

Mostly new school board turns to veterans for leadership

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A very different Rainy River district school board acclaimed its two most experienced members to the chair and vice-chair positions last week.

Raymond Roy, first elected to the board in 2014, is the new chair, succeeding Dianne McCormack who did not run for re-election. Vice-chair is David Kircher, first elected in 2010; he replaced Mike Lewis (who retired from the board at the end of September) in that role in October.

Both the chair and vice-chair represent Fort Frances. This is the first time a Fort Frances trustee has occupied a senior board position since 2010, when Dan Belluz was chair. In the recent municipal election, both Fort Frances men were re-elected by comfortable margins from a field of six candidates in that town.

The four new trustees are Jeff Lehman from Atikokan, David Loewen (acclaimed to represent Rainy River and the west end of the district; he replaces McCormack), Kathryn Pierroz (Alberton, Lavallee, and area; she defeated incumbent Ralph Hill and one other in the October election), and John Fuhrer (Emo, Chapple, Nestor Falls and area; he bested Janet Judson in the election; incumbent Don McBride did not run).

At Tuesday's meeting, Pierroz was acclaimed as the board's representative to the Ontario Public School Boards Assoc., with Kircher as alternate.

Chief Robin McGinnis of Rainy River First Nation was appointed by the Chiefs Secretariat as the school board's

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School Board updates

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Indigenous rep on November 8.

The final member of the board is a student trustee, a role which is filled each year, in rotation, by a student from one of the three board secondary schools. Currently, Katelyn Bruyere, a grade twelve student from Fort Frances HS, represents all of the students in the district.

Trustees are paid a base amount of \$5,900 per year in honouraria. The board chair receives \$8,900, the vice-chair \$6,775, and the student trustee \$2,500.

2017-18 school year finances

The board accepted the draft version of its consolidated financial statements for the school year that ended August 31.

Spending totalled \$56.8 million on revenues of \$57.6 million (the surplus came in at \$793,784). Provincial grants made up the biggest part of revenue, at \$41 million; federal grants and fees were \$7 million, local taxes contributed \$3.8 million, and capital contributions deferred from other years were \$3.4 million.

Instruction, at \$39 million, was the biggest spending line, with administration at \$2.8 million, transportation at \$3 million, and pupil accommodation at \$9.3 million. Its total spending on all salaries and benefits came to \$38 million.

The board's debt stands at \$19.9 million; it is making \$1.6

million annually in principal and interest payments. The debt is all with the Ontario Financing Authority, in the form of six separate loans. The biggest are for \$12.5 million (4.833% interest rate, maturing in 2036) and \$6.6 million (at 3.574%, maturing in 2037).

Transportation deficits

In a letter to new Minister of Education Lisa Thompson, the board urged an in-depth review of transportation funding.

Board chair Dianne McCormack (the letter was written November 27) noted that basing transportation funding solely on enrolment was not meeting the needs of students. She called for a funding model that better reflects geography and the actual kilometres travelled by students, as well as fuel costs, driver shortages, and other factors that affect costs.

"Lengthy ride times are the reality for many of our students and have negative effects on their school-home life balance and, ultimately, their educational experience," she wrote. "These long bus rides translate to inactivity, with many students also leaving for school and returning home in the dark, further decreasing opportunities for being outdoors and participating in physical activity."

The transportation consortium for the district saw its costs rise eleven percent this year, noted the

joint transportation policy committee at its October meeting. Provincial funding increased just four percent.

Speech-language services

At the November meeting, speech language pathologists Ann Anderson and Lonna Oster presented data on the board's speech language program, which serves some 221 students across the district. Most are in primary classes, but services are provided for students in all grades, including high school, by the two pathologists and a team of communication assistants (8.73 full-time equivalents).

Anderson and Oster, who serve as coordinators of the board's speech-language program, noted the way it is being delivered has changed with the addition of a second pathologist, and new data collection techniques for tracking service delivery and student outcomes. They also discussed the age, school, and disorder characteristics of the students they serve.

Personnel

Sheri Bailey was hired as a half-time school secretary at AHS in November. (Sheila Ferguson resigned in October.) In September, Nikki Nesplak and Gary Lemieux were stepped up to full-time education assistants at North Star School; Karlee Lyght moved from occasional to half-time education assistant at AHS.