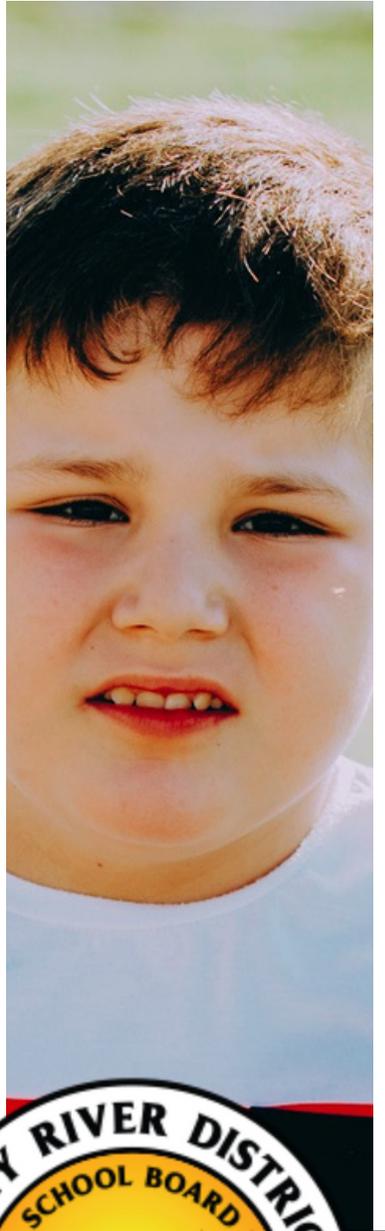
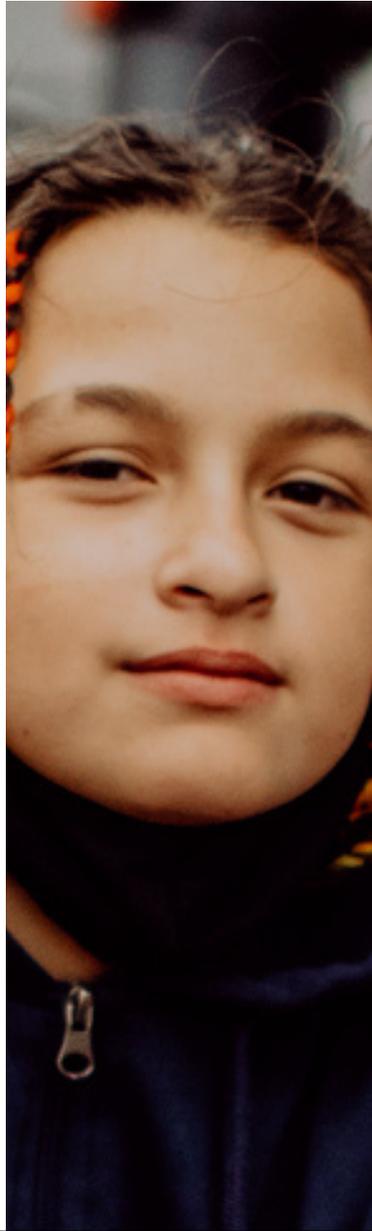


Director's Annual Report



2021-2022



Director's message

Heather Campbell



As Director of Education for the Rainy River District School Board, I am pleased to share our 2021-2022 Annual Report. The 2021-2022 school year was yet another challenging one, as we pivoted from in-person to remote learning due to COVID-19 health risks. Despite this, there was much to celebrate, with our staff and students rising to the challenge to accomplish some incredible work.

We updated our Strategic Plan, maintaining our two pillars - A Culture of Caring and A Culture of Lifelong Learning. We continued to prioritize mental health and the value of school in promoting and protecting well-being. We learned what it takes to create a mentally-healthy school environment within our school communities and how that ties to student achievement. We continued to address the learning that was impacted by the pandemic, recognizing that students require different supports and resources to ensure that they can experience academic success.

Thank you to the Board of Trustees for their ongoing commitment and dedication to student well-being and success. Our staff, parents, and caregivers must also be commended for the extra effort put forth this past year, supporting our efforts to keep our schools healthy and open, as well as being flexible in pivoting to different learning models as necessary.

Thank you as well to our community partners and community members who assisted in creating a culture of collaboration and caring, supporting the best interests of our students. Finally, the leadership of our students is also to be recognized and celebrated. Our students persevered through yet another challenging year, overcoming the obstacles associated with pivoting to online learning, and making the best of missing a variety of in-person instruction and experiences.

