

Alberta Education makes early education a priority ^[1]

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EXCERPTS:

The business of educating students in Alberta is changing.

In February, Alberta revised its education business plan and while school boards and school administrators are still considering the implications of the plan, Terry Marshall, Pat Hardy Primary School principal, believes it is good news for students just starting their education careers.

"It really speaks to us here at Pat Hardy," Marshall said.

Starting this September, Pat Hardy School became an Early Childhood Education School after the Northern Gateway School Division reconfigured the grades at Pat Hardy and Central schools.

Pat Hardy now serves students from prekindergarten to Grade 2 and Central School is home to students from Grades 3 to 5.

"The plan really reiterates the government's commitment to early education," Marshall said. "The very first goal listed in the plan is an excellent start to education.

Marshall said in the old Alberta education business plan, early education is not directly referenced.

"The first one was success for every student, second one was a kind of a management goal and the third one was specially targeted to ensure success of First Nation students," Marshall said.

The current Alberta Education business plan has been rewritten to include four main goals: an early excellent start to learning, success for every student, quality teaching and school leadership and engaged and effective governance.

"Of course, the one we are really excited about at Pat Hardy is an excellent start to education," Marshall said. "Early childhood education is so important, getting off on the right foot really helps students be successful for their entire education careers."

Before the last provincial election, one of the campaign promises Alison Redford and the Progressive Conservatives made was to fund full day, everyday kindergarten.

In the government's 2013 budget there was no mention of funding for full day kindergarten.

"However, in the business plan it says full day kindergarten is one of the government's top priorities for education in the next three years," Marshall said.

Another of the major priorities the government has targeted for the next three years is an early education development strategy.

Marshall said that part of Alberta's education business plan will be a collaborative effort between the schools and a number of different government agencies.

She said the government wants to co-ordinate the efforts of a number of different community services to make sure every student has the maximum level of support needed so that they can achieve to their fullest potential.

"A lot of these learning situations and issues students have can be corrected if they are identified and treated early," Marshall said. "With the help of other professionals, speech, occupational therapists and the medical community, if we all work together we can make sure every student gets off to an excellent start."

The business plan is just one of the latest changes to the Alberta government's plan to transform education to a more inclusive model.

In 2009, Alberta Education released a document called 'Inspiring Inclusive Education', and Marshall said schools are starting to see some of the initiatives in the document being implemented at the school level.

In May during Education Week, the government also announced a number of initiatives that have the potential to effect how education is delivered to students.

"Alberta Education has made a lot of changes to the way we as educators will be interacting with our students," Marshall said.

To help school administrators better understand what those changes mean and how they will impact school, Alberta Education has organized a two day workshop in Edmonton.

"There will be a lot of people from Alberta Education including a lot of the decision makers and I am looking forward to hear what they have to say about full day, every day kindergarten and how they are going to support us to make sure there is an excellent start to education for every child," Marshall said.

-reprinted from the Whitecourt Star

Region: Alberta ^[2]

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