



#TrySomethingNew - A Pilot Calendar for the 2018-2019 School Year March 7, 2018

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE - One of the Grande Yellowhead Public School Division (GYPSD) Board's responsibilities is the annual approval of the school calendar as per 'Policy 18, School Calendar'. The development of our calendar must align with the requirements under the School Act and recognize that maximizing student learning is always the primary goal of the board – '**what is best for our students**'. We also understand that the well-being of our staff, students and families, play a very important role in accomplishing this. The division has had two formal calendar surveys in the last few years: one in 2006, and one in 2013. Since then, our Board and leadership teams have been actively engaged in frequent conversations about matters that are important to the Grande Yellowhead's family of staff, students and families. In addition, GYPSD's board is always looking for innovative and reflective strategies that assist our students' in meeting their academic goals, pursue opportunities that support our students', our staff's, and our families' health and well-being, and ultimately align with our core value of 'one vision, one team'. Our suggestion: 'Let's **#TrySomethingNew**'!

Why Not Another Survey First?

We discussed another survey but then we asked ourselves '*are we going to continuously solicit feedback from our stakeholders on a current practice without affording them the opportunity to experience a different one firsthand for comparison?*' We sincerely believe that offering our stakeholders an opportunity to try a pilot calendar will result in additional feedback further to what we have received in the past, as well as negating some past concerns.

Our Three Major Goals for a New Pilot Calendar

1. We sought out new and innovative strategies that promote a more successful academic outcome for our students, and that offers a more balanced work and home life throughout the school year: ways that while recognizing less fatigue/stress in our staff's and students' mental health and well-being. Many other school jurisdictions, as well as post-secondary institutions, across Alberta and Canada, have implemented a one-week fall break, in addition to a one-week spring break, with great success for all stakeholders by:

- Minimizing fatigue and mid semester burnout for both staff and students, especially for younger learners, and
- Affording a mental rest for the staff and students in the first semester as well as the second that also provides a more flexible schedule for valuable family time.

2. We heard from our stakeholders who want one calendar across the division for all schools, aligning with our core value of '*one vision, one team.*'

Grande Yellowhead stretches from Jasper National Park, east to Evansburg, and north to the Town of Grande Cache. The jurisdiction includes seventeen schools, five Learning Connection Centres, approximately 4,100 students, and 600 staff members.

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3. One hour early dismissal 'Friday's' were not optimum periods for staff in designing strategic and collaborative professional learning practices to improve instruction and assessment for students' maximum growth. These times were also sometimes problematic for families' schedules.

What's Next?

We will collectively be rolling up our sleeves and delving into the strategic opportunities that the new pilot offers. By working together, we can identify and meet head-on, some of the opportunities and challenges that we may see coming on the horizon over the coming months.

We will also encourage and welcome everyone's suggestions and solutions by actively collecting stakeholder input through multiple communications tools including the use of online surveys throughout the pilot year. All the results will be made public so that we can all hear what is working or not through a transparent process. Your valuable input helps us to continually enhance the division's future calendars, going forward.

*To view the pilot calendar approved at today's Public Board Meeting for the 2018-2019 school year only, please visit our website at <http://bit.ly/2Hhzo7H>.

The Board of Trustees of Grande Yellowhead Public School Division always encourage our stakeholders to share their voice on all decisions made by the board. Some ideas for how you can reach out to your local trustee include talking to them at school council meetings, community events, attending public board meetings, or by contacting them personally. *We always need your voice to keep our division moving forward in the right direction, on the right path!*