Small schools preparing students for big futures.

Prairie Land Public School Division

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Encouraging Parent Involvement in our Schools

Whether it's parents volunteering or members of the community helping students with various projects, Prairie Land is known for its community based schools.

"The staff appreciates a close working relationship with the parents and every time we work side by side we build a stronger learning community with common goals and visions for our students," says Haley Powell, Principal of Youngstown School.

In schools across the division, parents are encouraged to volunteer. Hot lunch programs, fundraising initiatives, classroom helpers, field trip supervisors, members of school council—these are just some of the opportunities available.

Powell says that with its small staff, Youngstown School is grateful for its volunteers.

"Our staff is responsible for covering the K-12 curriculum as well as all of the extracurricular needs, we are SO dependent on support from parent volunteers. We simply cannot do it all ourselves."

Morrin School Principal Rebecca Webster says parents play an important role in Morrin as well.

"Having parents in the school is wonderful," exclaims Webster.

"Parents get to see what their children are learning, as well as connect with staff and help them complete various tasks."

Getting involved with their school or parent council is another great way for parents and guardians to be involved.

According to the Alberta School Council's Association (ASCA), a school council is a vehicle to support meaningful parental involvement in decisions that affect the school and its operations.

"It's so important for parents to be involved in not only volunteering as council members, but also as attendees at the meetings," explains Andrea Wickenheiser, Chair of the J.C. Charyk Hanna School Council.

"So much of what is discussed impacts their child or children in some way and their opinion matters," she said adding that parents usually bring new perspectives and ideas.

The ASCA states that some of the core activities of a school council include advising the principal and the board on educational issues that pertain to the school and communicating and consulting with parents and the school community.

In addition to school councils, many schools also have a dedicated fundraising body such as the Delia School Enhancement Society or BCCS Home and School. Theses groups are responsible for raising funds for various school projects.

"The Friends of Morrin School Council (FMSC) have played a huge role in fundraising for additional space during our school build, and are playing a key role in the renovation of the school community HUB," says Webster, adding that in addition to fundraising the group also applies for and obtains grants for equipment and other resources.

Prairie Land encourages all parents and guardians to take an active role in their child's education, even just at home, asking about their classes, helping with homework, reading to younger kids each day.

Dana Forsyth, Career Practitioner at JCC, says that parent involvement doesn't stop once student are in high school.

"Did you know that parents are the greatest influence on their teens career choice?" said Forsyth.

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Altario Expands to Offer Online Agriculture Classes

In five short years, the Altario Agricultural Academy has grown from a single red barn with two calves and some lambs to a completely student led farm, consisting of sheep, cows, turkeys, chickens and pigs as well as two hydroponic food modulars where students grow a variety of produce as well as hydroponically grown animal fodder.

Even before that—in 2017, the school's vision started with a simple garden and a re-imagining of Altario School, focusing on its agricultural heritage.

"It's unbelieveable how much this project has grown," exclaims Kevin Van Lagen, principal of Altario School.

"Step by step, it's really a collection of smaller projects that make up this great opportunity."

The school's newest venture is the Altario Agriculture Online Academy. Students from across the province are able to take agricultural based CTS (Career and Technology Studies) classes such as Introduction to Agriculture, Animal Basics, Agriculture Safety and Plant Propagation.

Jamie Galloway is the teacher in charge of the online courses.

"The classes are asynchronous and are a work at your own pace style course with myself being available to do assessment, answer questions and help students complete the courses," explains Galloway.

She is also building more CTS courses such as Field Crops and Animal Production and "everything in between within the agriculture industry."

Currently there about 30 students from across the province, all the way from Grande Prairie to Duchess.

The online academy is also working with Lakeland College to build some dual credit programming. The first course will focus on Value Added Agriculture.

When asked how Altario came up with the idea to offer online courses, Van Lagen said it was like most of their projects. "We have a lot of people reach out with ideas and we see which ones will be successful."

Alberta Education's CTS courses allow high school students to explore various interests and career options while earning credits and developing employability skills.

