

December 12, 2017

A Letter to Our Public

It is my pleasure, on behalf of the Abbotsford Board of Education, to note some of our milestones achieved in 2017.

First, I want to thank my colleagues for giving me the opportunity to serve as Chair, again. Congratulations to Vice-Chair, Stan Petersen, on his re-election.

As a Board, we are each elected to serve the public, and we are all equally committed to meeting individual educational needs by preparing and inspiring our students for a lifetime of success through respect, opportunity and innovation.

An important goal was achieved as the Board of Education completed and reported to the public on our self-evaluation. While it has been a triannual recommendation from the ad hoc External Stipend Review Committee, our Board considers the process of evaluation, individually and collectively, integral to our continued growth and success. We believe our community finds this work important, as well.

We also believe it is necessary to link the Superintendent's review and evaluation to the Board's own evaluation for our continued success. We are pleased to advise both evaluations were finalized in 2017.

With Abbotsford Restorative Justice's 2017 Restorative & Peaceful Schools Award presented to Superintendent Kevin Godden, we were reminded of the commitment and passion for creating a respectful, safe, and restorative school culture that our district is always working to expand.

Earlier this year we received a report on two District programs – French Immersion and Yale Sports Academies – a review regarding alignment with our vision. While pleased with the results presented to us, and as we celebrate the exceptional progress we have made, we were reminded of the continuing work related to the recommendations arising from the review.

Worth mentioning again, the Abbotsford School of Integrated Arts Sumas Mountain has been designated a 2016-2018 Exemplary School by Arts Schools Network, North America's largest professional membership organization of specialized arts schools. Created to highlight a school's commitment to excellence, this designation is presented to an Arts Schools Network member school in recognition of its efforts to evaluate strategically its purpose, operations, and educational programs.

In late spring, we approved the renaming of W. J. Mouat's football field to "Latham Field" in honour of longtime educator and former Principal Jim Latham. Jim was also the beloved husband of Trustee Freddy Latham. It must be noted that Jim was relationship driven and worked hard at developing a good

rapport with staff, students and parents, an ability which was foundational to his career. The rededication officially happened on October 13, 2017, at a special ceremony and 25th Anniversary celebration of W.J. Mouat Hawks winning the Provincial High School Football Championship in 1992.

We know many local community service organizations provide support to our schools whether through: the Starfish Back Packs funded by generous donors to the Abbotsford Food Bank; the inclusive playground at McMillan Elementary, built for children of all abilities and partially funded through the Rick Hansen Foundation; updating older playgrounds, such as at Prince Charles Elementary, with support from Rotary Club of Abbotsford; student service through Key Clubs supported by Kiwanis clubs in Abbotsford; and so much more. We really do have so much to be thankful for.

Annually, the Board recognizes an organization or individual within the Abbotsford community who contributes to the success of students. This past year we recognized Carol Timoffee, an In-School Mentor with Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Fraser Valley. We know so many go above and beyond in our community, and we remind the staff in the district, our stakeholders, and the public to please nominate a “someone” or an exceptional organization for our Community Matters Award.

The Future Science Leaders came to Abby Schools this fall. The program, an engaging, after-school science program for top high school students who are passionate about science and STEM is an exciting first step for Science World as their team tests ways of growing this successful youth development program.

We also approved a soccer academy for Eugene Reimer Middle School. For U11-U14 (under 11-14), the program offers a unique opportunity for middle years’ students to learn skills on the field and leadership in the classroom.

Talk of skills takes us to the annual Provincial Skills competition at Tradex, where our students secured six gold medals and three silver. At the National Skills level, our students brought home Gold in 2D animation and Silver in 3D animation. Our hats are off to our students for their stellar representation of Abby Schools at these levels.

The MOU '17 implementation – a return to 1998 language – saw an increase in the numbers of teachers hired in our district. With the newly revised curriculum driving educational outcomes, assessment practices shifting, and technology as a driving tool for learning, our students’ success continue to improve, indeed ranking among the best in the world.

It was our privilege to host not once, but twice, our Lieutenant Governor, the Honourable Judith Guichon as she visited our district. As part of her Sesquicentennial goal to visit 150 schools in the province, she chose an elementary on her first visit, and two middle and two secondary schools for her second for a total of five schools. She remarked at how welcome she felt in Abbotsford.

This year we had several opportunities to engage with our community with the Matsqui and Sumas First Nations. In particular, Orange Shirt Day was held in Mill Lake with a walk followed by the unveiling of a hummingbird cedar house pole, designed by Raphael Silver, at Kariton Gallery. Hundreds of district

students, staff and community members gathered and walked to remember the wrongs incurred by residential schools.

On November 1st we recognized the one-year anniversary of the tragedy that took place at Abbotsford Senior Secondary. With the passing of Constable John Davidson in the line of duty, followed by the tragic death of a nine-year child on her way to school, our district and school communities continue to be deeply affected. We recognize the emotional impact felt by our staff, students, and families.

If you notice the use of Abby Schools in my remarks, it is intentional. Moving to a friendlier moniker in our web domain (www.abbyschools.ca) and online brand presence, and away from being just another number, it may seem like a small shift, but it is a larger undertaking and the Board expresses its appreciation to our Communications Manager for her efforts.

We have much to celebrate and many ways to share success. Our Measuring Up report is one of the important ways that the Board communicates with parents and the broader community about how we are doing. We want the public to know that our public education system is strong and that here in Abbotsford we continue to aspire for the future.

We continue with our strategic direction, marking progress in many areas including our own Board governance and how we structure our meetings. Our senior staff, Superintendent Kevin Godden and Secretary-Treasurer Ray Velestuk and their capable Executive Assistants, work hard on our behalf and on behalf of the public and are deeply appreciated.

This year marks the fourth of a new four-year term mandated under the provincial government in 2014. However, it behooves me to assure you, we – the Board of Education and district staff – remain focused on the prize – our students' success in the Abbotsford School District.

In closing and on behalf of the Board, I end with this:

To our school communities, please accept our sincere appreciation for the work you do on our behalf with the goal being student success. With 2018 in our viewfinder, let's do this!



Shirley Wilson
Chair, Abbotsford Board of Education