod in 2010

and is just one of many students at Prairie Valley School Division who are being helped every day by a variety of assistive devices.

Devices run the gamut from beds and lifts to bikes and commodes, to laptops, iPads and iPods, to ball chairs and specially designed desks, says Leanne Sudom, who heads up the assistive technology team at Prairie Valley School Division.

“We typically provide assistive technologies for students who are identified as needing intensive support or students diagnosed with a learning disability,” she says. “Technology needs to fit where the student is. It depends on where they are at and where the need is.”

Sudom explains that assistive devices can have a number of very different objectives from helping students to communicate to

that he still has the technology he needs but he is also right in a row with the rest of the kids.”

At Prairie Valley, devices are not limited to students with intensive needs. Instead, they are also being made available to students with learning disabilities, who can get access to laptops to help them either in the classroom or at home. And assistive technology is not always just

for students, says Sudom, explaining that Prairie Valley has added amplified sound devices in all pre-K to Grade 5 classrooms to help teachers communicate with students.

Sudom, who has been involved with assistive devices for the past six years, says advances in technology have been very beneficial for students. Hardware and software have become much more user friendly, and devices are more compact and are also much less expensive than they once were.

Students with auditory problems who relied on devices that were often bulky and difficult to use can now be outfitted with iPods or iPads.

An additional benefit is that students are more accepting of using them.

“You can’t overlook

the cool factor of having an iPad as opposed to having a big bulky device,” she says.

“I have one student who might use his (previous device) reluctantly, but his iPad, everybody wants to know what he can do on it. So when you are looking at inclusion, it creates an opportunity for interaction and communication and for kids to be included and to be a part of things.”



Cassie Curtis works with Reila Bird-Duesling at Clive Draycott School.

making them feel more inclusive in their schools. As well, different devices can be combined in order to best help a student.

“We have a student with a visual impairment but the computer needed to be at the side of the classroom because it had a big monitor,” she says. “Our recommendation was for a different style of desk, which falls within our assistive technology policy. Now, he has a desk that is L-shaped so

HELPING MORE YOUNG CHILDREN



New pre-K programs

The number of pre-Kindergarten programs operating at Prairie Valley School Division schools has increased by three for the 2011-2012 school year. New pre-K classes have been added at Balcarres Community School (which now has two pre-Ks), Pilot Butte and Broadview. Other pre-K programs are

located in Fort Qu'Appelle, Grenfell, Indian Head, Whitewood and Lumsden.

Pre-K programs provide high quality early childhood education. This can result in both short-term and long-term benefits such as improved learning abilities and social skills for children, and especially for vulnerable children.

TECHNOLOGY IMPROVEMENTS



High-tech schools

Prairie Valley School Division's commitment to improving technology continues.

This summer, 37 new Smartboards were installed in 12 schools. With the addition of the new Smartboards, Prairie Valley has achieved its target of having Smartboards in 50 per cent of all instructional spaces. As well,

every school has a Smart Camera, which allow teachers to display paper notes or three-dimensional objects on Smartboards. Seven schools also received technology refreshes this summer.

Prairie Valley also produced an Education Technology Roadmap this fall, which will provide guidance for future technology renewal.

LITERACY ENHANCEMENTS



Literacy camps held

Students from the Fort Qu'Appelle and Grenfell areas participated in literacy camps this summer. The camps were held July 11 to 22, 2011 in Grenfell and July 25 to August 5, 2011 in Fort Qu'Appelle.

Students from those communities and from surrounding communities and First Nations attended the camps.

The camps provided programming for more than 40 children and helped to increase the participants' love of reading and books through storytelling, group reading, games, arts and crafts, music, writing and drama.

The camps also have a positive impact on student reading readiness, retention and achievement.

MORE EXTRA-CURRICULAR OPTIONS



Football programs expand

Students at three Prairie Valley School Division schools have had new football teams to cheer for this fall.

Football programs have been revived at Indian Head High School, Milestone School and Broadview School.

All the teams have been enjoying successful seasons and all of them have received

tremendous support from students, and from their schools and communities.

The Milestone Cougars play at the 1A six-man level, the Broadview Bandits are in the 2A six-man division and the Indian Head Broncs play nine-man football.

The three teams are members of the Qu'Appelle Valley Athletic Association.

French Immersion at White City School

The French Immersion program at White City School is capturing the interest of students.

That quickly becomes apparent from visiting the two French Immersion classrooms where students are responding readily to instructions in French from kindergarten teacher Häla Magnuson and her Grade 1/2 counterpart, Giselle Chomos.

"They are really interested in learning French," says Magnuson, who alternates between French and a little bit of English as she explains an activity to her 16 kindergarten students.

"They are a fantastic group of kids. They are so ready to learn, they are little sponges."

French Immersion is new to both White City School and Prairie Valley School Division. After extensive consultations with Prairie Valley residents, plans were devel-



Kindergarten students at White City

oped for the French Immersion program, with White City identified as the optimum location. After approval was received from the provincial government last spring, Prairie Valley began moving forward with getting everything in place to start the program in September. French Immersion teachers were found, new teaching materials were added and two new relocatable

classrooms were constructed at the school.

So far, interest from parents has been strong, with 42 students registered in the kindergarten and Grade 1/2 classes. The plan is to grow the program one grade annually in future years.

"We've had fabulous feedback from our community members," says Principal Bev Bjornson-Kowalchuk.

"From the opportunities from being in the school and the language their children have already been bringing home, parents have been very positive about what they have seen."

Bjornson-Kowalchuk is also very pleased with how the students are progressing with their French language skills.

"We hear them using phrases in the hallway," she says. "They've already got the confidence to speak a little bit in public, not just in the classroom."

SCCs: ENGAGING THE PUBLIC

As chair of Greenall High's School Community Council, Dawn Blaus is keenly interested in providing two-way communication between her school and her community and engaging the public in what is happening in classrooms.

"SCCs are vitally important to student education," says Blaus, who also sits on a Prairie Valley public engagement committee.

"Students need an engaged public. They need everyone in the community supporting them. Students benefit academically when the community gets involved and

there's a shared sense of responsibility for student success and achievement."

closely with School Community Councils to find ways to better engage the public.



SCC members attend a workshop at Indian Head High School.

Prairie Valley hosted a professional development workshop for SCCs members, with an emphasis on providing the tools to help them explore ways to enhance public engagement and participation, on October 15, 2011 at Indian Head High School.

As well, Prairie Valley School Division is developing a Public Engagement Plan that SCCs will be able to access to more effectively involve parents and other

community members in what is happening in their schools.

That sentiment is a major focus at Prairie Valley School Division, which is working

Calendar of Events

Regular Board Meetings

November 9

Division Office

9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Organization meeting

5 p.m. to 6 p.m.

December 14

Division Office

9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Christmas Break

December 27-January 4

inclusive

Prairie Valley Annual Meeting

January 25

Balcarres Community School

7:30 p.m.

Prairie Valley School Division serves approximately 8,000 students in 38 schools throughout southeast Saskatchewan. In support of the vision "Leadership in Learning and Life", the Division strives to ensure a high-quality education that provides students with the tools to reach and exceed their potential.

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P.O. Box 1937 • 3080 Albert Street North • Regina SK • S4P 3E1

Phone (306) 949-3366

Fax (306) 543-1771

www.pvsd.ca

Toll Free 1-877-266-1666