

Renfrew County District School Board welcomes new First Nation Trustee

(Pembroke, Ontario) The Renfrew County District School Board is pleased to welcome Jessica Verch as the first ever First Nation Trustee.

“The appointment of a First Nation Trustee to the Renfrew County District School Board is an important expression of the Algonquin presence and in support of the voice of other First Nation, Metis & Inuit families residing in our territory,” said Chief Wendy Jocko. “We celebrate this appointment of Jessica Verch; a member of the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation and honour her commitment to education. This is an historic event, as this will be the first appointment of a First Nation Trustee to this board. Indigenous teachings, knowledge and values are essential foundations of the safe, caring, inclusive and respectful environments of RCDSB schools and communities; all of which will no doubt guide and enrich our futures and the work of our newly appointed Trustee”.

Jessica is a member of the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation. A mother of two and has recently become a new Grandmother. Jessica is an employee of the First Nation for almost 20 years.

Her educational background includes Native Social Service Worker Diploma from Canadore College, and Native Early Childhood Education Diploma from Cambrian College. Jessica brings with her the experience working with our students, and other students as a previous employee of the Manido Mindiwin and as a current employee as an Algonquin Educational Assistant.

Jessica’s traditional teaching and culture provides a strong connection to parents, students, families in the community. Her commitment is to advocate for the students, to have a voice on the RCDSB Board of Trustee. Jessica believes all students benefit from learning Indigenous knowledge and with a positive direction can lead to academic success.

In October 2019, the Board of Trustees passed a resolution inviting the Chief and Council of the Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation to appoint a First Nation representative to the board.

The District currently provides educational services for nearly 100 students covered under the Education Service Agreement with Algonquins of Pikwakanagan First Nation. This agreement was signed in accordance with section 188 of the Education Act. Regulation 462/97 (First Nations Representation on Boards).

According to this regulation, the responsibility of appointing a First Nation trustee lays with the First Nations communities with whom a Board holds an Education Service Agreement. Appointed First Nation Trustees have a responsibility to all families in their community and must build and maintain relationships with the entire community. They work with their Board colleagues and community partners to ensure that all the students within the Board’s jurisdiction have equal opportunities to reach their full potential.

“The Board of Trustees is so fortunate to continue the strong relationship we have with our Pikwakanagan friends,” said Board Chair Susan Humphries. “Having Trustee Verch join us around the board table provides an important perspective and voice that will enrich our discussions and decision-making. It will help us to continue to represent and respond to the needs of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students across our District. On behalf of the entire board, I look forward to working with Trustee Verch in support of our Indigenous student achievement and well-being.”

As First Nation Trustee, Ms. Verch will be an equal voice around the table and will provide oversight on all facets of RCDSB operations through a governance lens.

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