

'Connected North' program lauded

Wednesday, Apr 18, 2018 – Fort Frances Times

By [Sam Odrowski](#)

Students at Fort Frances High School, Mine Centre School, and McCrosson Tovell School all have been able to speak with experts, and see new places from the comfort of their classroom, thanks to the Rainy River District School Board's "Connected North" program.

The provincially-funded program delivers an immersive and highly-engaging education service through Cisco's high-definition, two-way TelePresence video technology.

Jason Jones, the "Connected North" facilitator for Fort High, gave a presentation at the board's monthly meeting earlier this month, during which he discussed how the program is being received by teachers and students.

The program is designed for remote communities in the north which don't have equal access to educational opportunities that students in urban city centres have.

"If you grow up in the north, you don't have the same opportunities as someone who, say, lives in Toronto," Jones noted.

Students in the GTA, for instance, can organize a field trip to the Royal Art Museum or Art Gallery of Ontario without travelling too far. But those here in Rainy River District would have to drive to Winnipeg or Thunder Bay for a similar experience.

Jones said what makes the program great is having a real person you can interact with compared to an educational video or slide show.

"It makes it more real when you are talking with people who have had experiences," he explained.

"You're not listening to a video of someone on YouTube," Jones reiterated. "You are actually talking with a live person on the other end."

In the past, health and science classes have connected with surgeons who perform simulated medical procedures while answering any of the students' questions.

Jones is satisfied with the level of engagement and learning students receive through the program.

"At the end of the day, the students get really familiar with the subject that we are talking about," he remarked.

"You can really see the learning happening."

"Connected North" also can be a helpful resource for older students who are trying to decide their career.

"For students in Grade 12 who aren't 100 percent sure about the field they want to get into, they can talk directly with a surgeon and ask them questions," Jones said.

Through hearing from the expert first-hand, a student can get a better idea of what is required for the occupation they're interested in.

Jones is enthusiastic about his role with "Connected North" and would like to see the program expand to more schools that could benefit.

"I think that it's growing and it's putting Fort Frances on the map," he enthused.

"There is only positive things that can happen through this for students in the future."