

SCHOOL NOTES

Green the curriculum

Alberta Education should ensure that environmental education is front and center when it comes to its new K-12 curriculum, says St. Albert's public school board.

St. Albert Public School trustees agreed Feb. 10 to ask the Alberta School Boards Association (ASBA) to lobby Alberta Education to incorporate environmental education into the K-12 school curriculum.

Alberta Education is rewriting the province's K-12 school curriculum – a process started by the NDP government in 2016 but paused in 2019 by the UCP who alleged that the NDP's rewrite was politically biased.

Right now, Alberta students only learn about the environment in specific subjects such as the sciences, said Trustee Cheryl Dumont, St. Albert Public's ASBA representative.

But a 2020 poll commissioned by the Alberta Council for Environmental Education found nearly seven in 10 high school students were worried about their future as a result of global heating, with about 60 per cent of youths aged 18 to 24 willing to make major changes to their lives to address it. The poll also found youths showed very high interest in learning about solutions to global heating, and a lack of knowledge was the biggest barrier holding them back from doing more to protect the environment.

"Kids want to know more and be part of the solution," Dumont said, citing that poll as evidence.

St. Albert's schools have long emphasized environmental education and action, and Dumont said she wanted to see a similar approach taken province-wide. Embedding environmental education into all parts of the curriculum

would give students the tools they need to address today's climate challenges.

Lois E. Hole Elementary teacher Abi Henneberry has spent about a decade using the outdoors and the environment to teach students all parts of the curriculum and said she supports this move by the board.

"Environmental education creates more responsible citizens," Henneberry said, and helps engage students by showing them their lessons have real-world applications.

You can use a stormwater pond to discuss chemistry and ice safety, she said as an example, or explore a community garden to learn the importance of protecting farmland.

The province has yet to release its latest draft of the K-12 curriculum, and St. Albert Public wants to ensure the environment has a prominent place in it, Dumont said.

"Our kids want this education. They need it. It's their future."

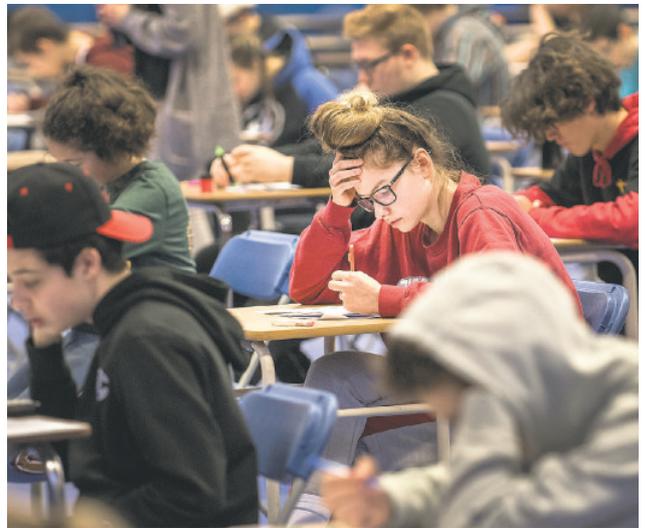
Dumont said the board is now finalizing a resolution to present to ASBA Zone 2/3 meeting this March. Should the resolution be approved by the provincial board, the ASBA would lobby by the province to act on it.

Fitness talk

St. Albert's Catholic school board will host a free talk this Thursday on the importance of fitness for mental health in these COVID times.

Edmonton chiropractor Adriana Mar is hosting a free talk Feb. 18 on how physical activity affects mental health. The talk is organized by Greater St. Albert Catholic Schools and Alberta Health Services as part of the GSACRD Voice mental health series.

Researchers have found considerable evidence regular physical activity



FILE PHOTO/St. Albert Gazette
High school students bury their heads in their final exams in the gym in St. Albert in January 2019. St. Albert Public Schools has some advice for the province on its curriculum rewrite.

improves sleep, mental health and academic performance amongst youth by releasing various hormones and neurotransmitters, Mar said.

But there's also plenty of evidence Canadians aren't getting the exercise they need to stay healthy. Statistics Canada reports that just one in five Canadian adults got the recommended 150 minutes of physical activity prior to the pandemic, and that most had increased the amount of time they spent watching TV or using the Internet since the pandemic started.

"Physical activity and movement don't

have to be something you do at the gym," Mar said.

Mar encouraged parents and students to get creative when it came to adding physical activity to their daily routines. Families can build a snowman or shovel the sidewalks to stay fit, and athletes can stage team workouts over Zoom to keep in touch with their teammates. Even cleaning the house can count as activity if you're strapped for time.

Mar's talk runs from 6:30 to 7:30 p.m. Visit gsacrdvoice-physicalactivity.eventbrite.ca to register.

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