

## ***Director of Education Roger Clarke's Farewell Address Board Meeting – January 31, 2017***

For my last Director's Monthly Report, I would like to reflect on my 33 years with the RCDSB and my eight years in the role of Director of Education.

The last few weeks have been filled with emotional highs and lows, and while I don't regret my decision to retire, I know I will miss the work and this Board.

If you haven't been a teacher, it is hard to explain the feelings one experiences in preparing to teach a group of students. There is the excitement of digging into curriculum expectations and visualizing lesson plans and assessment practices that engage learners. You imagine yourself walking around your classroom observing students enthralled in the lesson, interacting with their classmates, asking brilliant questions as you listen proudly knowing all your planning has paid off! And then, there is the stark moment of panic on some days when you are not sure if your lessons will work. Did you miscalculate their level of interest, misjudge their ability levels, and incorporate the wrong learning resources - could your smiling group of 30 students turn into an unruly mob! Fortunately, I didn't have too many unruly mobs in my classrooms. I probably over planned and I can say with sincerity my teaching years are filled with great memories and I believe teaching is the most rewarding job in the world.

I knew at 16 that I wanted to be a teacher. By then my development as a hockey player was beginning to reach the ceiling and I faced the prospects that playing time with the Leafs was not going to happen!! Fortunately, I was blessed with several inspirational teachers and one in particular, my high school Geography teacher, Rex Sharman was the person who influenced me the most! I got my undergraduate honours degree in Geography at Carleton U, went off to Queen's to get my B Ed, fired off dozens of resumes and applications all across Canada and on my last practice teaching round, was invited to an interview in Southern Alberta. I flew out to Lethbridge, was interviewed by the superintendent and was offered the job on the spot. I returned to Ontario, packed up my car and drove to Tilley, Alberta over the Easter long weekend. I was thrilled, nervous and totally unprepared for what lay ahead of me. I was the fifth teacher the school had hired that year for this group of students and the students were ready to add a 6<sup>th</sup> notch on their pencils. I persevered, eventually won the students over and spent over 3 years teaching Social Studies to Grade 7 - 12 students. It was one of the best experiences of my life.

Marriage and our first child brought me back to Ontario and I was fortunate to see a posting in the Globe and Mail for a .85 Intermediate teacher at Keys School in Deep River. I applied, got the job and worked in one of the most exciting teaching and learning environments ever. While teaching an Intermediate class, I also taught the Astrolabe program – it was a program for gifted students and I had over 40 of the most challenging, brightest and demanding students possible.

I eventually applied for the Intermediate Division Consultant position, spent 13 years as a principal, six years as a superintendent and eight of my most enjoyable years as your director.

When I look back on the 33 years with Renfrew County, I think of 3 things – People, Programs and Progress.

**People!** I have no doubt we have amazing people in our organization and at every position within our organization.

I have seen secretaries and office staff comfort students and staff when emotional crises confront them.

I have seen custodians work through their summer holidays and late into the evenings to ensure our schools are ready to receive students on the first day of school in September.

I have seen principals and vice-principals work well into the evening trying to find a safe home for a student to go for the night.

I have seen teachers teach brilliant lessons to multiple classes throughout the day and then board a bus with their team, only to arrive back at the school and wait till after 10 PM until every student is safely picked up by their parents/guardians.

I have seen School Support Counsellors, Educational Assistants and Early Childhood Educators do miraculous work with students!

I believe everyone in this room knows we have great staff in our organization and I hope our Board will continue to find ways to acknowledge our staff. When we invest in our people, the returns are immense. The underlining quality and attribute for me is we want staff who truly care about our students.

**Programs!** Our educational programs are second to none and I truly believe our students aren't disadvantaged because of where they live.

I've visited our K classrooms and have seen the sheer delight on the faces of our early learners as they explore and discover something new for the first time.

I've seen students in our Special Education programs develop confidence and new skills as they get the opportunity to work for the first time in our Summer Work Experience program.

I've seen students in our secondary technology programs demonstrate their exceptional skills at the Options Skilled Trades Fair.

I've attended our Adult Education Graduations and have been moved to tears hearing the obstacles our students have overcome to earn their high school diploma.

I've seen our Indigenous students find their voice in the curriculum.

I've watched our students in our Core French, Extended French and French Immersion programs converse in a second language with proficiency and pride.

And I've watched our students sing their hearts out in musicals and school performances.

Renfrew County has always been a leader in developing and creating new and innovative programs and I know that tradition will continue for many years to come.

**Progress!** Lastly, we are measured by the progress we make as an education system. Through the hard work of our teachers, support staff, vice-principals and principals, and our superintendent team – we have seen an increase in student achievement and well-being! Yes, student achievement is important but not at the expense of student well-being. I'm proud that we have never lost sight of focusing on the whole student and a strong commitment to ensuring all students learn. My wife and I were told our daughter Meredith may never learn to read. Today at the age of 30 she reads at a Grade 3 level and attends our Literacy Basic Skills program and continues to learn! Please don't turn your backs on these students.

We have seen improvements in our EQAO scores in Reading, Writing and Mathematics, Grade 9 Mathematics, OSSLT and our Grad Rates.

Our Information Technology services, supports and programs are extensive and have well positioned our students to be 21<sup>st</sup> century learners.

Our SHSM sectors continue to expand and we see more and more students earning the credential requirements to add to their diplomas.

We have examples of Collaborative Professionalism with our union partners well before the term was introduced by the Ministry of Education.

Our schools are caring places, where students feel welcomed, valued and cherished.

All of this doesn't happen by chance. It's because our staff are dedicated, our programs are exceptional and we value the learning of all our students.

As I say goodbye to you tonight, I want to say it has been a privilege and an honour to lead this organization. I've made lasting friendships through my work and I can hardly wait to see my granddaughter enter our school system in the years to come!

Thank you for your support, your friendship and your confidence in my leadership!