Despite the challenges of the 2021-2022 school year, our school communities came together, once again, learning about resiliency and overcoming obstacles. Students and staff discovered some positive practices to build upon, and we will continue to celebrate our students and to help them achieve success.

Yours in education,
Heather Campbell, Director of Education

Strategic Plan

The Rainy River District School Board updated its multi-year strategic plan during the 2021-2022 school year, beginning in August 2021 with trustees and administration meeting with a facilitator to evaluate the current Board Strategic Plan for strengths and opportunities.

Over the following three months, stakeholders were invited to provide input into the development of the new Strategic Plan through sessions held in Fort Frances, Atikokan, Emo, Rainy River, and virtually. In total, 58 stakeholders, consisting of school council representatives, community partners, community leaders, staff, and school administration, provided feedback through these sessions. Consultations were also held with union affiliates, the Student Senate (with additional students invited), the Special Education Advisory Committee, the First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Advisory Committee, and the Parent Involvement Committee.

The final avenue for input was a community-wide virtual ThoughtExchange which resulted in more than 249 individuals providing 254 thoughts to the question, "What are the most important things for RRDSB to consider as we prepare our students for future success?" This exchange received over 6,700 ratings.

The Board then reviewed the feedback provided, as well as the draft Strategic Plan priority statements. Ultimately, six statements, under two pillars, were approved.





Culture of Caring

Mental Health

We know that to be ready to learn, all students need to feel a strong sense of safety, belonging, and well-being at school. It is important to recognize the incredible efforts of all staff and families to promote child and youth well-being and learning through the pandemic. It is also important to recognize that the pandemic had a disproportionate impact on some students. As such, we approached the 2021-2022 school year with a renewed focus on equity related to mental health and well-being.

Our students and staff experience a sense of belonging in safe, caring environments that will encourage their well-being and mental health.

In the 2021-2022 school year, we looked to the following guiding principals:

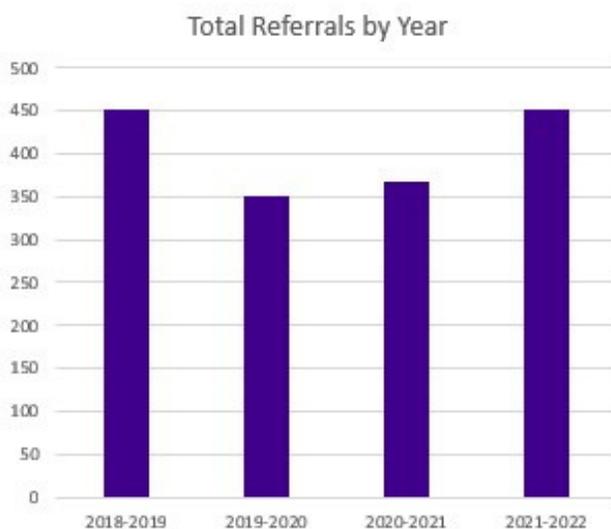
- *prioritizing mental health and well-being as a key condition for students to learn and flourish.*
- *leading with compassion and empathy and taking action to address equity in mental health and well-being.*
- *protecting and promoting student mental health within caring learning environments.*
- *recognizing and building on the learning and experiences of the pandemic.*
- *making our way together, with community partners and within communities.*

Educators were asked to complete the Mentally-Healthy Classroom Reflection Tool, designed to help prompt thinking about building a mentally healthy classroom, to spark ideas for actions that enhance conditions for learning, and to provide possible strategies to support student mental health and well-being.

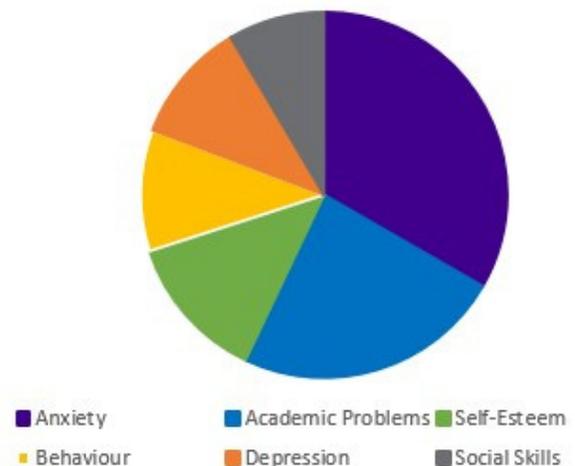
Mental Health Leader, Tracey Idle, presented Social Emotional Learning (SEL) lessons within elementary classrooms throughout the spring, to support the development of stress management and healthy coping skills.



