

Trusteeship in Education
Mr. Ken Sommerfeldt

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 Mr. Ken Sommerfeldt, Superintendent for Westwind School Division and was published on November 29, 2017. Thank you to the Lethbridge Herald for permission to post this article on the CASS website.

One of the fundamental values of our society is our connection to democracy at all levels of our social and political engagement. When one considers all that matters or should matter to citizens in a democratic state, the voice of the people in the selection of those who will represent the interests of their constituents is of great importance. Over the past 11 years I have had the privilege of serving with committed and passionate trustees who have voluntarily stepped out of their private roles and accepted the oath and responsibility to be a trustee for the education of our students.

Recently, I attended the Fall General Meeting of the ASBA (Alberta School Board's Association) with a number of Westwind Trustees. In these meetings, important policy discussions are conducted in a very formal parliamentary process to determine areas of focus for education and proposed recommendations to the Provincial Government. Among the many topics of discussion, equity funding for all students, as well as funding structure for High School students, were addressed. These are topics of great importance to education in order to ensure that the resources needed to provide a quality education for all students regardless of where they live in Alberta are in place. Over the years, recommendations from ASBA have been respected and responded to by the government for the benefit of Albertans.

It was noted in this year's assembly, that 45% of Alberta's trustees are new to their roles. While Math was never my strong suit, nearly half of the trustees are now engaged in the orientation process to become acquainted with the duty they now shoulder. Westwind has 7 newly elected members to a 9-member School Board. I have observed the commitment, passion, and desire for learning of these people as they assume these important duties to represent the public. Gaining a deep understanding of the mountain of legislation, policy, and procedures that are a part of the governing structures in education are daunting to be sure. It has been my experience over the years that following an election trustees are quick to find their way, and to assume the roles of leadership in a commendable fashion.

School Board trustees play a vital role in education. From one perspective, they model the fundamental principles of democracy in their respective communities as it applies to education. From another, they become intimately involved in the decisions and policies that shape the educational experience of our children and youth. I want to take this opportunity to express publicly my appreciation for trustees past and present for accepting this public duty on our behalf.