



PRAIRIE LAND PRIDE

Small schools preparing students for big futures.

Prairie Land Public School Division

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One of the things that sets Prairie Land apart from other school divisions, is its schools' involvement with their communities.

From Morrin to Altario and Veteran to Berry Creek, students have always been strongly involved in their local communities. With the division's online schools the communities extend across the province and even worldwide.

"Throughout our history, we have consistently prioritized engagement, fostering strong connections, and promoting collaboration between educators, students, families, and the broader community, explains Superintendent Cam McKeage.

"This is instrumental in fostering a sense of civic responsibility, empathy, and personal growth."

Whether students are collecting items for a food or clothing drive, helping local seniors or volunteering with various community groups, Prairie Land students are quite busy.

This year the division has developed a junior high Integrity in Action program to proactively encourage students to focus on social emotional development and growth through meaningful involvement in community.

Junior highs have weekly class time, focusing on the importance of integrity—being honest, having strong moral principles. Students are examining themes such as accountability of actions, citizenship and civic responsibility and social media.

Each school has come up with a project that exemplifies integrity and positively impacts their school or community.

"By participating in community initiatives, young adolescents not only learn the importance of giving back but also build connections, empathy, and a sense of purpose,"

"These experiences empower them to become proactive, com-

passionate citizens who understand the impact of their actions and are equipped to positively shape their communities and society as a whole," explains McKeage.

Instilling leadership qualities in the division's youth has always been a priority in Prairie Land.

This fall, approximately 160 grade 7-9 students met in Hanna for the annual Prairie Land Junior High Leadership Retreat. This year's theme, Cultivating, Celebrating, and Creating Intentional Action encouraged students to consider how they can have a positive impact on their schools and surrounding communities.

Through a variety of leadership activities led by Project REACH and guest speaker

breakout sessions, students learned how service to others benefits all involved.

Student created intentional action plans for service projects at their home schools. In addition to leadership skills, the retreat gives students the opportunity to meet and make new connections and friendships.

"Prairie Land has proudly upheld a long-standing tradition of active involvement and unwavering dedication to its school communities," said McKeage.

"Whether through volunteer initiatives, community events, partnerships with local organizations, or collaborative projects,

we have continuously demonstrated a commitment to being an integral part of the communities we serve, fostering an environment where every individual feels valued, supported, and empowered to thrive."

INTEGRITY
Choosing courage over comfort; choosing what is right over what is fun, fast, or easy; and choosing to practice our values rather than simply professing them.
Brené Brown

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BCCS Students Acknowledge Local Volunteers

Many rural communities run on volunteers and the area surrounding Berry Creek Community School is no exception.

For their Integrity in Action project, BCCS students in grades 7 and 8 are finding ways to acknowledge and appreciate various community members who give their time and energy to local events.

“The project is important because we are trying to recognize those in our community who contribute and create positive ripples,” explains Connie Henke, a junior and senior high teacher at BCCS.

The students created a list of about 20 individuals who they feel contribute a lot of time and energy into community events such as the bronc match, ball diamond maintenance, the curling rink and other initiatives.

They have written thank you cards and handed them out at the community Christmas supper at the beginning of December.

Henke says that by discussing local role models, students are learning to model their own behaviours on those who have set such great examples.

BCCS students are also focusing on service to the community and will be performing acts of service such as shoveling snow, helping with yard cleanups, holiday decorating, etc.

Student Mentoring at JCC

The word community has many definitions. It can be the area where a person lives or a place where people spend a lot of time. For staff and students, their school community plays an important role in their lives.

Students in Prairie Land are known for helping one another, many schools have opportunities that allow older students to help in younger grades.

At JCC, junior highs are mentoring younger students in their a Career and Technology Foundations (CTF) class.

“They have been crafting with them, helping another staff member with students (playing games, having conversations, and teaching them social skills), and they also put together a Halloween scavenger hunt for the kindergarten classes,” explains Jennifer Palmer, the school’s Youth Wellness Worker with Project Reach.

