

# Kindergarten screening starts next month

BY Dan Singleton, MVP Staff

**INNISFAIL** - Numeracy and literacy screening of kindergarten students in Chinook's Edge School Division (CESD) and Red Deer Catholic Regional Schools (RDCRS) starting next month should provide useful information for educators, say officials.

"At the end of the day, anytime we can learn more about who are students are as learners in both numeracy and literacy, we are not opposed to that," Jason Drent, associate superintendent with CESD, told the *Albertan*. "We want whatever tools are necessary to support our kids.

"We are going to work with our teachers and provide feedback to our partners when we do that."

Asked what the assessments of kindergarten students might look like, he said, "There is a focus on some phonological awareness, so letter sounds is where they start."

Alberta Education announced on Dec. 4 that screening already underway for Grade 1, 2 and 3 students started in September will be expanded to kindergarten students starting in January.

The current assessments involve

both verbal and written testing of the students, with the Grade 1 assessments being mostly verbal.

The Innisfail-headquartered CESD includes schools across the district, while RDCRS includes schools in Innisfail and Olds.

Dr. Ryan Sawula, RDCRS associate superintendent of curriculum and inclusion, says the assessments will provide useful information in support of the students.

"The introduction of enhanced literacy and numeracy screening for young learners is a significant investment in the future success of Red Deer Catholic students," Sawula said in a statement provided to the *Albertan*.

"Identifying and addressing challenges early on will allow us to provide the right supports at the right time, ensuring that no child falls through the cracks.

"The additional resources and funding provided by the province will strengthen our efforts to foster confidence and growth in every student, ensuring a strong foundation for life-long learning."

Education minister Demetrios Nicolaides said during a Dec. 4 press conference that the screening will

indicate to teachers, educational staff and parents where a child's numeracy and literacy skill are and if they may need follow-up help.

In response to a question from the *Albertan* during the press conference, Nicolaides said, "The screening will give educators and our school boards valuable information about their (kindergarten students) literacy and numeracy abilities and of course that information is incredibly valuable to help inform and spot students that may require additional intervention or support.

"We recognize, of course, that kindergarten not being mandatory means that many students might be coming in the school system for the very first time and may not have had any kind of prior learning or academic experience."

Dr. George Georgiou, professor with the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta, also took part in the press conference, telling the *Albertan* that the screening tools can "accurately identify about 95 per cent of the students who will later on develop reading difficulties. It is our responsibility to catch them early before they fall. The earlier we provide the intervention to these students the

better chances we have to help them."

The province will be providing school authorities \$10 million for the 2024-25 school year in literacy and numeracy support funding, said Nicolaides.

Teachers will be able to access resources to help with the screening, including tutorial videos for specific screening, intervention lesson plans, and kindergarten counting intervention activities.

Jason Schilling, president of the 46,000-member Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA), said, "The association stands firmly against the province's plan to subject every kindergarten and elementary school students in grades 1-3 to unnecessary assessments. The government's plan will require teachers to administer time-consuming and, in many cases, unnecessary tests to every student. This takes away from the time available for teaching."

The Smith government's suggestion that the ATA played a role in the "development of its screening process and approves of its implementation is wrong and dishonest," he said.

New screening requirements will be introduced for students in Grade 4 and Grade 5 starting in September 2026.

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# St. Marguerite brings Christmas concert for the ages

BY Johnnie Bachusky, MVP Staff

**INNISFAIL** – Since 2003 when St. Marguerite Bourgeoys Catholic School opened its doors in Innisfail there has been a grand celebration for the holiday season.

And for most of those years since, Diana Bushell, the school's long-time music teacher since 2005, has been with the students to lead them at the annual Advent Christmas Concert.

This year the concert with its accompanying play was held on Dec. 3.

More than half of the school's 300-plus student body had a role in the annual concert, which includes about 20 musical performances and ran for just over 75 minutes.

On Dec. 3 all elementary students from Grades 1 to 5, along with band members from Grades 6 to 9, performed at this year's concert for Advent; a four-week season in the church calendar dedicated to anticipating the arrival, or advent, of Jesus and to celebrate with reflections on hope, peace, love, and joy.