Focusing on agriculture courses allows students to not only build on their farming backgrounds, but learn new skills.

Ultimately Van Lagen says they want to build the school's residency program which provides students with hands on learning.

The school has hosted two agriculture residencies. Last year Altario and Youngstown students camped, toured local farms as well as the Altario barn.

They visited cattle operations and learned about branding and the finishing of an animal. They also spent the day at Dry Land Agro where they learned everything about harvest. Students explored various career opportunities and practices in agriculture. They also made curriculum connections to their core classes such as biology, chemistry and math.

"These students spent three days learning about all things agro, but another important aspect of these residencies is the friendships students make."

Another new thing this year at the Altario Agriculture Academy is a Community Advisory Board. "We've always have great support from community members," said Van Lagen. "But this allows our students to build relationships with members of our local ag community."

With things like the student led farm, two grocers and The Hive—a store with produce and meat (all grown at the school) as well as homemade products available for purchase—Altario School is thriving.

Van Lagen says the school's student population is the largest its been in years.

"We're just going to keep growing—working on new projects, focusing on our students and keeping with our agricultural heritage."

The Importance of Parent Involvement in Schools

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Deciding what to do after graduation is a huge decision and parents can have a huge influence. Whether it's looking at post secondary schools, apprenticeship programs or the benefits of working full time, parents help students find what's right for them. Forsyth recommends the ALIS website which has a great section for parents on helping your teen explore career options: https://alis.alberta.ca/tools-and-resources/resources-for-parents/.

For those attending post secondary, Forsyth says scholarship applications can be overwhelming for students.

"Browse scholarship websites with your students and come up with a plan to help them stay organized and dedicate time to applying. Brainstorm what makes your child unique and encourage them to write about their passions, volunteer experience, academic achievement and community involvement."

She also says its great if parents or guardians can tap into their personal and local networks, maybe their employer or organizations they are involved in offer scholarships.

"Help them keep track of deadlines and proofread, but resist the temptation to do the work for them," says Forsyth.

"Remember don't apply too much pressure but offer support and help your child to understand how their money will be used."

Welcome to Green Dome Islamic School

A new Islamic school is now open in Calgary. Not only is the Green Dome Islamic School the newest school to join Prairie Land, it provides a unique opportunity for the growing needs of the Muslim community in Calgary.

After breaking ground in 2021, 148 students from kindergarten to Grade 5 were extremely excited on the first day of their new school.

"It feels incredible to finally be open after the groundbreaking in 2021," exclaims Noreen Bashir, Vice Principal of Green Dome.

Bashir said there is an increasing demand for educational institutions that provide not only academic excellence but also instill Islamic morals and values in our students.

Through an environment that fosters both educational achievement and spiritual growth, Green Dome Islamic School combines Islamic teachings with a rigorous curriculum.

"We ensure that our students develop a strong sense of identity and purpose, allowing them to thrive in a multicultural society."

Bashir says the response from parents has been overwhelmingly positive.

"They have expressed excitement about the new facilities and appreciate the enhanced learning environment for their children," said Bashir, adding many parents have also mentioned how welcoming and supportive the staff have been, which adds to their confidence in the school.

Staff members are equally enthusiastic. Bashir says staff feel energized by the new resources and opportunities for collaboration. The feedback indicates a strong sense of teamwork and commitment to providing the best education possible.

"Overall, there's a shared sense of pride in being part of this new chapter for the school!"

Like any new school, years of planning and hard work have gone into this new school.

"We've worked hard to bring our vision to life, and seeing our students and community engaged in the new space is truly rewarding."

Bashir says Green Dome stands out from other Calgary schools for a few reasons.

The school provides a culturally responsive environment that celebrates the diverse backgrounds of its students.

"By incorporating elements of Islamic culture and tradition, students feel a sense of belonging and pride in their heritage."

There is also a strong community engagement that allows collaboration between parents and the school.

