



Inspiring Success!

TRUSTEE NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2025

Message from the Board Chair



As my time as a Trustee and Board Chair comes to a close, I reflect with gratitude on the past eight years of service to the Black Gold community. It has been an honour to work alongside dedicated board members and Senior Administration, and a privilege to serve the families, students, staff, and community who entrusted me with this role.

One of a trustee's key responsibilities is advocacy. As defined by Wikipedia, advocacy means that, "the board ... works to educate the community, including elected officials and lobbies to advance an issue". How is this work carried out in Black Gold? We meet with local, municipal, and provincial leaders to share the challenges our schools face and propose solutions. We advocate for things such as adequate and sustainable funding for all student programs, stronger support for classrooms with complex needs, and safe, modern learning spaces that can accommodate our growing student population.

Our advocacy extends beyond local efforts. Together with boards across Alberta, we speak with one voice through the Alberta School Boards Association. Through the association, we have proposed policy statements, present them to the Minister of Education, and work to influence provincial priorities. Closer to home, we speak with school councils, community partners, and anyone who will listen - encouraging them to also speak up for students and for strong public education. To learn more about our advocacy work, please visit <https://www.blackgold.ca/board-advocacy>

Advocacy is most effective when done collectively, as a board united in the belief that strong public education is the foundation of thriving communities, engaged citizens, and student success beyond graduation. I am proud of what we have accomplished together, and I have every confidence that the next board will continue to champion the needs of our students and staff.

Esther Eckert

Board Chair

Black Gold School Division

Looking Ahead Beyond Job Action

We recognize that this period may require changes at home, and we appreciate the support and care that families provide. When classes resume, we look forward to welcoming students back, supporting learning, and restoring routines—made possible by the dedication of teachers, staff, and families working together.

As your Board of Trustees, we are committed to delivering strong public education, maintaining safe and caring schools, and championing every student's success. We will continue partnering with Division leadership to ensure a smooth transition back to the classroom and keep families informed every step of the way.

Thank you for your resilience and partnership. Together, we can create a positive and successful return to school for all students.

Honouring Truth, Living Reconciliation

As Trustees of Black Gold, we support and guide our Division's Truth and Reconciliation journey, encouraging learning, reflection, and meaningful action with our students, staff, and communities. We recognize the truths of our shared history, honour Indigenous voices, and continue to work toward a future rooted in respect and understanding.

Over the last several years, many meaningful steps have been taken across the Division. Elders and Knowledge Keepers have shared their wisdom in classrooms, and we welcomed Mike Swampy as Instructional Coach and Curriculum Indigenous Lead, helping deepen understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing.

Symbols and reminders, such as the Every Child Matters flag and regular land acknowledgments, reflect our shared responsibility



to reconciliation. Professional learning is also central—high school staff complete the 4 Seasons of Reconciliation course, strengthening culturally responsive teaching and advancing the TRC’s Calls to Action.

Students are also engaging in powerful experiences. Grade 7 classes at École Leduc Junior High participated in the Blanket Exercise, while École Dansereau Meadows

Acknowledging the Essential Work of Custodians

We are proud to share that our custodial staff, represented by Teamsters 987, have received a well-deserved raise. This adjustment aligns with recent public sector settlements across Alberta and reflects the true value of the essential work they do every day.

Our custodians play a vital role in ensuring schools are safe, welcoming, and well-maintained for students and staff. Their dedication and hard work often happen behind the scenes, but their impact is felt in every classroom, hallway, and gym.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, we extend our heartfelt thanks to our custodial team. Your commitment does not go unnoticed, and we are honoured to support you.



created a tipi space for learning and connection. Teachers increasingly incorporate land-based learning into their programs. Cultural enrichment continues with events such as Jay Genaille’s Hoop Dance at Warburg School, which share stories, symbolism, and tradition through performance.

A historic milestone was reached with the naming of Leduc’s newest high school—

Our FSL Team: Bridging Home, School, and Community

We believe in meeting students where they are, and sometimes that requires extra support. Right now, we’re experiencing two pressures: growing student needs (more families reaching out for support) and a tight budget. Even so, we are doing our best to serve students by allocating the support we do have as fairly and equitably as possible, prioritizing areas of greatest need.

One of the most impactful ways we live out this commitment is through our **Family School Liaison (FSL) Team**. This small, but mighty group of Child & Youth Care Workers and Social Workers provides specialized support tailored to the unique needs of students, families, and school communities. Whether through one-on-one, group, classroom, or family support, they meet people where they are and work collaboratively to equip and empower them to build resilience.

FSLs bridge the gap between home and school, helping “put the pieces of the puzzle together” by identifying needs, connecting families with resources, and partnering with administrators, counsellors, and teachers within the Division’s pyramid of intervention.