Palmer says it was the students themselves who came up with the idea of helping with the younger grades. Currently there are 13 junior highs who are mostly working with students in Kindergarten to Grade 3, and sometimes upper elementary.

“They are providing a valuable service in our school,” she said. “We’ve been missing the mentorship piece here for a few years and getting it up and running again has been so great for both ages of students.”

The group is also helping with a Christmas food drive and are hoping to do more activities in the new year.

JCC junior high students play games with Grade 1 to 3 students.



Youngstown Students Designing a Fishing Pond

For their Integrity in Action project, Youngstown students are thinking big.

Students in grades 7 to 11 are hoping to build a fishing pond for the entire community to utilize and enjoy.

“Youngstown is known as ‘The Sportsman’s Paradise’ and students feel that this would be a lifetime project and gift to the community,” said Haley Powell, principal of Youngstown School.

According to Powell, the students have talked for years about how beneficial a fishing pond would be to the community.

“At the Jr High Leadership retreat in Hanna, they dared to dream and started generating ideas and solutions for how to make this happen.”

The students want the pond to be welcoming to families

and individuals of all ages, provide an excellent extra curricular destination for all the citizens of Youngstown and be non cost prohibitive.

The students already have support from the village and are looking for permission from Special Areas.

“They would like to have the pond built by next year, complete with a wetlands, then continue to develop an outdoor classroom space, a dock, paths and benches, etc.” explains Powell.

Powell says the village councilors are very supportive and are asking good questions to move the students’ project along.

“Special Areas has been receptive to the project idea and are also looking further into what details we will need to work on.”

A project this large will be largely dependent on volunteer time and equipment. Students have been talking to their families and community members to build support.

While providing a recreations space, a fishing pond has numerous connections to the students’ education, in-

cluding science, PE, art, photography, math/data collection, etc.

They anticipate this project would be beneficial to the entire school division.

“This is a very outdoorsy group of students who are very motivated to make this happen.”



Members of Youngstown Schools Integrity in Action Team present their proposal of a community fishing pond to the Village of Youngstown council members.

Delia LEADS Team Focuses on Community Projects

Introducing Delia School’s new LEADS Team. Leaders Engaging Actively in Delia School—a group of junior and senior high students committed to creating a positive school culture through inclusive events and community initiatives.

Led by Mr. Blair Raugust, vice principal and Mrs. Katie Suntjens with Project REACH, the group has already had a busy year.

In addition to planning school wide events, the students have come up with a few Integrity in Action projects. The school raised close to 500 lbs for the Drumheller Salvation Army’s Annual Red Bag Food Drive.

“This project is important because it benefits the local community, while having students engage directly with a local service provider,” said Katie Suntjens, Project REACH Wellness Worker for Delia School.

The students have also decided to donate funds raised from their annual Christmas Extravaganza, a holiday production put on by the junior high students, to the local community centre.

“Delia School recognizes the importance and value of the local community hall,” explains Suntjens, adding the school utilizes the community centre for various events throughout the year.

“Thanks to donations at our extravaganza we are able to donate \$300 to the Delia Community Centre to go towards their fundraising efforts to help continue the level of service that they provide to the community.”



Delia LEADS collected almost 500 lbs of food for the Drumheller Salvation Army.

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Prairie Land Pride is a bi-monthly publication focusing on the incredible work of our staff and students.

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Online Students Practice Random Acts of Kindness

For Hope Christian School and Prairie Land Online students, their communities are spread throughout the province. “The students agreed on random acts of kindness because it is something that can be done in their own communities across the province,” explains Jai Dubyna, a teacher with Hope Christian.

“They realize that by being intentional about spreading kindness, that it will encourage others to spread kindness as well.”

Dubyna explains that each grade 7 and 8 class will have their own focus, for example the grade 7s are donating food to the food bank. The students will put together a slide show of their random acts of kindness and explain why it’s important to give back to their community.

She says at first students were feeling a bit stumped about what they could do, but after brainstorming, the ideas came rolling in. “They realized that they have many opportunities to serve others—it’s just a matter of taking the initiative to actually do it,” said Dubyna, adding ideas include visiting seniors, baking cookies and dropping them off at a police station, helping to clean up after potluck at church, helping in the kids Sunday School, leaving cheerful notes on cars, etc.