Green Dome provides a safe and nurturing environment. "We prioritize creating a safe and supportive space where children can thrive academically and emotionally," said Bashir.

The school plans to expand to Grade 6 next year, and slowly expanding after that.

By focusing on gradual growth, staff are able to maintain quality education while ensuring their facilities and resources support their growing student population effectively.

Bashir said the school wants to make it easier for families to receive a consistent and continuous education within the same community.

"It's a joy to witness the positive impact we can have on our students' learning and growth. We're excited about the future and the opportunities ahead!

Construction is still ongoing at the Green Dome Islamic School so students are currently in portables but that hasn't dampened their spirits.

Connect with Your School Today

Al-Amal Academy
Phone: 825-996-5399
Address: 9 Royal Vista Drive NW, Calgary, AB T3G 0E2

Al-Amal High School Online Academy
Phone: 825-996-5399

Altario School
Phone: 403-552-3828
Address: General Delivery Altario, Alberta T0C 0E0

Berry Creek Community School
Phone: 1-844-566-3743
Address: General Delivery Cessford, Alberta T1R 1E2

Consort School
Phone: 403-577-3654
Address: Bag Service 1002 Consort, Alberta T0C 1B0

Delia School
Phone: 403-364-3777
Address: Box 236 Delia, Alberta T0J 0W0

Green Dome Islamic School
Phone: 403-900-5445
Address: 4616 80 Ave NE, Calgary, AB T3J 4B7

Hope Christian School
Phone: 403-897-3019
Address: Box 269 Vulcan, Alberta T0L 2B0

J.C. Charyk Hanna School
Phone: 403-854-3642
Address: 801 4th Street West
Box 1270 Hanna, Alberta T0J 1P0

Morrin School
Phone: 403-772-3838
Address: Box 10 Morrin, Alberta T0J 2B0

Veteran School
Phone: 403-575-3915
Address: Box 649 Veteran, Alberta T0C 2S0

Youngstown School
Phone: 403-779-3822
Address: Box 69 Youngstown, Alberta T0J 3P0

Colony Schools
Principal Laura Lee Toews
Phone: 403-651-6514
lauralee.toews@plrd.ab.ca

Prairie Land Online Academy
Phone: 403-779-3822 x 9009
brian.giesbrecht@plrd.ab.ca

Prairie Land Outreach School
Phone: 403-854-3642

Consort School Celebrates Character Virtues

One of the focuses at Consort School has always been developing well-rounded students—this includes encouraging certain character traits such as resiliency, citizenship, generosity, etc.

Consort principal Vince Hill, who is a trained Master Facilitator with the Virtues Project, a program that encourages people to live by such virtues, says it is important to develop these virtues in students.

"By integrating these principles into the school environment, we help students become more compassionate, self-disciplined and empowered individuals, ready to contribute positively to society," explains Hill.

Each day, Consort school staff are watching and recognizing students who demonstrate specific virtues.

"Teachers and staff members nominate students who exhibit qualities like empathy, honesty and determination, and these students are celebrated during school assemblies or through special acknowledgments."

Hill explains that staff and students enjoy the project.

"Students have responded positively to the virtues," he said. "Many have shared that it helps them reflect on their own actions and understand the impact they have on others."

Students of all ages are learning the value of teamwork, how to handle conflicts with kindness and the importance of self-discipline in both academic and social settings.

"Through this program, students are gaining a deeper understanding of what it means to be responsible, respectful individuals who contribute to a supportive school community."

Since 1991, the Virtues Project has been used around the world, to encourage personal growth and cultivate purpose and joy in people's lives. There are five strategies of the project, speaking the language, recognizing teachable moments, setting clear boundaries, honoring the spirit and offer companioning.

"A program like the Virtues Project is important because it helps create a positive and inclusive school culture by fostering values such as respect, responsibility, kindness, and perseverance," explains Hill.

"These virtues are the foundation for developing strong character in students, which not only supports their academic success but also their social and emotional growth."

Each month the school focuses on a specific virtue.