



## MEMORANDUM

May 28, 2024  
Regular Board Meeting

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<b>TO</b>	Board of Trustees
<b>FROM</b>	Shauna Boyce, Superintendent
<b>ORIGINATOR</b>	Scott Johnston, Associate Superintendent
<b>RESOURCE</b>	Parkland School Division Stakeholders
<b>GOVERNANCE POLICY</b>	Board Policy 1: Division Foundational Statements Board Policy 2: Role of the Board Board Policy 12: Role of the Superintendent
<b>ADDITIONAL REFERENCE</b>	BP 1: Vision, Foundational Statements BP 2: Education Planning and Programming <i>Education Act: 19-23, 33, 196-197</i>
<b>SUBJECT</b>	<b>RURAL EDUCATION ENGAGEMENT REPORT</b>

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### PURPOSE

For information. No recommendation required.

### BACKGROUND

The Board is charged with the responsibility of providing, for its students and their parents, an education system organized and operated in the students' best interests. It exercises this responsibility through setting of local educational policy and the wise use of resources. The Preamble for the *Education Act* notes:

“... education is a shared responsibility and requires collaboration, engagement and empowerment of all partners in the education system to ensure that all students achieve their potential.”

Furthermore, Board Responsibilities (s. 33(1)(c)) notes that a board, as a partner in education, has the responsibility to

(c) provide, where appropriate, for the engagement of parents, students, staff and the community, including municipalities and the local business community, in board matters, including the board's plans and the achievement of goals and targets within those plans.

In upholding those responsibilities, the Board of Trustees engages Parkland School Division stakeholders, consisting of Elders, parents, staff, students, community members and local government members to provide insights and wisdom in setting the strategic outcomes for 2024-2027. Our small, rural schools are an important

part of the Parkland School Division family, and hearing directly from stakeholders on the advantages and challenges of rural education ensures that the Board is inclusive of all perspectives when setting future objectives.

This Rural Education Engagement Report summarizes the feedback received from stakeholders at the April 23, 2024 Rural Advantage Stakeholder Event, held at Wabamun School. This is a summary report that consolidates the diverse views of stakeholders on the concept of the "Rural Advantage" from their perception and within their educational and community settings. The responses highlight various aspects deemed beneficial, and the Rural Advantage focuses on the unique experiences of students, parents, and educators in rural environments.

Administration would be pleased to respond to any questions.

SJ:kz



# RURAL EDUCATION ENGAGEMENT REPORT

May, 2024

Presented to the Board of Trustees, May 28, 2024

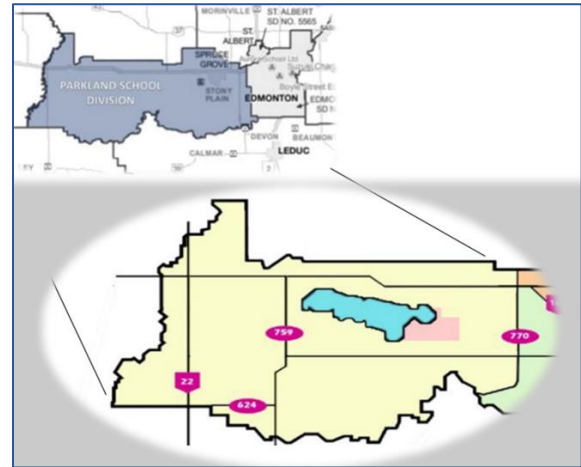
Scott Johnston, Associate Superintendent, Education and System Services  
Resources: Principals Bell, Bileau, Lovsund, and Worthington and Parkland School Division Stakeholders

## Background

On April 23, 2024, the Board of Trustees for Parkland School Division, and the Mayor and representatives for Parkland County, engaged rural Parkland County stakeholders to share their perspectives on *The Rural Advantage*.

During the course of the evening, held at Wabamun School, stakeholders shared their perspectives in response to two areas of interest.

- What does the Rural Advantage mean to you in your school and community?
- How can the Rural Advantage be enhanced?



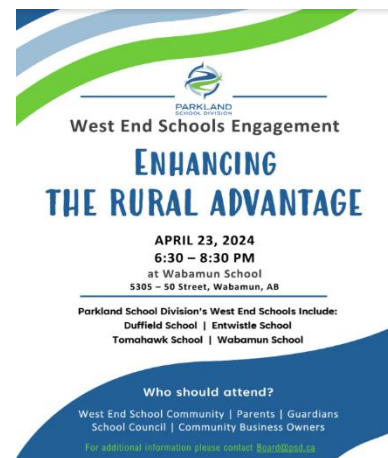
This stakeholder engagement summary report consolidates the diverse views of stakeholders on the concept of the "Rural Advantage" from their perception and within their educational and community settings. The responses highlight various aspects deemed beneficial, and the Rural Advantage focuses on the unique experiences of students, parents, and educators in rural environments.

## Engagement Summary

### The Rural Advantage: Educational Environment and Learning Opportunities

The Principals of the Parkland School Division schools, located in the rural, western end of the school division, each provided local context as to why they are great schools.

Principal Bileau shared that **Entwistle School** provides students many opportunities for enrichment. Entwistle School is located next to the Pembina River Valley and, therefore, students have access to outdoor opportunities that would not be available to students in urban settings. Notably, Entwistle students enjoy the library, the arena, the swimming pool and the museum. Principal Bileau shared that there is a strong connection between the school and the local community businesses. Entwistle School is a



multi-generational school, and the Entwistle families are well-connected to the opportunities that the school provides their children.