With the extra funding provided by the Ministry of Education, the Board increased the number of Mental Health Clinicians within the schools from 4.5 to 6.5. The Rainy River District School Board mental health counselling program is unique in that the counsellors are contracted through a partnership with Kenora Rainy River Districts Children and Family Services. This partnership supports the Tier 1 supports outlined in the funding requirement, while also supporting schools, and, most importantly, students and their families, in addressing more serious needs. Counsellors are assigned to schools (or groups of schools) and provide support through walk-ins, individual and group counselling, and presentations to classrooms and staff. Through the partnership, the clinicians provide initial short-term counselling services and are thus able to seamlessly transition students, based on the needs presented, to more intensive supports provided within their agency.



Presenting Issues 2021-2022



To support our students, we need healthy and resilient employees. Our work to create safety mindedness through regular training and promotion of safe work practices continued into the spring and included a focus on cyber safety. In addition, several well-being presentations and workshops have been held over the school year. These included three sessions by Dr. Greg Wells covering sleeping soundly, eating smarter, and moving more. Morneau Shepell, our EFAP provider, also completed six hours of training, covering personal financial planning and budgeting, Seasonal Affective Disorder, supporting co-workers through difficulties and holiday stress. We also resumed Mental Health Champions Meetings; these sessions involved employees who self-identified as wanting to champion mental health and wellness. The sessions promoted staff and student mental health initiatives such as our EFAP program, provided Mental Health First Aid training, and offered information on how mental health fits within our sick leave and leave of absence processes.

Equity

The work we do around equity, diversity, and inclusion doesn't exist in isolation – it includes students, staff, parents, and community members. It involves challenging current biases for positive change, that, in the end, impacts student achievement. We want all students and staff to feel safe, included, and welcomed in our schools.

We build supportive relationships with students to deliver equitable and inclusive learning experiences.

Our ongoing professional development through Dr. Andrew Campbell, Understanding Indigenous Voices in Canada, and presentations by Bobby Hudon from the Binesiwag Centre for Wellness focused on continuing to build an understanding of inclusion, equity, and diversity.

Dr. Andrew Campbell, otherwise known as "Dr. ABC", has met regularly with system and school leadership and members of School Support Services, with a total of 45 participants learning about equity and re-examining our current practices.

Understanding Indigenous Voices in Canada is a module-based, self-directed online course designed to educate our staff on issues faced by Indigenous people in Canada. We implemented this in September 2021 with the purpose of addressing *The Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action* in the interest of promoting understanding, empathy and communication. This training is now a permanent part of our onboarding of staff.

Bobby Hudon, Wellness Coordinator from the Binesiwag Centre for Wellness, met with students in Grades 5-10 and staff at each school throughout the Board to discuss the 2SLGBTQIAP+ acronym and engage in discussions on awareness, inclusion and diversity. These sessions, in turn, support educators in continuing the discussions at the school level.

In addition, the work within the Plan has involved:

- The piloting of an Equity Backpack program at J. W. Walker School.
- The introduction of "Under the Rainbow" sessions to students at Mine Centre School, with the plan to expand to all students in Grades 5 to 10 by the end of the school year.
- The provision of funding to support educators in furthering their professional learning through Queen's University's Inclusive Classroom Three-Part Additional Qualifications program.
- The provision of time for all permanent staff to complete the Ankiigamig training modules, online training developed locally, which helps to build knowledge and understanding of the impact of colonialism on our Indigenous communities.
- Work to complete a Student Census in the Spring of 2022 by hiring Forum Research to assist with the data cleansing and analysis in this project.

Finally, our hiring processes were reviewed to eliminate bias: all interview questions were reviewed through the lens of equity, with new questions and revisions to existing questions occurring. The Non-Union Job Equity Review was also initiated in the late fall through Pesce and Associates; this process is in its final stage.



The collection of student and staff demographic census data is a requirement for all school boards as per Ontario's Anti-Racism Data Standards (ARDS), under the 2017 *Anti-Racism Act*.

