



Enhanced school culture an important aspect of learning at High Prairie Elementary School

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HIGH PRAIRIE, AB – High Prairie Elementary School is playing a leading role in the continued development and implementation of several effective strategies aimed specifically at enhancing positive school culture.



Jamie Babcock,
Principal for High Prairie
Elementary School

“We’re working hard at High Prairie Elementary to enhance the various facets of our school culture,” says Principal Jamie Babcock, adding that the overall objective is to make the school as warm and inviting as possible for students, staff and the community. “We want our school’s identity to reflect a strong sense of purpose, value and belonging within the community.”

Babcock says it’s all part of a collective effort at the school to promote the message that High Prairie Elementary “offers a quality learning environment where students feel safe, well cared for and are well taught.”

And that message is being reinforced through a number of effective programs which continue to have a profound and lasting impact in terms of their positive influence on student learning outcomes and academic/behavioural expectations.

These initiatives range in nature from Roots of Empathy, to the Good Morning Club and Breakfast for Learning program – all of which serve as significant sources of educational inspiration to students regarding the importance of healthy lifestyles, respect, positive behaviour and good grades.

“Our ultimate objective as a school is to ensure that all of our students have the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in life,” Babcock explains.

Roots of Empathy is a powerful, evidence-based classroom program which aims to build caring, peaceful, and civil societies – child by child – through the development of empathy in children.

The program, which was founded in Canada in 1996 by Mary Gordon, an internationally recognized educator, has reached more than 270,000 children in 11,000 classrooms worldwide since its inception.

At the heart of the program are classroom visits by an infant and parent. Through guided observations of this loving relationship, children learn to identify and reflect on their own thoughts and feelings and those of others (empathy). Independent evaluations consistently show children who receive Roots of Empathy experience dramatic and lasting effects in terms of increased pro-social behaviour (sharing, helping and including) and decreased aggression.

The Good Morning Club program targets approximately 15 students at High Prairie Elementary School students and runs from 8:20 to 8:35 a.m. each morning throughout the school year. Marla Willier, liaison worker at High Prairie Elementary School, says the focus of the Good Morning Club is to improve overall student attendance by making the school more welcoming.

“The attendance-based program includes a variety of unique activities, snacks and social interaction as incentives to help encourage students to recognize the value of education and attending school,” she explains.

Another beneficial program is the school’s Breakfast for Learning program, administered through Breakfast for Learning Alberta and governed by the Breakfast for Learning Advisory council. The program supports child nutrition programs by working closely with schools and community groups to establish breakfast, lunch and/or snack programs.

“The vision of the program is to ensure every child in Alberta attends school well-nourished and ready to learn,” says Willier, adding that community donations and grants help to effectively sustain the program and ensure its successful continued operation.

Complementing these beneficial in-house programs is a new initiative at the school called “Finding Ways Together,” which was introduced last year as part of a three-year pilot through Alberta Education.

“We’re one of three schools in the province selected by Alberta Education to take part in this pilot project,” Babcock says. “The Finding Ways Together project will provide opportunities for parents, elders and community members to support the success of all students in the school.”

The project involves all three school communities and their affiliated FNMI communities to facilitate a change in the school culture. This change in the school culture is a new vision for engaging parents and communities in education. (Although initiated last year through FNMI, the project is intended to affect all parents).

A “Guiding Collaborate” will be developed at each school site involving members from throughout the school community (educators, school staff, FNMI parents, students and community members). All work at each school site will be documented through multi-media and diligent reporting. This information will be compiled in the last year of the project and used to develop resources for schools across Alberta.

While many of the school culture strategies at the school are aimed directly at student improvement, there are others which specifically target parents within the community. Babcock says stimulating additional community involvement and interest in the school through effective methods of communication and engagement with parents remains an integral component of the school’s success.

“We want our parents to embrace their child’s education as a wonderful opportunity to share the success and pride of their accomplishments and those of the school as a whole,” Babcock explains, using meet-and-greet events, open houses parent/teacher interviews, parent council and other school-based functions as prime examples of how parents can become actively involved in their child’s education at High Prairie Elementary School.

Put it all together and you have a strategic educational recipe for success at a school where staff members don't simply subscribe to the hope of student success, they demand it through a combination of both hard work and commitment to positive student learning practices.

"Having high academic expectations for all of our students is a critical component of our overall school culture vision," says Babcock, who credits much of the school's success at the grass roots level to the dedication of teachers and the support of HPSD's coaches who work collectively with teachers to ensure the continual needs of students are being met.

-30-

For additional information please contact High Prairie Elementary School Principal Jamie Babcock at 780-523-4531 or High Prairie School Division Communications Officer Kevin Laliberte at 780-837-6638.