

New BRSD Superintendent excited about coming school year

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Editor

Battle River School Division (BRSD) has a new Superintendent, Rhae-Ann Holoien, and she says she's excited about the coming school year.

Holoien was the Buffalo Trails Public School (BTPS) Superintendent, living in Wainwright, before she and her husband purchased a home in Camrose over the summer after accepting the position at BRSD. "We have taken the plunge and moved to the community, which is exciting. It's such a beautiful community and area. That played a huge part in my decision to leave Buffalo Trails."

Prior to heading up the BTPS division, she was in Brooks, at the Grasslands School Division. Before that she worked at Alberta Education.

Holoien started out teaching in Saskatchewan, where she also spent time as a principal, then some division work as well.

Holoien and her husband have two children, ages 23 and 21, and a new grandson. She says the move also brings her closer to an airport to visit her grandson. Their son is starting his first term at the University of Regina, after taking some courses while playing junior hockey.

Holoien says BRSD is similar to BTPS, with one larger central place surrounded by smaller rural schools. Both have Hutterite colony schools, both have diversity, and different school configurations with different grades, she says, adding that Grasslands was very similar to that as well, although she says Battle River is physically very large.

"The difference is that I really do now need to get to know our communities and our schools, and see the great programming."

She says BRSD hasn't had a new superintendent in 10 years, "I'm excited, it's a very different time now, and there's a new person leading the division."

One key change between the divisions is that BRSD owns its own busses. Holoien says she's had the opportunity to visit the bus garage to meet the fleet supervisor and mechanics, who she says have been working super hard to "make sure everything's ready to rock and roll on Tuesday. That's exciting, too."

"Our transportation department, the mechanics, those are the people who are working all summer to get things ready, as is our facility department."

"We've had some great enhancements in our schools over the summer."

She's looking forward to her first

meeting with the board of trustees at the end of September. She's met the board chair, and keeps the trustees updated through news releases. "They're doing some great work," she says, "I'm very excited to work with our board."

She says everyone she's encountered at the division and the leadership team has been nothing but welcoming.

"Everybody knows some history and each other, to help me along. Sometimes change is refreshing."

"So far it's been a great opportunity to work with the leadership team at Central Office and whether they were brand new, like me, or with existing knowledge, everyone seems to be on board with moving forward together."

"As superintendent I really hope that we set the tone coming into a new year that's exciting."

"We are thrilled to welcome our students back, and to support our students and staff as we start a new year. Hopefully that tone that we start here carries out throughout all the schools in the division."

"Many of the programs and initiatives start here in Division office, and then we work with our schools at implementation."

"When kids ask me what does a superintendent do, I relate my job to being similar to what they know as a principal. So their principal runs their school, and takes care of everything from facilities and technology, staff professional learning, and student behavior, all of those school things really come through the principal. I tell kids I have the opportunity to do that with all the schools."

"I also have an opportunity to work with all of our principals and assistant principals. We hold regular leading and learning meetings."

"Principals report directly to the superintendent, so I have an opportunity to do principal evaluations, and work with them, to ensure that I can support them on the work they are doing at the school level."

Holoien sat in with meetings last week between bus drivers and principals and assistant principals, relating expectations for students for positive behavior.

"It demonstrates just how key our bus drivers are. They are the first face that students see, so setting that tone right there, that's our expectation."

Holoien says she had an opportunity to meet with Dr. Rita Marler last June to tour some of the schools, and adds, "I commend Dr. Marler for leaving me a division that is in such a phenomenal place to be able to move forward. With the people that are here, and you know things do start



Rhae-Ann Holoien is Battle River School Division's new Superintendent of Schools. She says she's looking forward to leading the Division into a new school year. Pictured here with BRSD's senior management team: (from left) Secretary Treasurer Imogene Walsh, Superintendent of Schools Rhae-Ann Holoien, Assistant Superintendent, Education Services Stephen Hoyland, and Assistant Superintendent, Human Resources Natasha Wilm.

with amazing people, we have a great team in place."

She says she's looking forward to getting started on implementing the Division's three-year plan.

"I'm in a great place as a new superintendent to be implementing this plan, because it's the first year. Our priorities, which I'm very proud to be able to lead and work with our staff on, are literacy and numeracy, optimum teaching and learning, and it's equity, and I couldn't be more proud to roll out what Dr. Marler and her team had in place before I got here."

"We have an equity coordinator that works with school staff to ensure equity for our students, and our staff. That work starts here, and we share and support our schools for implementation and work at that level."

"They have laid a great foundation for the next three years."

Comparing to her previous divisions, a recent meeting with the principals, assistant principals, and bus drivers was new and unique to her. "That was phenomenal; that kind of learning I have not seen before and I hope to continue that in Battle River."

She says she's also really excited about Tuesday, Aug. 29, when BRSD's entire teaching staff will meet at the CRE.

"It will be a phenomenal day. Our vision of the day is leadership and resilience. We will have some positive messaging to really kick start our new year."

She adds, "That will be unusual from many other divisions, to bring all staff from all departments together for a great day of learning and celebration as we start a new year."

Holoien says she's really looking forward to getting out and meeting everyone else.

"Getting out and meeting them where they are, visiting our school communities, seeing parents."

"I've already told all the principals and assistant principals that they need to invite me to all the welcome back activities they are planning."

"Quite often our schools will host some event where the parents will come in, whether it's a pancake breakfast or a barbecue. I'll start there." She says with sports starting up, she's looking forward to meeting the teams, and meeting coaches and volunteers.

"Our board has some engagements planned as well. There will be a school boundary review process starting, and we will have more information about that, but we'll have four communities where we will be going out and talking to parents and stakeholders about the boundaries that our schools have, and bus routes, and things like that."

"That gives the board and I another opportunity to be in our schools."

She says, "I'm really looking forward to meeting our families, our students, and our staff, where they are, and getting to know each of our unique schools."

During her schools tour with Dr. Marler last June, Holoien says, "I was really impressed. Hats off to our facilities department, our schools are phenomenal. I am really looking forward to touring the rest of them, I know that they will be of the same standard that I've already had the opportunity to see."

She says despite the large physical area of the division, "I'm looking forward to looking at ways to bring our division together. Our team has done a great job with that as well," she adds, giving the meeting at the CRE Tuesday as an example of that.

"I know that our team here goes out and does regular visits at schools as well. It's ensuring that if even if you're physically large like BRSD everyone still feels like part of the Battle River team."