

Friends taking care of friends

Darren Mazutinec

Once a week, the Lethbridge Herald publishes a column written by a superintendent of one of five school jurisdictions in the Lethbridge area. This week's column is authored by Darren Mazutinec, Chief Deputy Superintendent for Westwind School Division and was published on November 21, 2018. Thank you to the Lethbridge Herald for permission to post this article on the CASS website.

The start of school in September also ushers in the "Friday Night Lights" football experience to southern Alberta for young and old, student and non-student alike. I have been humbled and inspired at how this football season has encapsulated the great work going on in public education with our teachers, our students, our parents and in our communities.

In mid-October, five Westwind football players were involved in a serious car accident. Throughout this difficult time, I have been touched as I've watched rival schools posting positive well-wishes and wearing Magrath and Raymond colours on their wrists, in their hair and on their jerseys to support the community and these boys. I have observed various high schools student councils, parent councils and local businesses working together on fundraising to help offset the costs for the boys and their families. It made my bosom burn with pride knowing that our schools are full of good kids capable of doing the right things in tough times. It made me realize that we have really good kids in our schools who "stepped up their game" in the most important stadium of all – human empathy and kindness.

The LCI vs. Raymond playoff football game on Nov. 1 was the first time that all five of these injured players from Magrath were reunited since the accident. To see them on the sideline with their halo braces, slings and wheelchairs was an inspiring moment – some would say even miraculous. Three short weeks ago I watched one of these players be wheeled past me on his way to the STARS helicopter for emergency medical transport, and to now see him on the sidelines is simply amazing.

As I sat in the stands during that Nov. 1 playoff game in the cold misty drizzle watching two historical rivals play a masterful game of football, my mind and heart were full as I realized that I had had the best seat in the house watching human kindness manifest itself over the past three weeks through the examples set by our students, teachers and communities.

To see our students supporting each other in tough times confirms to me that we have great things going on in our schools. From this incident, I know that school administrators are leading, teachers are caring/modelling/mentoring, and involved parent groups are all working together to ensure that we never lose the elements of human kindness, empathy, and compassion for each other.

As I listened to the RHS student section and the LCI student section challenge each other with "We've got the spirit, yes we do, we've got the spirit, how about you?" it made me proud to be an educator in southern Alberta. To see all of the province rally around each other and support our Magrath students confirmed to me that this whole region has the most important spirit of all – kindness. One of my favourite mantras during my teaching and coaching career to my students and players was "friends take care of friends." This message was evident in lots of ways as everyone in southern Alberta, and the province took care of each other during this tough time.

On behalf of Westwind School Division, I humbly thank all of our neighbouring school divisions, schools, Alberta Education and all the local communities for the warm messages, thoughts and calls during the past month. It has helped us immensely and means a lot.

Thanks to everyone, but especially our great students and teachers in our communities, for your kindness and support.