“This project is important, as it gives students time to be intentional about serving others and hopefully, this will help develop an awareness of how to spread kindness on a regular basis.”

Students at Prairie Land Online are also working on their Integrity in Action project.

“Our online students faced a choice in helping their community,” said PLO teacher Lauren Baier. “They had to decide if their “community” was our online community, or their in-person surroundings.” PLO students were about 50/50 split so some students decided to do activities in their local towns while others focused on things that benefit their online community.

Some examples of what they are doing in their communities includes volunteering at animal shelters, helping younger students (online) read, shoveling snow for neighbors, random acts of kindness, pick up neighborhood trash, helping elderly with their electronics, doing a bottle drive and donating clothes.

Baier explains that students who chose online communities to serve did so because they felt they are more connected to online folks (versus people nearest, physically, to them).

“Kids chose activities that they thought would benefit people the most.” Projects include drawing digital art for their online school people, creating an online inspirational page, and reading online with younger students.

“It puts the “action” in the Integrity in Action class,” she said. “It is important for our kids to be practicing what we are learning about in class.”



Morrin School's Mitten Tree Celebrates 13 Years

For 13 years, Morrin School has collected winter items for the Drumheller Salvation Army.

Each December, students, staff and community members donate mittens, toques and scarves—decorating an empty Christmas tree.

“It is such a great initiative,” explains Kate Suntjens, Project REACH Wellness Worker with Morrin School. She explains that the project is a partnership between Morrin School and Project REACH.

Since the program started, the school has donated hundreds of pairs of mittens, toques and scarves to the Drumheller Salvation Army which distributes them to the local community.

Students at Morrin School have quite a few projects they take on during the holidays. Moneka Eddie, a teacher at Morrin School explains that Grade 7 and 8 students are taking part in a seniors dinner for the holidays, helping with anything needed for that. They are also making cookie packages for the community which will be distributed before Christmas.

“It’s important our students are involved as our community does so much to support us and our school,” said Eddie. She adds, “we especially get a lot of support from our seniors in the community who were once students or teachers in Morrin.”

Eddie says the students will lead the community yard cleanup in the spring as well as help with garden care.



Consort Students Spread Christmas Cheer

Each holiday season, students across the province take part in the Liquor Bag Campaign—where students personalize paper liquor bags to raise awareness on the impact of impaired driving.

Students at Veteran and Consort have been participating in the program since 2017.

Project REACH Wellness Worker Kris Thulien explains this project brings awareness to students about the dangers of drinking and driving.

“It also opens up conversations about empathy, compassion and spreading kindness,” said Thulien, adding it also teaches students to make healthy and responsible choices for themselves.

The handwritten messages are more impactful explains Thulien.

“Having a handwritten safety message from a child on a bag has far more impact than a printed message from a corporation.”

Thulien also partners with a Teen Empowerment Program—an after school program run by Consort FCSS and the Neutral Hills Community and Connection

Centre.

“They do a number of events centered around physical activity, healthy nutrition and mental health,” she said, adding there are approximately 25 students in grades 4-9 that attend these events.

“We started the gift delivery project last year as a partnership between Neutral Hills, FCSS and Project REACH, and will be doing it again this year due to popular demand from both the students and seniors.”

This year the students are making little snowmen out of paper wrapped chocolate bars with a pair of gloves for the hat, as well as hot chocolate and homemade tree ornaments.

“Each bag will have a personalized note from a student, wishing the recipient a merry Christmas.” The gifts will be delivered to seniors around the village of Consort and to the Lodge and Extended Care.

“Last year we had a huge

amount of positive feedback and it really made people’s day to see a big yellow school bus pull up in front of their house, and a group of teens running towards their house, gifts in hand,” she laughs, adding volunteer bus driver Deryk Thulien has driven the students around each year.

“I love any opportunity to build partnerships between the school and the community.”



The 2023 Teen Empowerment Program delivered gifts to community members this Christmas.