



Good Spirit School Division No. 204

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~ MEDIA RELEASE ~

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“Everybody...Everybody...Needs to Know What Happened”

On Monday, April 7, 2014, the Board of Education, along with Dwayne Reeve, Director of Education, and Mark Forsythe, First Nation Métis Achievement Coordinator, presented a framed copy of the “Statement of Apology to former students of Indian Residential Schools” at the Good Spirit School Division Visions of the Elders meeting.

In November, 2013, at the Saskatchewan School Board Associations’ (SSBA) Fall Assembly, a resolution was made by the 28 school boards in attendance to encourage boards to place the federal government’s 2008 statement of apology in each of the province’s more than 700 schools. The recommendation originated from Justice Murray Sinclair, Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and was brought forward by the SSBA’s Aboriginal Council.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada website opens with the statement, “The truth of our common experience will help set our spirits free and pave the way to reconciliation”. The symbolic gesture of placing this apology in all schools is one way in which Good Spirit School Division hopes to bring awareness and a way in which to help educate our students and communities on the legacy of residential schools.

“We recognize our past and are trying to educate our students,” states Mr. Forsythe. “It is important that the story be told. This is a way in which to help clear up misconceptions and ensure the past is not forgotten. We want to keep this message going.”

The Visions of the Elders is a group made up of representatives from Keeseekoose, Key and Cote First Nations as well as members of the Board of Education, Andrew Quewezance, GSSD Cultural Advocate, and Mark Forsythe. A new addition to the group sees Métis representation at the table. The group meets 3 to 4 times per year to glean guidance and support from Elders. Information is used as a resource to talk to students and build the educational bridge for a better cultural understanding of our past, present and future.

The framed copy of the apology was accepted and then passed around the room so that each member could share their personal residential school experiences. Many emotional stories were shared – both positive and negative – with a true understanding of the fact that many have reached different milestones in their personal healing journey. All agreed that gestures such as this start conversations that need to happen. Our children and children’s children need to be told what happened to understand.

Mr. Quewezance, our Cultural Advocate who visits GSSD schools to talk about First Nation culture, was a strong voice in the room stating, "It takes a lot of courage to walk into a school and talk about this. I am willing to do this so they (*students*) understand and have a better life and future. No one heard our cries when we were in residential schools; now at least somebody knows. We've been through the worst and now let's make things better. Everybody...everybody...needs to know what happened. People are starting to listen and it's our turn to do our part and start spreading the message."

Other voices in the room were heard and met with many heads shaking yes in unison. Comments included, "It is an honourable thing to apologize.", "We want to teach our grandchildren why this happened.", "This is just a piece of paper but we have to learn to forgive and not forget what happened. I commend GSSD for sharing; it's a beginning of a long road ahead with baby steps to start.", and "I am better today than I was yesterday."

Mr. Dwayne Reeve concluded the presentation circle by commenting, "It is indeed a journey to create awareness and understand it. There is a way to tell a story to our young ones so they understand."

The statement of apology was symbolically accepted by meeting attendees with the acknowledgement that a framed copy will soon be placed in each of our 28 schools as well as the Administration Office in Yorkton.

For further information, contact Dwayne Reeve, Director of Education, at 306-786-5500 or by email at info@gssd.ca.

The Good Spirit School Division strives to provide safe, caring, welcoming schools for children. Our primary objective is to foster a respectful learning environment to achieve student success and well-being in each of our 28 public schools throughout East-Central Saskatchewan. Our values of belonging, respect, responsibility, learning and nurturing ensures "Students Come First". Visit us at www.gssd.ca; contact 306-786-5500 or 1-866-390-0773.

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