"It's definitely crucial that there is that spiritual aspect to this concert," said Bushell. "It's one of the biggest faith events we have through the whole year, and so we definitely want the students to know how important that is, and that's what this season is all about."

"I think they grasp the importance of it because they all buy into it and do their best."

Bushell and her students have been preparing for the concert since after Halloween.

"The classes practised their songs during all of their music and band classes, and then I did lunch hour rehearsals for the kids that are in the play," said Bushell, who was helped by school educational assistant JoAnne Keevill and husband Steve.

"They came in on the weekend to start setting up lights and sound, and they were here all day (Dec. 3), setting things up and running the sound," she said. "It's just amazing the amount of work that they do to make it look and sound like it does."

And everything was ready on Dec. 3 for the concert.

But first there was a full rehearsal in the gym from 1 to 2:30 p.m.

"I felt like all of the kids performed really well," Bushell told the *Albertan* after the rehearsal. "We just had some technical things to recheck and iron out before our evening performance, but the evening concert tends to always go a little bit better because we've had the run-through in the afternoon."

And when the concert is over after weeks of dedicated preparation by her students, Bushell is



Elementary students at St. Marguerite Bourgeoys Catholic School practise Christmas songs at a rehearsal on Dec. 3 before the annual Advent Christmas Concert.

Johnnie Bachusky/MVP Staff

confident she will once again feel happy, relief and a strong sense of pride.

"It gives me a huge sense of satisfaction because the kids go from not knowing the songs at all to just doing a really great job of them and it's really cool getting to teach the younger kids all the way up to the older kids," said Bushell. "And some of the kids that have gone through this school I've taught for 10 years."

"And I get to see that growth from when they're in kindergarten or Grade 1 all the way up to Grade 9 and see how much they've improved and how good they are at music by that point."



## THE PRO SIDE Mathew MacDonald Head Golf Professional The Muscle You're Missing in Your Training Routine

No, we're not going there we promise, this is strictly professional!

Golfers often overlook training their glutes, despite their critical role in optimizing performance. The glutes-comprising the gluteus maximus, medius, and minimus-aren't just for aesthetics. They're powerhouse muscles that stabilize the pelvis, protect the spine, transfer energy, and enhance hip rotation and extension. Strong, active glutes can help you hit the ball farther and more accurately, all while reducing the risk of injury.

Incorporating targeted glute exercises into your gym routine can significantly improve your strength, stability, and mobility. Start with these highly effective moves:

- **Goblet Squats:** Use a dumbbell or kettlebell depending on what you have available, and be sure to lower the squat past 90 degrees for maximum glute activation (if you're physically able to do so – be sure to listen to your body).
- **Squats:** Bodyweight or weighted, these are a classic for a reason, and do a spectacular job of training the glutes, hamstrings, and quadriceps.
- **Hip Thrusts:** Perform with or without weights to activate and strengthen your glutes. Focus intensely on engaging your glutes through the entire range of motion, and extending fully at the top of the exercise.
- **Single-Leg Deadlifts:** These exercises also target the glutes and hamstrings, with additional support required from the ankles and core to perform the motion correctly. All of which are vital when training for improved performance on the course.

These exercises are easy to include in your workouts and, with consistent effort, will translate to noticeable improvements on the course. So, next time you're at the gym, give your glutes some love. Come spring, when you're driving farther and playing pain-free, you'll be glad you did. Out driving your buddies? That's just a bonus.

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Annual General Meeting.

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## Sports



**BATTLE WITH THE BRONCOS** - Defenders and teammates alike watch as Ava Dalebozic heads toward the net on Dec. 7 during Battle with the Broncos at the Olds Sportsplex. A good crowd showed up for the second annual charity game. This year, the RCMP faced off against the Olds Fire Department. Each team featured members of the Olds College Broncos female hockey team. All proceeds raised from the event will go to support the Christmas Angels.

