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June 25, 2021

Dear Prairie Spirit families:

I want to say a sincere thank you to all of our Prairie Spirit students and families at the end of this particularly unique year. On behalf of the school division, I want to express my gratitude for your support as we navigated the challenges, interruptions, disruptions, and opportunities that presented themselves.

We are so proud and thankful that we were able to continue with in-person learning throughout the year, with only a very few interruptions for some classes. We did this together! Thank you!

We have missed the opportunities to have parents engage in person in our schools this year. You are our vital partners in the important work of student learning.

In Prairie Spirit, we are focusing on response and recovery. We are strategically planning how our resources will be allocated to meet the needs of our students and families.

Our learning response will include a focus on connection. We believe that a greater focus on connections for students and families will lead to greater learning. We want to support hope-filled engagement with families and the local school.

I am so proud of our continued focus on learning this year. Our Prairie Spirit students and staff have done an amazing job of adapting and supporting safe learning environments. Despite the complexities of this year, we know that learning has happened, both in and out of the traditional classroom.

### **Residential school tragedies**

As a Division, we were heartbroken to hear the news of the discovery of 751 unmarked graves at the former Marieval Indian Residential School site, announced by the Cowessess First Nation this week.

Prairie Spirit offers sincere sympathy and condolences to Prairie Spirit staff and families who may have connections to Cowessess First Nation, and to all Indigenous peoples for whom this is continued trauma and loss. It is devastating to know that there will likely be more announcements like this one in the days and weeks ahead.

As a Division, we are committed to working together with our Indigenous partners on the journey toward reconciliation. Our commitment has never been more important than it is now. We believe reconciliation is rooted in learning.

We share in the sorrow and commit to continuing to work together in a good way for the benefit of our students and our society.

In response to this sad news, the flags at all Prairie Spirit schools have been lowered to half-mast. Please note that the flags at all Prairie Spirit schools will be removed over the summer months according to our

flag policy and in order to ensure they will be raised and lowered appropriately when staff are in the building.

### **2021/22 school year**

As we anticipate a positive end to the 2020/21 school year, we are also looking forward to a return to school this fall. The Ministry of Education is working on the Safe School Plan with the Ministry of Health and the provincial Response Planning Team.

The provincial Ministry of Education has advised that the vaccination rollout and provincial reopening plans are the current provincial priorities, while plans for the upcoming school year are still being considered. We don't yet know what the start of the 2021/22 school year will look like. We will provide more information as soon as it is available in August. Stay tuned!

### **COVID-19 update**

According to the Saskatchewan Health Authority, the number of cases is decreasing in schools. We are currently experiencing a substantial decrease in COVID cases in our Prairie Spirit schools. Dare we say that we haven't had a COVID case reported at a Prairie Spirit school for over two weeks? This is great news!

I want to thank all of our students and staff for so diligently following safety protocols all year long. Thank you to parents and caregivers for supporting these safety strategies. Although the school year is coming to an end, Dr. Shahab reminds us that we will be living with COVID-19 and variants for some time. We will all need to continue to be mindful in our health practices as we protect our children and each other.

### **Budget 2021/22**

Earlier this week, the Board of Education approved the balanced budget for Prairie Spirit School Division for the upcoming school year.

Provincial funding to Prairie Spirit will increase by approximately 2.8% or \$3.1 million for 2021/22, which includes the 2% salary increase for all teachers as part of the provincial collective agreement. Funding does not keep pace with inflationary costs in the Division.

Provincial funding is based on projected enrolment for the Division of approximately 11,900 students this fall, an increase over the previous year.

Projecting student enrolment has been particularly challenging this year, with some families choosing to have their children stay home or learn online during the pandemic. Spirit eLearning School, Prairie Spirit's online school for Kindergarten to Grade 12 students, provides an important option for some families.

The Division is using a conservative approach for the budget, given the uncertainty surrounding enrolment. The Division has planned a net reduction of about 7.5 FTE teaching staff, managed through attrition. The budget is designed with flexibility to respond if enrolment numbers are higher than expected and additional staff is required.

Approximately 70% of Prairie Spirit's annual expenses are in the area of instructional costs, which is school staff working directly with students. The overall pupil-to-teacher ratio in the Division is at just over 16, which is consistent with previous years.

The focus for the upcoming year is guided by the Provincial Education Plan for 2021/22, with a focus on supporting students with attention to:

- interventions for Grade 1 students who did not attend Kindergarten in 2020/21
- interventions to support reading for Grade 1 to 3 students
- support for staff to reach out and engage with students and families who did not attend or had low attendance in 2020/21
- mental health supports for students
- sanitation and PPE

### **Director's Thank You**

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to “get to” learn and lead as an educator in the former Sask Valley School Division and the current Prairie Spirit School Division for over 34 years. It has been my privilege and honour to serve as the Director of Education for Prairie Spirit for these past four years.

Thank you for working side by side with us throughout this past year and for your ongoing support and partnership. I hope that this summer season ahead is filled with fun, family, and friends. I wish you all the best.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lori Jeschke', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Lori Jeschke  
Director of Education