In speaking about the Rural Advantage at **Duffield School**, Principal Lovsund shared the quote that

*“our students are fortunate to have opportunities from every part of our community that only enhance rural living.”*

Duffield students similarly enjoy strong family connections and community partnerships. The school's focus is to increasingly find ways to bring the community into the school.

With a new, robust Wolf logo, and the phrase “*Growing Better Together*,” **Tomahawk School** students similarly enjoy small class sizes and one-on-one support for numeracy and literacy. Principal Bell shared that Tomahawk School utilizes nature-based learning on its ten-acre campus, and that the school regularly connects the Tomahawk students with the local community.

The school, as a central focal point for the community, is also evident in the community of Wabamun. Principal Worthington shared that **Wabamun School** students regularly explore career and workplace opportunities, due to the support of the local business community. Principal Worthington shared that the community appreciates the provision for full-time kindergarten.

Stakeholder conversations began after the short presentations by the principals of the four schools in Parkland School Division's rural, west-end.

### **What Does the Rural Advantage Mean?**

Stakeholders frequently cited smaller class sizes and the resulting personalized attention as significant advantages in rural schools. The stakeholders agreed with the principals' presentations in that the “small school” environment fosters strong one-on-one connections and therefore provides the benefit of tailored educational programming, enhancing both academic support and personal growth. The integration of practical learning experiences, particularly those related to agriculture, local businesses, and hands-on activities (like interacting with local fire departments and engaging with agriculture in foods classes), is seen by residents as both crucial and motivating for students. Stakeholders noted that they observe, first-hand, that educational content is often closely tied to the realities of rural life; preparing students with necessary life-skills such as resilience, problem-solving, and effective communication.

Stakeholders shared that the deep integration between schools and their surrounding communities stands out as a hallmark of the rural advantage. Community members, including parents and local businesses, are actively involved in schools; this active involvement contributes to a variety of available educational programs and extracurricular activities. Students have a variety of opportunities, including leadership opportunities, sports, and cultural programs. The presence of Elders in schools helps to transmit local knowledge and traditions, further enriching the student experience.

Participants at the engagement shared their perception that the close-knit nature of rural communities contributes to a safer, more interconnected environment where "everyone seems to know everyone." This familiarity facilitates a strong mentorship culture among students and enhances the overall safety and wellbeing of children, both in and outside of school. It also allows for a more comprehensive support network, with multiple community members keeping a watchful eye on students' development.

Given the smaller student population, rural schools often offer more opportunities for students to engage in sports and other extracurricular activities from an earlier age. Competition determines team placement for students in larger schools, whereas in a smaller school, every student is invited to participate. This openness not only helps in team building but also allows students to explore and develop diverse interests such as drama, music, and various clubs. Rural schools have the flexibility to support programming that enables students to find and pursue their passions, which is crucial for their personal and social development.

### **The Rural Advantage: Challenges and Areas for Improvement**

Despite the many advantages, stakeholders also noted some challenges. For instance, the lack of breadth of resources can present challenges. Stakeholders noted that they want to see the best aspects of all schools made available for students in the rural setting, but understand that there can be geographic limitations with accessing resources effectively. For instance, students may have to travel a greater distance to benefit from the educational advantages of a field-trip, and their time may be more limited, due to the distance. Where possible, we can determine how best to bring those opportunities to the students, rather than bringing the students to the opportunity.

The transition to larger educational settings can be a culture shock for students accustomed to smaller, more personalized environments. There is a call for more interactivity and collaboration between different rural schools to ensure that students are better prepared for whatever comes next. Stakeholders suggest that increased connectivity could enrich students' educational experiences by exposing them to diverse environments and peer groups.

There is a perceived need for enhancing business education beyond traditional trades and for integrating more advanced technology into school curricula. Additionally, stakeholders expressed a desire for more varied competitive opportunities similar to those offered by organizations like 4H.

Smaller student groups often mean higher costs for certain opportunities, limiting access to activities like robotics or advanced science projects. There is also a challenge in funding and maintaining facilities like larger gyms, which are essential for school sports and community events. Addressing the need for better facilities and more consistent funding, especially for extracurricular and community activities, could significantly improve the educational and social environment of rural schools. To this end, the Tomahawk School community is very excited to be receiving facility enhancements to its existing gymnasium.

Programs that encourage student involvement in local issues and community service, such as volunteering with seniors or refurbishing local landmarks, can deepen students' connections to their community and enhance their personal development. Overall, there is a

perceived need for more community experts to participate actively in schools to provide students with real-world perspectives and experiences. This includes greater exposure to local industries like agriculture, arts, and local businesses.

One stakeholder captured that it is very challenging to acquire child-care with fewer options available in the rural setting, and that, in itself, can limit advantages.

### **The Rural Advantage**

Overall, the rural advantage in education is characterized by a strong sense of community, parent involvement with the schools, and a seamless integration of practical life skills. Stakeholders expressed that they appreciate that a benefit of small-sized schools is an increased connection between students and teachers, resulting in learning that truly focuses on student abilities and interests. These elements contribute to a robust educational foundation that prepares students for a variety of future challenges and opportunities.

Both strengths and challenges were presented, and continuous efforts to address the existing gaps, and expand educational offerings, remain essential for maximizing the potential of rural schooling. While rural schools face distinct challenges such as resource limitations and isolation from larger educational networks, they also possess unique opportunities to create deeply interconnected educational experiences that are closely aligned with their communities. By addressing these challenges and capitalizing on the identified opportunities, rural schools can further enhance the educational landscape and foster a stronger sense of community engagement among students.