



School District No. 59 (Peace River South)

April 30, 2025

Board of Education

RE: **Strategic Plan and Budget Community Meeting**

On April 2, 2025, the Board held community meeting to outline the renewed strategic plan and budget as part of its consultation process.

Invitees along with Senior Staff and Trustees gathered for dinner, a presentation by the Superintendent and the Secretary-Treasurer, and facilitated table talk on four pre-determined topics. The topics and themes are provided below. Table notes were themed by ChatGPT.

Topic 1

After hearing tonight about how our students are doing and the priorities of the strategic plan, what should the board focus on over the next four years? Are we on the right track?
What does success look like for each student and how can we achieve that success?
How can we improve efficiency by changing how we operate?

Top Five Themes

1. Sense of Belonging & Relationships

- Recurring emphasis on how belonging impacts attendance, academic success, and wellness.
- Key transition periods (Grade 7–8) are critical for maintaining connection.
- Building strong, trusting relationships with students, families, and staff is foundational.
- Students need to feel seen, safe, and connected to thrive.

2. Family & Community Engagement

- Parents need to feel welcomed, informed, and involved.
- Barriers to engagement (socio-economic, cultural, logistical) must be addressed.
- Strong school-community partnerships can support students holistically.
- Celebrating student growth and strengths with families matters.

3. Mental Health, Wellness, and Basic Needs

- Student mental health challenges are common; support is essential.
- Sleep, nutrition, and overall wellness are repeatedly raised as barriers to learning.
- Food programs and sleep/nutrition education are needed.
- Mental health support should include awareness for both students and teachers.

4. Equity, Personalization & Student-Centered Success

- Success should be defined individually, not only by academic metrics.
- Programs must support diverse learners: trades, academics, gifted, DL, etc.
- Students must be met where they are, with differentiated supports and flexible pathways.
- Focus on growth, resilience, and confidence—**not** one-size-fits-all outcomes.

5. Staffing, Systems, and Structural Efficiency

- Challenges with staffing (LOPs, retention, lack of awareness of resources).
- Systemic inefficiencies (time, travel, tech delays) impact success and morale.
- Building internal capacity and retaining qualified staff is a priority.
- Need for structures that support collaboration, professional development, and long-term planning.

Topic 2

How would students know that we are committed to truth and reconciliation? In the district, on a personal level, and as a community?

1. Truth, Reconciliation & Cultural Integration

- Strong, ongoing focus on embedding **Truth and Reconciliation** in daily school life through **events, visuals, curriculum, and student involvement**.
- Observances like **Orange Shirt Day, May 5th NID, and land acknowledgements** are seen as important, symbolic steps.
- **Cultural practices** (e.g., smudging, art, beading, sage use, Cree anthem) are becoming routine parts of school culture.
- There is a clear **district-wide commitment** to addressing the **Calls to Action** visibly and meaningfully.

2. Student Voice & Youth-Led Advocacy

- Students are seen **talking at home**, participating in **leadership**, and driving learning through curiosity and advocacy.
- Youth are informing their families and challenging past beliefs.
- Students are visibly engaging in **land acknowledgements, ceremonies, and Indigenous-focused courses**.
- Their emotional responses show deep engagement and a growing sense of **empowerment and connection**.

3. Community Partnerships & Elder Involvement

- Schools are working with **First Nations, Elders, and Knowledge Keepers** to co-create and deliver authentic learning experiences.
- **Land-based learning, career fairs, and community events** are opportunities for relationship-building and shared understanding.
- Strong emphasis on **gathering spaces** and **welcoming environments** in schools for Indigenous students and families.

4. Teacher Support & Professional Development

- Increasing **teacher confidence** and willingness to engage with Indigenous content, especially with **coach mentors** guiding them.
- Continued need for **ongoing learning** (Pro-D days, resources, cultural safety training).
- Staff are shifting from fear of “getting it wrong” to embracing **curiosity, support, and growth**.

5. Curriculum & Visual Representation

- Integration of Indigenous knowledge into **core subjects** (English, Socials, ADST, etc.) is becoming more normalized.
- Representation through **novels, art, bulletin boards, flags, and murals** are creating **visible cultural inclusion**.
- New curriculum offerings like **First Peoples courses** and **Indigenous-focused studies in French Immersion** reflect structural change.

Topic 3

What partnerships or gaps in our collective responsibility to create and maintain a thriving community could we focus on together?

1. Strengthening Family and Community Partnerships

- Emphasis on **welcoming parents and families** (including younger siblings) into schools to build trust and inclusion.
- Community partnerships (e.g., **YMCA, Northern Health, trades, local organizations**) are vital to supporting students and families.
- Collaboration with **industry, emergency services, and municipalities** creates meaningful connections and real-world experiences for students.