A student Demographic Census to support the collection, analysis, and use of voluntary student data occurred from April 25 through May 6, 2022.

Going forward, this census will allow us to deepen our understanding of our students to help us continue to create equitable, inclusive learning environments that support student achievement and well-being. A report will be made available on our website next school year.

Health & Safety

We are committed to providing a healthy, supportive learning and working environment for our students and staff. We know that students achieve their best when they feel safe, nurtured, welcomed, engaged, respected, and included.

During the 2021-2022 school year, we implemented an Anti-Sex Trafficking Protocol and facilitated a new Bullying Prevention and Intervention Policy and Plan.

We work with families, partners, and communities in mutually respectful and productive relationships to enhance the success of all students.

The Anti-Sex Trafficking Protocol, which was completed at the end of January 2022 in cooperation with our community partners, aims to help students who disclose that they have been or are being trafficked are supported and have access to appropriate resources (i.e. school social worker, community agencies). The goal is to keep the student safe, both physically and emotionally.

As well, in updating the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan, we ensured that these key components were included:

- Needs assessment
- Training strategies & resources
- Prevention and awareness-raising strategies
- Intervention and support strategies
- Communication and outreach
- Monitoring and review process

In developing the Bullying Prevention and Intervention Plan, we solicited the views of school councils, Board advisory committees, Student Leadership Councils, and Student Senate. Once finalized, the Plan will be used by schools to analyze their school climate survey data, identifying areas of strength and areas of concern with their Safe School.

For 2022-2023, further training is planned related to these initiatives.



Culture of Lifelong Learning

Pathways

Techways is one of the many different programs that the Rainy River District School Board offers to enhance and support students' pathway planning. The program offers practical, real-life learning experiences that support Grade 7-8 students' mastery of learning, encouraging them to develop confidence and skills that support their growth. Since its inception in 2017, the Techways program has successfully engaged the RRDSB intermediate cohort (approximately 400 students) in over 20 different hands-on learning experiences annually.

We steadily work to improve the Techways program and the experiences that are offered. A major part of our improvement is the implementation of a project menu, along with a simple, yet comprehensive website that houses resource materials for all lessons. Information and student voices gathered through Xello, our career exploration program, highlighted that many of our students are tactile learners and enjoy working with their hands to create a variety of projects.

Another notable improvement has been the embedding of Indigenous-based activities, such as the Red River Cart Project, into our curriculum. In this project, learning goals include being able to describe some significant aspects of daily life in various First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities in Canada during the 1800's.

Another focus of pathway planning, Anishinaabemodaa, the Ojibwe Language Strategy, continues, with this year being the fifth of a seven-year project. Accomplishments to date include:

- Four more children's shows have been produced, all in Anishinaabemowin.
- Seven students going through the Mentor Learner Program with a six-month stagger between the two classes; the Grades 9 and 10 students in the Program spend 15 hours of extra Anishinaabemowin practice per week.
- Enrollment in Ojibwe language classes continues to increase year over year; 47% of Grade 9 students are enrolled in Ojibwe language.

Our students pursue learning pathways that reflect their individual interests and needs, building their skills for the future.



Numeracy

During the 2021-2022 school year, many initiatives were implemented to support teacher learning and student math achievement in the Rainy River District School Board. Some examples include:

- Ensuring materials and resources are available for teachers to support teaching and learning in Financial Literacy, Coding, Real-Life Connections, Working with Numbers, and Building Confidence in Math Skills.
- Incorporating at least one Connected North session into each MTHIW Class during the 2021-2022 School Year to help support Individual Pathway Planning, so that students could see the relevance of numeracy across many professions.
- Providing opportunities for Experiential Learning that relate to the MTHIW Curriculum in the areas of Financial Literacy, Geometry, Mathematical Processes and Social-Emotional Learning in Mathematics (e.g., Adopt-An-Angel Activity in December 2021).
- Supporting virtual and in-person learning with individualized and small group supports for students who have gaps in their mathematical learning to ensure equity.
- Providing professional development at the elementary level via staff meeting presentations as well as job-embedded, "at-the-elbow" work with teachers. All professional development was underpinned by the practices of equity and inclusion.
- Partnering with faculty from Ontario Tech University to deliver after-school PD sessions to teachers. These sessions offered teachers practical ideas and support for utilizing maker pedagogy to teach math concepts.
- Co-planning and co-teaching opportunities continued across the District to support the implementation of the elementary Math curriculum. Over this year, we worked to support our high schools in Grade 9 destreaming in Math, and to prepare for the destreaming of Grade 9 Science, English, Geography, and French for the fall of 2022. The Grade 9 Math curriculum was implemented with a high level of credit achievement: 95% of students enrolled in MTH 1W achieved the credit.

