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~ MEDIA RELEASE ~

December 9, 2013

STUDENTS COME FIRST: A Defined Focus on Student Achievement

The 2013-2014 school year has seen many positive initiatives implemented towards our focus on providing a high level of learning for all students.

Good Spirit School Division believes in “**Learning Without Limits**” and “**Achievement For All**”. Teachers employ responsive teaching strategies with a belief that each and every student can learn and succeed. These strategies support students to become self-directed learners who look at any given situation as an opportunity to learn and who problem-solve to achieve their goals. Central to this theme is differentiation.

Differentiation is a philosophy of teaching and learning that puts the needs of individual students at the center of all instructional opportunities. Learning experiences are planned around each student’s interests, learning preferences, and readiness levels to achieve their individual curriculum outcomes. Teachers are continually assessing students to ensure each is provided with unique pathways to achieve at the highest level with their own personal learning abilities.

In the GSSD strategic plan feedback (released in August, 2012), staff indicated a need for a cohesive “big picture” look at how all of the initiatives and work we are doing for students ties in to complement one another. This is a direct link with our strategic goals of improving student learning, enhancing student well-being, strengthening instruction, enhancing levels of qualified staff and strengthening staff engagement and morale. In the fall of 2013, senior administration, after a year of developing an action plan, developing targets and a thorough implementation plan, the GSSD Five-Year Professional Development Continuum Plan was released.

The PD Continuum Plan will work on consistency in teaching practice division-wide with a unique focus in each of the five years of the plan. In the first year, Response to Intervention (RtI) strategies will be key along with environmental supports like the look and feel of the classroom environment. RtI is not new to our division but rather is becoming a central focus in how we can ensure student needs are best met. The purpose of RtI, and ultimately the creation of RtI teams, is to provide early, targeted support to students through preventative strategies and focused interventions.

Another large part of this year is Understanding by Design (UbD). UbD is a framework that uses the backwards by design model to unpack outcomes and objectives, design assessment, and plan instruction for deeper understanding by students. Basically, once you know where you need to be, you can plan how best to achieve the goal.

Central to this year is the classroom environment with the specific goal of creating a calm setting and welcoming atmosphere with changes such as natural colors and quiet reading corners in a “homey” comfortable setting. This will not be an overnight change but one which schools and classroom teachers have been asked to view with a critical eye as to the effect it has on student learning and a purposeful student-centered environment.

In looking for ways in which to complement our goal of ensuring each and every student gets the best learning experience possible, a program called Review360 is in the implementation stage. Good Spirit is the first division in Canada to utilize the behavior tracking system and we are very excited to work with Pearson in making Canadian adaptations to the product.

Pearson shared that research shows that early and appropriate identification and intervention of behavioral concerns is key to improving outcomes for everyone: students can concentrate on learning, parents are better informed, teachers focus more on teaching and administrators can be more proactive. Review360, a tracking and support tool, will provide a unified approach division-wide in working towards better outcomes for students. It provides a seamless fit with programs already in place including non-violent crisis intervention training and threat-risk assessment procedures. One of the major positives of the program includes actual videos showing how strategies are used and implemented rather than simply providing suggestions.

This year, year one, includes the introduction of behavior tracking plans and a call for schools to volunteer to pilot the program. Year two will see full implementation division-wide including behavior and assessment tracking. Year three will focus on the addition of data walls where the important facts gathered will allow schools to see at a glance how best to strategically isolate supports for different students and be able to share and celebrate success stories.

The Ministry of Education’s announcement of Student First as a guiding force for education will have a major impact on all school divisions’ delivery of education into the future. It is an approach to unify and re-orient the education system on what matters most – the students. Once a strategic framework for the province is established, the Good Spirit School Division will take a critical eye to our own strategic plan to ensure that goals align both locally and provincially. Our initiatives to date reflect the Student First approach and Students Come First is and continues to be our central guiding force.

For further information, contact Quintin Robertson, Deputy Director of Education, at 306-786-5500 or by email at info@gssd.ca.

The Good Spirit School Division strives to provide safe, caring, welcoming schools for children. Our primary objective is to foster a respectful learning environment to achieve student success and well-being in each of our 28 public schools throughout East-Central Saskatchewan. Our values of belonging, respect, responsibility, learning and nurturing ensures “Students Come First”. Visit us at www.gssd.ca; contact 306-786-5500 or 1-866-390-0773.

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