2. Access to Services & Equity of Opportunity

- Families face challenges with **affordability, access, and availability** of resources (e.g., childcare, transportation, extracurriculars).
- Need to **expand before/after school care**, mental health supports, and inclusive youth programs.
- **Transportation**—especially in Dawson Creek and Chetwynd—is a major barrier to participation and access.

3. Holistic Support for Students & Families

- Schools cannot do it all—there is a call for **wraparound services** that support students **emotionally, socially, and physically**.
- Importance of **guidance and mentorship** for students to see a future beyond school, especially in trades and healthcare.
- Desire for **better transitions** between school stages (K-7 to high school) and into post-secondary or careers.

4. Staff Retention & Community Integration

- Schools and communities need to **support and retain staff** by offering honest expectations, community integration, housing support, and a welcoming environment.
- Suggestions include a “**buddy system,**” **community orientation,** and stronger ties to local supports (e.g., realtors, healthcare, recreation).

5. Youth Engagement, Enrichment & Future Readiness

- Students need more **enrichment programs**, like **clubs, leadership opportunities, after-school activities,** and **career prep** (dual credit, Youth in Trades).
- Kids need support to **build foundational skills,** develop **future goals,** and **see their path** beyond high school.
- A focus on making **schools places where kids want to be,** with programs, relationships, and mentorship.

Topic 4

Are there partners missing in the quest to recruit and retain?

What motivates and inspires you to work where you do?

What other initiatives do you believe the District could undertake to further its efforts?

What has worked for you in your past or current work/industry that has attracted and retained employees?

1. Recruitment & Retention through Community Connection

- **Strong local relationships** (born/raised here) are a key factor in retention.
- Creating a **sense of belonging**—through buddy systems, community involvement, and staff social events—helps newcomers feel welcome.
- Connection outside of school (sports, housing, recreation, social life) improves **long-term retention.**
- Suggestion to **ask those who stay why they stayed** to guide future retention strategies.

2. Holistic Onboarding & Support for New Staff

- Staff need **realistic previews** of what to expect (e.g., limited amenities, transportation).
- **Buddy/sponsor systems, district-organized social events,** and help with **housing, recreation passes, and community integration** are all ways to support newcomers.
- New staff may be isolated without children or family ties—creating intentional pathways for **connection** is crucial.
- Better onboarding and **communication about community resources** (housing, childcare, services) needed.

3. Investment in Professional Growth & Local Talent

- Strong support for “**earn while you learn**” programs for LOPs, EAs, and others to gain qualifications while working.
- **Internal pathways** for advancement (e.g., EA → teacher) are working well and should be scaled.
- Need for **training time, funding, and policy changes** (e.g., release time, leave for education)

to support EAs and other staff.

- Calls for **mentorship, shadowing, and upskilling** across roles (LATs, counselors, new teachers, EAs).

4. Affordable Housing & Financial Incentives

- **Housing is a major barrier**—calls for partnerships with municipalities, dedicated staff housing, or rental support.
- Interest in **signing bonuses, retention incentives**, and **debt forgiveness** for rural/remote service.
- cost of living and transportation remain significant concerns, especially for younger staff without driver's licenses.

5. Inclusive and Strategic Workforce Development

- Expand recruitment to **Indigenous staff, trades, and international hires**.
- Ensure roles (especially Indigenous-focused ones) are **filled with culturally competent or representative staff**.
- Broaden career conversations with students to include **non-traditional and local opportunities**.
- Align with **community, healthcare, and trades sectors** to create **local pipelines** into education careers.

In all 68 people attend the April 2 event as follows:

Attendees:

BCGEU	6	West Moberly Lake First Nations	1
CUPE	4	Saulteau First Nations	1
DPAC	4	Indigenous Education Advisory - Dawson Creek	1
Teamsters	3	City of Dawson Creek	2
PRSPVPA	8	District of Tumbler Ridge	2
Senior Staff	13	Regional District	1
Trustees	6	Village of Pouce Coupe	1
Norther Lights College	3	Early Learning Partners	3
PRSTA	7	MCFD	2
		Total	68

Senior Staff served as table facilitators and trustees moved around the room to a different table after each topic. One person from each table was assigned as the recorder to take notes from the conversation.

Table notes and comment cards were gathered at the end of the event which were then transcribed by staff at the Board Office, including comments sent via the QR code provided. The notes were then themed by topic by AI. The presentation was posted to the District website under District Info/Financial Information/2025-2026 and can be found here: [Financial Information | School District 59](#) .

Many thanks to all participants for the informative, open and respectful discussion. Special thanks to Richell Schwartz for assistance in organizing and typing the table notes.

Kim Morris
Secretary-Treasurer/CFO

