

New group of trustees sworn in

By Sam Odrowski
Staff writer
sodrowski@fortfrances.com

Some new faces now are representing communities across the district with respect to public education.

The new group of Rainy River District School Board trustees serving the 2018-22 term were sworn in at last night's board meeting and they're both eager and excited to serve.

Outgoing chair Diane McCormack, who served as a trustee for eight years, said she's really enjoyed her time on the board and wishes the new trustees all the best.

"My hope is that they're able to learn their role quickly and work together as a group," she remarked.

"That doesn't mean they agree on everything but it means they're able to work towards what's best for students."

Fellow outgoing trustees said they had great experiences serving the communities, and look forward to seeing the new board continue to provide quality education to the district's students.

One of the difficulties the new group may encounter is the political aspect of serving as trustee, McCormack warned.

"So many decisions are made at Queen's Park that may work really well in southern Ontario in the more heavily-populated areas but aren't going to work in the more rural northern areas," she noted.

During her time as trustee, McCormack said the board faced a lot of provincially-mandated legislation, but did see a few successes in reaching out and explaining where the difficulties lie in putting it into place.

She also revealed she would have run in this fall's election but her husband works for the Canadian National Railway and is being transferred to Manitoba.

Looking back on her eight years as trustee, McCormack is most proud of the board's work to revise its strategic plan.

"We spent a lot of time working on that," she remarked. "We had a lot of input from a lot of stakeholders."

Out of the consultations which 40 students across the district, along with staff, helped to create, they narrowed the focus of the plan to creating "A culture of lifelong learning" and "A culture of caring."

"Under the lifelong learning, one of the things we're emphasizing is developing pathways for students," McCormack explained.

"One of the things we heard from students was that they needed choices," she noted. "They needed different ways in which to peruse their education to help them go out into the world and be successful."

As well, the board had been working to ensure the infrastructure exists to help students as needed.

"Under the 'culture of car-

ing,' I think the heart of that is just bringing all the supports needed to students for their well-being," McCormack said.

"We've talked about how if students are not physically and mentally healthy, it's very difficult for them to achieve academically," she reasoned.

"When you're looking after your basic health, there's not a lot of energy left for other things."

Through the strategic plan, the board created a strong student-focused approach to education.

Another aspect of McCormack's position on the board that she enjoyed was drafting policies.

"I had no idea that I would enjoy policy so much," she enthused. "Our policies really drive what we do; they set the direction for the board."

Once she started understanding how policies worked, her focus was on ensuring they were written concisely and easy to understand.

McCormack also will miss the "Recognition of Excellence" portion of the board's monthly meetings.

"Seeing the successes, especially the programming successes . . . is the most rewarding part for me," she remarked.

"It's seeing the results of the work you do.

"I've enjoyed the years I've been there [on the board] and I think I will miss all of it," McCormack added.