

Education Matters – Space Challenges

Beautiful Plains School Division has some unique circumstances that very few rural divisions face – not enough space for our growing population. In a part of the world that has been losing its rural population for many decades, this is a wonderful challenge and opportunity to have. Our communities are either stable or growing right across the division.

When the province mandated that all classes between Kindergarten and grade 3 should have no more than 20 pupils, it required little change by us; we already know the value of small classes for young students. But as our population grew, Hazel M. Kellington School was the first to run out of classrooms in which to add the needed teachers. We were already getting portables and considering moving the grade six class to the middle school in Neepawa Area Collegiate Institute.

As we start the school year in 2017, we now have four portable units at HMK, and five at NACI, and the population continues to grow. Proportionally to our size, the Beautiful Plains School Division has been one of the fastest growing divisions in the province for the past few years.

It's not just Neepawa schools that have grown beyond capacity; there are eight Hutterian colonies in the division, and four of them have felt the need to erect spacious new buildings for their schools. These new facilities they have built are a real credit to the colonies and their care for their young people.

We have continued to work with the provincial government to address the need for additional space in Neepawa and are extremely thankful and excited that Neepawa has been awarded a new school. It will take the form of an addition to the "campus" at NACI to house a middle school, and a stand-alone day care facility. The portable classrooms at HMK will eventually be removed to restore much-needed playground space.

Projects of this size require a great deal of preparation and time. With a detailed and aggressive time-table, the province is working with Beautiful Plains School Division in an attempt to ensure that the new school's doors will be open to students in time for the start of school in 2019. That is fast indeed for a project as complex as a full school, with classrooms, gym, band room and multi-purpose room.

At Carberry, the population pressures aren't quite so strong, but there is full utilization of the schools' facilities, a nearly steady population and a consistent uptake of exchange students.

Through all the growth in our population and its excitement, our main priority remains to provide quality programming for all our students. It looks as though that is best done with a new school, so let's roll up our sleeves.