

## BOARD HIGHLIGHTS

Special Board Meeting, May 9, 2021

For Immediate Release

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### *Operation of in-person learning at Twilight Colony School*

The NGPS Board of Trustees and administration met virtually regarding a request from Twilight Colony to cancel at-home learning at the Colony and allow Colony students to continue learning in-person, in school. Several Twilight Colony community members, Twilight Colony Principal Christine Bzdel and local MLA, Todd Loewen also attended virtually.

#### **Letter from Twilight Colony**

Trustees shared that they had been in telephone contact and discussion with several members of the Colony. In follow up to those conversations, a letter signed by parents of school-aged children from Twilight Colony was shared with the Board .

In the letter, Colony parents outlined their concerns regarding children losing their in-person education and a lack of technology to support at-home, online learning. Parents also indicated that they share in the concern about Covid and that the community is following health protocols and limiting travel. Citing the Minister's exemptions for Colony schools, members would like NGPS' decision to move all students to at-home learning to be reversed for Twilight Colony children.

#### **Board/Administration**

Superintendent Andrea shared that the Board and administration is empathetic to the Colony's concerns and the concerns of all NGPS parents in our small rural communities, but noted that the move to at-home online learning for all NGPS students is in alignment with the Government's mandatory restrictions and the current status of Covid-19 in the province and our communities. As outlined in NGPS' [Covid-19 Re-entry Handbook](#), extensive measures have been taken and many hours invested by all staff to navigate the pandemic. The move to at-home learning in our colony environments is based on:

1. **Health and safety of students and staff.** Staff do not reside on the Colony.
2. **Continuity of Learning.** With increasing numbers, we need to consider what happens to programming for colony students if staff become ill.
3. **Consistency of practice across the division.** Moving to at-home learning allows the Division to provide continuity of learning and to protect the health and safety of students and staff.

NGPS Superintendent Andrea, “Understandably, colony parents would like to have their students learning face to face, similar to many other non-colony parents; however, as a superintendent my job is to look at the immediate, short-term and long-term implications of these decisions. Based on these factors, the operational decision was made for consistency of practice across the division and at-home learning for all NGPS students, including colony students at Twilight, Homeland, Valleyview Ranch and Rochfort Bridge.”

NGPS is able to support the Colony in setting up online learning; however, in absence of that wish from the Colony community, at-home learning will be conducted via paper packages and telephone contact.

NGPS Trustee Hailes asked about Alberta Education’s direction that allows in-person learning to continue on Colonies. NGPS Superintendent Andrea explained that after consultation with the Ministry there is flexibility on the part of school divisions to make decisions about Colony schools, based on their Division’s experience and practice.

Superintendent Andrea added that, “given the small staff numbers at Colonies, the capacity to replace staff should current staff fall ill would be extremely challenging and certainly disruptive to students’ continuity of learning.”

Several trustees shared their sympathy for Twilight Colony parents and parents and students throughout the Division. “While we have empathy for parents and students, the province has deemed these measures necessary and we have a responsibility to protect the safety of all students and staff. The decision to implement consistent practice across the Division was made in the best interests of all students.”

Other trustees voiced their belief that Twilight Colony School should be able to operate in-person learning, at school, in accordance with the Government’s May 4, 2021 direction.

Following the discussion, NGPS Trustee Gerry Steinke made Motion:

**Motion No. 4432-21: That the Board direct administration to operate Twilight Colony School with in-person learning according to the permission and guidelines provided by Alberta Education following the May 4, 2021 announcement.**



The vote was recorded as follows:

- Trustee Diane Hagman, Mayerthorpe – Opposed
- Trustee Jim Hailes, Fox Creek – Opposed
- Trustee Sherry Jeffreys, Darwell/Sangudo/Mayerthorpe – In Favour
- Trustee and Board Vice Chair, Barb Maddigan, Whitcourt – Opposed
- Trustee Judy Muir, Alberta Beach/Onoway/Rich Valley/Darwell – Opposed
- Trustee Christine Peck, Onoway – Opposed
- Trustee Anita Portsmouth, Valleyview Rural – In Favour
- Trustee Gerry Steinke, Valleyview – In Favour
- Trustee and Board Chair Linda Wigton, Whitcourt - Opposed

Total Votes In Favour: 3

Total Votes Opposed: 6

### **Motion Defeated.**

Twilight Colony students will continue to learn at-home during the government mandated period. Northern Gateway Public Schools' students are expected to return to school on **Thursday, May 27, 2021**, following a day in lieu and a non-instructional day.

### ***Next Meeting***

The next meeting of the Board will take place virtually on **May 25, 2021** commencing at **10:00 a.m.** Members of the public are invited to watch the Meeting live on our YouTube channel, [NGTV](#).

