

Board of Trustees Meeting Highlights Battle River School Division — Oct. 2020

Mental health programs give critical support to students and staff alike



Members of the BRSD Learning Team, (Director of Learning—Inclusion, Brenda Herder, left and MHCB Program Coordinator Andrea Dyck, right) made a presentation to the BRSD Board of Trustees on October 22.

“A mental health crisis is considered to be one of the most significant fallouts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Positive mental health strategies and building resilience among the students and staff of schools is paramount to successfully coping with today’s realities.” That’s the message delivered to the BRSD Board of Trustees meeting on October 22, by the Mental Health Capacity Building Program Coordinator Andrea Dyck.

Board members heard how the highly skilled staff of the MHCB program do pro-active work to support students, identify ways to stop them from falling through the cracks and use a growth mindset to encourage students to be resilient and move forward with their learning.

“It may seem like we’re offering fun programs—and we are,” says Ms. Dyck, “but there is a lot more to it than that.”

Even before the pandemic, BRSD staff were aware that student’s mental health challenges were growing. Ms. Dyck shared statistics about the programs and services her team provided between September 2019 and March 2020, such as the 725 sessions for BRSD students, teachers, and families. More statistics are included on Page 3 of this update.

Ms. Dyck also reminded Board members that, despite the growing needs, mental health programming is under consideration for funding cuts. The Board voted to write a letter of support for maintaining MHCB program funding in schools across Alberta. BRSD families are also reminded that the provincial budget input process is open for public input until December 4. Everyone can share their thoughts. <https://www.alberta.ca/budget-2021-consultation.aspx>



**Every Student, Every Day,
A Success**

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Accountability Report update

During this disrupted school year, BRSD has seen both some encouraging improvements in results and some worrying trends. Though there were no second semester Provincial Achievement Tests or Diploma Exam results, the high school completion rates, education quality, safe and caring school environments, and other measures are positive. But the school division is also seeing evidence that students are struggling with some of the basics right now. Literacy and Numeracy development will be a primary focus in schools this fall, with schools supporting flexible programming if needed to ensure students are supported in their learning. High Quality Teaching and Optimal Learning will be the Critical 2 priorities.

Allocation of federal funding

Battle River School Division was allocated just over \$2 million from the federal government this fall, as part of its plan to support schools during the pandemic.

The first \$1 million has been received, with the second installment due in January. BRSD has used these funds to pay for teachers who were hired to support the At-Home Learning program (over and above the existing staff who took on new roles).

The school division has also allocated extra Custodial, Educational Assistant and Bus Driver time to manage the extra cleaning duties that have been added this fall. To date an additional \$360,000 has been spent for this purpose. We know that if these new protocols carry on for the whole school year we will not have enough funds to cover the extra expenses.

Nearing the end of the first quarter

This year about 720 BRSD students began the school year learning at home. BRSD schools transitioned to a 'quarter system' for this school year, which enables students to switch from at-home to in-person learning at four different times (and vice versa). The first quarter of the school year will end on November 10. Any families who are considering switching back to school, or from in-school to at-home programming, must let their home school know their plans before Friday, November 6.

Enrollment decline

Like many Alberta school divisions, BRSD is experiencing a drop in student numbers this fall. About 200 students have not yet returned to school, either through the at-home, in-person, on-line or alternative programs.

Policy Review

The BRSD Board continued its process of reviewing and updating policies, to reflect changes in the Education Act and changes in practice. In October they updated their Annual Work Plan to take into account some reporting deadline changes at the provincial level, and also reviewed Policies 2 and 4 to ensure they are ready for next year's election.



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Council of School Councils meeting November 18

Several times a year the BRSD Board hosts a meeting with all School Council Chairs, to talk about local issues, share ideas and ask for feedback from parents. The first Council of School Councils meeting for this school year will take place on the evening of November 18. It will be offered in a virtual format for the first time.



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2019-2020 BRSD MHCBC Universal mental health supports in Battle River School Division.
MENTAL HEALTH CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAM

21 SCHOOLS SERVED
In the 2019-2020 school year, 21 BRSD school and their communities had weekly access to their MHCBC Wellness Coach for in-class, small group, after school and lunch time mental health programming and social emotional learning for students, staff, and parents/caregivers.

SESSIONS PROVIDED 727
Between Sept. 1, 2019 and the closure of schools in March of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, BRSD MHCBC staff provided over 725 sessions to students and their teachers, families and the greater BRSD community.

ELEMENTARY Most programming requests are for elementary aged students. More than 55% of BRSD MHCBC sessions are for students between the ages of 6-12.

MOST REQUESTED Teachers and administrators commonly ask for programming that helps create calm and connected classrooms, gives students and teachers the strategies to regulate and focus, and build healthy relationships.

HIGH SCHOOL STRATEGY
Informed by information gathered from BRSD high school students, MHCBC continued this school year to move ahead in getting mental health information to high school students in meaningful ways through: adding lunch time RELAX Groups in rural schools, supporting QSA/GSAs and a student led mental health committee, making "Stress Kits" available during exams, and increased social media engagement.

SUMMER PROGRAMMING
BRSD MHCBC is active 12 months of year, and this summer expanded to collaborate with community partners in Camrose and every BRSD county. Wellness Coaches hosted nature mindfulness walks, provide teen mental health talks, facilitated growth mindset and emotional literacy building programs, provided art based mindfulness activities - and much more - in-person, online, and through activities packs.

COVID-19 SPRING RESPONSE
When schools closed in March, BRSD MHCBC staff shifted focus quickly and began offering online programs to support student wellness, hosted a online wellness week and ongoing Mindfulness sessions for BRSD staff, shot wellness videos, hosted a division wide Move Your Mood Family Challenge, created a weekly wellness newsletter for families and another for staff, and worked in many other ways to provide mental health support to students, BRSD staff, and families.



Safe. Calm. Connected.
BRSD WELLNESS



QUESTIONS? CONNECT WITH THE BRSD MHCBC PROGRAM.

Email: mhcb@brsd.ab.ca