Doug Collier/MVP Staff

## St. Marguerite boys volleyball team is perfect

BY Johnnie Bachusky, MVP Staff

**INNISFAIL** – For almost a month there has been a lot of buzz around Megan Buyks' office at St. Marguerite Bourgeoys Catholic School.

Students and staff are talking mighty proud about their Bears.

Their senior boys volleyball team is the best ever.

This past season the St. Marguerite senior boys team not only defended the school's Chinook's Edge Northern Athletics Association (CENAA) regular season and playoff championship from 2023 they were perfect this season in both.

The senior boys volleyball champs may very well be the best senior boys volleyball team the school, which began in Innisfail in 2003, has ever produced.

"Even as recently as today (Dec. 4) I had some of the younger Grade 7 kids that were playing JV (junior varsity) and talked to me about, 'hey, next year do you need a setter?' or, 'do you need a hit, or 'can I play this position?' That was today, not even 20 minutes ago," said Buyks, the school's athletic director and coach of the senior boys volleyball team.

"There's a lot of our younger players that are really encouraged by our boys and seeing them play and caring about their successes and are excited to be continuing on with volleyball next year."

Volleyball is serious business at St. Marguerite.

There are boys and girls senior teams, and JV teams for both.

The JV teams play in developmental leagues, and many players were ready this season to step up and

probe the learning systems of senior league play.

"We had some Grade 9 leaders on our team that had played before, and they really stepped up and helped all of our new players," said Buyks. "Everybody was on the court every game. Everyone had the opportunity to play.

"They were a great group of boys that really helped each other out to get better, and everybody improved so much throughout the season."

The 2024 St. Marguerite senior boys volleyball team has 12 players from grades 7 to 9.

The team's regular season was 10 games in the six-team CENAA, featuring teams in smaller Central Alberta towns like Innisfail, Sylvan Lake and Spruce View.

The playoffs were played Oct. 29 and 30 at Sylvan Lake's École Mother Teresa Catholic School.

There were four total games in the playoffs. The Bears won them all, including the final against home team École Mother Teresa.

St. Marguerite won handily in two straight sets.

It was the perfect season and playoffs. Fourteen wins and zero losses.

"The thing that was so great about it is everybody participated to do that, every boy on our team. We had some kids playing their first year volleyball on our senior team," said Buyks. "Everybody worked together to go and achieve that goal.

"It wasn't like it was just the best six players on the court all the time. That wasn't how we ran our season. We ran it so that we were a cohesive unit. There were boys who were stepping up into pos-

itions they'd never played before but were being supported by their teammates.

"And they just really bonded together as a fantastic group of athletes and were really good ambassadors for the sport. They were always very gracious, and even though they would be ahead of the other teams they would never be rude about it or anything like that.

"They were always just very, very happy and outgoing, just great ambassadors for the for our school."

The season was not quite over.

The Bears still had regionals in Ponoka to play in the six-team Central West Alberta Junior High Schools Athletic Association (CWAJHAA) tournament on Nov. 16.

The competition was much stiffer. They did not go undefeated. The Bears, however, did play well. They won their final game after losing both round robin games in three sets by close margins.

"It was a disappointing finish for them because they missed out by one point in each one of their games. They didn't actually come up against a team they couldn't beat this year. They had so much heart and hustle this year. It was just fantastic to see how they worked hard together to be find success."

There is always next year for the Bears to avenge the CWAJHAA result.

They are still the two-time defending CENAA champs, perfect in the second.

And Buyks is ready to lead.

"That's the play, yes," she declared.

GAME DAY

### HOME GAMES

**OLDS GRIZZLYS VS CANMORE EAGLES**

Tuesday, December 10  
7:00 PM Olds Sportsplex

Free admission for children 12 and under with purchase of Adult ticket.

**OLDS GRIZZLYS VS CALGARY CANUCKS**

Tuesday, December 17  
7:00 PM Olds Sportsplex

Dec. 10 & 17- College Loonie Toonie nights  
\$2 entry & \$4.00 Keystone, with college ID  
December 10 enter to win a Nintendo Switch  
December 17 Ugly Christmas Sweater night  
and enter to win a PS5



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