Areas of Focus include:

- **Elementary Schools:** Supporting social and emotional development, building

Ohpaho Secondary School. The Cree name, meaning “to take flight,” is the first school in the Division to be given an Indigenous name.

These steps are part of an ongoing journey. As Trustees, we are proud of the progress made and remain committed to ensuring reconciliation is not only acknowledged but lived in our classrooms, hallways, and communities.

self-awareness, problem-solving, reducing anxiety, and engaging families.

- **Junior/Senior High Schools:** Promoting mental health and addiction prevention, encouraging school engagement, and teaching life skills.
- **Division-Wide Supports:** Facilitating Success in Schools (SIS) planning, attending PGO/TGO meetings, and assisting with VTRA and tragedy response.
- **Community Connections:** Making referrals to agencies, providing resources, and building capacity through collaboration.

As Trustees, we are proud of the compassion and professionalism of our FSL Team. They embody what it means to be collaborative partners in education—working not in isolation, but as part of a broader network that includes families, schools, and community agencies.

Through their work, Black Gold demonstrates its commitment to mental health and well-being in tangible and meaningful ways. By addressing social-emotional needs, promoting resilience, and reducing barriers to learning, the Family School Liaison Team helps ensure every student feels seen, supported, and empowered to succeed.

Honouring Our Outgoing Trustees

We extend our heartfelt thanks to four trustees who are concluding their terms with Black Gold School Division: Esther Eckert, Robyn Steed, Michelle Martin, and Gary Hansen. Each has made a meaningful difference through their service, dedication, and advocacy for students, staff, and families across our communities.



Trustee Esther Eckert

As Board Chair, Esther brought steady leadership and a strong voice for families. As Board Chair she celebrated the work of the Board and Sr. Administration at every opportunity. Her commitment to support student learning and success in both urban and rural communities has left a lasting impact across the Division.



Trustee Robyn Steed

Robyn’s thoughtful approach to board discussions and tireless promotion and support for the new high school in Beaumont are her legacy. She asked hard, reflective questions, considered the impacts of decisions and consistently championed initiatives that put students first.



Trustee Michelle Martin

During her time on the Board, Michelle was a strong advocate for Indigenous students and a dedicated voice for advancing reconciliation across the Division. She consistently encouraged meaningful change to ensure schools were welcoming and inclusive. She also worked to improve safety and well-being for students, notably renovations at Thorsby Junior/Senior High School to upgrade aging bathroom infrastructure.



Trustee Gary Hansen

Gary’s practical perspective and passion for education strengthened the Division’s focus on student well-being and success. His insights reflected Black Gold’s core values and a deep understanding of the issues. He also consistently challenged thinking on diversity, advocating for systemic change and championing women in leadership.

Trustees Visit Calmar Collegiate Renovations

Our recent visit to Calmar Collegiate gave us a chance to see the progress on the school’s renovations — a project that reflects our ongoing advocacy for supportive and inspiring student learning environments. Throughout our term, we have championed priorities such as equitable funding, career development opportunities, inclusive

education and mental health supports, and addressing the needs of our growing communities. This advocacy has helped lay the groundwork for continued success across the Division. As our term concludes, we leave confident that the new Board will bring their own impactful vision and priorities to strengthen the future of our Division.



Outgoing trustees visited Calmar Collegiate to see the progress on renovations — a project that reflects their ongoing advocacy for student learning environments.

Investing in Every Student’s Success

The Black Gold Board of Trustees remains committed to ensuring that every student has the opportunity to thrive. A key part of that commitment is advocating for a strong and sustainable **Basic Instructional Grant**—the per-student funding that supports classroom teachers, learning materials, and the essential programs that make quality education possible. This grant represents 63 per cent of total operational funding from Alberta Education, or 77 per cent of all instructional funding, forming the foundation of every student’s learning experience.

Across Black Gold schools, we see dedicated teachers, educational assistants, and staff working together to create welcoming, engaging classrooms. Rising costs, however, make it harder to sustain these high-quality experiences. Ensuring that the Basic Grant keeps pace with inflation means schools can continue offering the supports and opportunities that students deserve.

Our division has long taken pride in being careful stewards of public funds, always focused on maximizing classroom impact. Yet true fiscal responsibility must also include predictable growth and adequate provincial investment. When the Basic Grant keeps pace with inflation, schools can maintain class sizes, retain valuable staff, and continue to innovate for students.

This conversation is not just about funding—it’s about equity, opportunity, and Alberta’s future. Every dollar invested in students today builds the skills, creativity, and citizenship our communities will rely on tomorrow.

The Board of Trustees will continue to work collaboratively with government and community partners to strengthen this vital funding. Together, we can ensure that every student—no matter where they live or learn—has access to the teachers, programs, and support they need to succeed.