

Engagement lunches working to improve lines of communication

By Sam Odrowski

Staff writer

sodrowski@fortfrances.com

Donald Young School in Emo has been working to increase the lines of communication between teachers and parents through its monthly "Rainy River First Nation Parent Engagement Lunches."

In the three years the program has existed, it has grown from one or two parents participating to 16 at the most recent lunch in April.

The lunches are meant to improve communication between teachers and parents so they can express their ideas, opinions, and concerns in a non-judgemental environment—without any kids around.

The increased level of communication is helping parents connect to their child's education in a meaningful way, noted Tara Hunter, education director at Rainy River First Nation.

DYS vice-principal Heather Bridgeman agrees.

"It's just to open communication and make sure parents are informed about what's happening at the school," she noted.

Lunch attendees discuss any events happening at the school or if anything is coming up. And if the parents have any questions those are addressed

"The more faces we get at these meetings, the more ideas we have and it's just going to continue to get better."

**—Heather
Bridgeman**

have a personal relationship with the teachers and DYS staff, they can feel better about their child's learning, Hunter added.

Looking ahead, DYS teachers and parents are going to work on organizing a pow-wow specifically for school students at the Rainy River First Nation pow-wow grounds.

"That's something we are working on, and not only the parents but the kids who attend the school are going to be helping, as well," Hunter said,

The pow-wow is slated for September and the event will remain an agenda item at the lunches until then.

Hunter encourages all parents living in Rainy River First Nation with children who go to DYS to attend the parent engagement lunches, and noted their feedback is valued.

questions, those are addressed, as well.

Bridgeman said the parents' response has been great and the meetings seem to continue growing each month.

"They just continue to grow every time we have them," she enthused. "More and more people are coming."

Hunter, meanwhile, is grateful for the lunches and happy to provide a space where parents can talk to teachers candidly about their child's education.

"Communication is a big thing, and the more open that you can be and comfortable with where your kids are attending school, [the better]," she reasoned.

When parents are able to

their feedback is valued.
"If we didn't have the input from the parents, we wouldn't really know what the needs are or the things they would like to see in the future for their own children," she remarked.

"Input is always key to successful relationships, and having that open line of communication between the school and the parents is always a good thing.

"The more faces we get at these meetings, the more ideas we have and it's just going to continue to get better," Hunter added.

The next parent engagement lunch will be held at the RRFN's east end building tomorrow (May 17).