We support our students through high expectations in teaching and learning.



Literacy

The Literacy Support Plan for the 2021-2022 school year took into consideration the importance of sound pedagogy, collaboration across roles in education, equity in achievement, as well as monitoring for growth at the student, classroom, school, and system levels. The framework was a collaborative action plan for literacy instruction which looks to Principals, the Speech-Language Pathologist, Reading Recovery Teachers, Early Childhood Educators, Educational Assistants, and Communication Assistants to play pivotal roles in supporting student literacy learning.



Guided Reading/Writing remained at the heart of the literacy plan. Literacy Coordinators supported teachers across the District with the implementation of newly purchased assessment kits which aligned with *Next Step Forward in Guided Reading and Literacy Footprints*. Teachers were able to assess their students and use the results to form flexible Guided Reading and Writing groups based on similar strengths and needs. The results of these comprehensive assessments were used to strategically plan for each child. This research-based, high-yield strategy allowed teachers to provide precision teaching to students based on immediate needs in a low teacher to student ratio. Groups and individuals requiring more support were seen more frequently, while students requiring less direct instruction still met with the teacher as well as receiving opportunities to work at their level independently.

To ensure accountability and maximize student growth, Literacy Coordinators continued to support the use of reading continuums in all schools across the District. Teachers entered monthly reading assessment results into the reading continuum, which was reviewed at staff meetings to monitor student growth as well as classroom, school, and system programming trends through supportive, meaningful, action-oriented discussions between colleagues and administration.

A comprehensive literacy plan including high-yield strategies for reading and writing instruction, a balance of hands-on and tech-based learning, professional development for all educators, and at-the-elbow support for teachers helped to build capacity and align practice across schools during the 2021-2022 school year.



Land-based Learning

The Rainy River District School Board continues the work to have our Indigenous learners see themselves in their learning and to develop staff members', students', and communities' understanding and appreciation for Canada's Indigenous peoples, their cultures and perspectives, and our shared history. Some highlights during the 2021-2022 school year include the following:

We recognize, respect, and honor the experiences of students and families, to provide learning opportunities that are culturally relevant and responsive to students' needs.

The Youth Outreach Workers at Robert Moore School and Crossroads School supported students in building self-advocacy skills through small group work and teamwork activities. Lessons included land-based and experiential learning to give students access to hands-on learning. For example, activities such as hiking, outdoor-safety, camping, and compass skills have produced a sense of accomplishment and joy in our students.

Students learned to work as a team to coordinate how to safely make a fire, brew cedar tea and cook Bannock while outside. Students researched, designed and built bat and bird houses to maintain the current population. We believe that students who have opportunities to learn from the land and to be active participants in the outdoors are able to strengthen their creativity, imagination and problem-solving skills, while boosting their confidence and overall mental well-being. These enhanced skills will help students to be more successful in their learning, thus improving attendance, engagement, and achievement.

A great deal of the work within Experiential Learning involved reconnecting with community partners, to ensure safe continuation of experiential learning opportunities, including on-site excursions where possible. As a result of this work, we saw 85 students in Grades 2-4 at Robert Moore School and 20 Grade 12 students from Fort Frances High School participate in cultural learning onsite at Kay-Nah-Chi-Wah Nung Historical Centre. And, all schools participated in Fall Harvest this year.

We also have begun work to develop further land-based learning opportunities for students, including the initial development of a secondary course for at-risk students. As part of this work, 50 students from Grades 5 to 12 participated in land-based learning on site at Nigigoonsiminikaaning First Nation, with students learning to set snares and marten traps on the trail. As we move towards resumption of on-site opportunities, we have discovered the opportunities provided through virtual connections leading up to and following the onsite experience have given us greater capacity to reinforce the experiential learning cycle (i.e., Participate, Reflect, Apply). For instance, students met online first with Elders Don and Koko Jones before the onsite experience for background on the experience and to ask questions.

