

Trustees given look at board's indigenous education strategy

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Rainy River District School Board trustees were treated to a look at the Indigenous Education Strategy during its Nov. 7 meeting here.

A presentation was given by Indigenous Education leader Bob Kowal and FNMI Resources/Support Teacher Pam King to outline some of the work they have been doing, as well as the importance of the strategy.

It was noted roughly 40 percent of students within the local public school board self-identify as First Nation or Métis—a number that has climbed from 32 percent in the past five years.

The latest project in line with their strategy is the "Journey Towards Reconciliation" document, which was put together by the board's Indigenous Education team, Seven Generations Education Institute staff, and Grade 8 teachers across the district.

It is designed to assist teachers in integrating lessons on residential schools into history lessons for students.

"Every Grade 8 teacher across the district now has to have a copy of this document and there is also a electronic version online," noted King.

"Currently we are working towards implementation."

King said after multiple meetings to create the document and lessons, she will be meeting with teachers in December to help plan, teach, and offer any other support they may need.

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—Pam King

later, everyone will be attempting one or two lessons from the document," she remarked.

Kowal and King also told the board about some of the activities students have been engaged in, such as the young women's and young men's conferences—two-day gatherings that took place in October at Sunny Cove Camp for selected students from each school in Grades 7-12.

"It is a leadership and mentorship opportunity for our high school students who take on that role," Kowal noted.

"Then we have the younger students who are picked by the principals because they may go either way with their education and this might get them engaged in their learning," he explained.

Kowal said the students come from across the board and have to follow the rules of the camp while also learning to collaborate with a group they have never met before.

"Frankly, we think the results have been terrific," he lauded.

"We did not have one incident of any sort of behaviour problem at all—it was remarkable."

Some of the activities included boating and fishing lessons, indigenous teachings, sewing, and crafting.

"The kids were up at seven in the morning—we didn't have to tell them to be there, they

were there—and went until nine at night, then hit the sack," Kowal noted.

King said she taught the young women some simple sewing techniques, which quickly became their favourite thing.

"Usually during free time, they want to run back to their cabins but I was pleasantly surprised that they wanted to go back to the sewing machines," she recalled, saying organizers had to run back into town to buy more fabric.

"The girls were engaged and felt good about their learning, which was a great opportunity for them," she added.

Other activities/events mentioned were "Orange Shirt Day," the blanket exercise, and a few books King uses as resources in primary and junior classrooms.

Also at last Tuesday night's meeting, trustees heard:

•Robert Moore principal Donna Kowalski, vice-principal Shane Beckett, and students Keirsten Ducharme and Alex Kabel speak about improvements to the school's playground for the board's monthly recognition of excellence;

•board reports on the Special Education, FNMI, Bylaw, Parent Involvement, and Policy committees; and

•reports from student trustee Lemeul Carradice, board chair Diane McCormack, and Director of Education Heather Campbell.