



Feature School Stories

Redesigning the Culture of High School in Mayerthorpe -

By Lisa Bakos, Communication Coordinator, Northern Gateway School Division & Brent Northcott, Principal - Mayerthorpe High School

MHS administration and teaching staff have doubled the number options offered to students and introduced flex block while refreshing and renovating many of their interior spaces this new school year. These are changes which both students and staff are proud of and excited about.

“School is a huge part of students’ lives: they spend as much time here as they do at home and we want it to be a welcoming place that each student feels a part of,” commented Principal Brent Northcott. “School needs to be a place where our students feel comfortable and inspired. Part of that comes from spaces where they can talk, collaborate and hang out.”

The renovations started with the main entrance. Students returned to school this year to find the cumbersome double-doors removed and a more spacious and inviting front area: the newly converted common area comes furnished with comfortable seating. Seating areas have been refreshed throughout the school with new benches, furnishings, flooring and fresh paint. “The environment in which we learn has more impact on our learning and our motivation than we often give credit to,” Principal Northcott shared. “And for our school it has brought a sense of regeneration.”

This is a feeling that has certainly carried over into the academic and options offerings at the school. New courses at the school this year include Photography, French and Art at the 10, 20 and 30 levels. Wildlife and Outdoor Education has been extended from the junior grades to include high school. Science 20 and 30 and Math 31 are once again offered on site for the first time in many years, as students previously pursued this course through the Alberta Distance Learning Centre. Foods, Industrial Arts, Welding, Construction and Woodworking as well as MHS’s award-winning Drama program continue to round out the options available to students.

Principal Northcott and Assistant Principal Beth Jager interviewed all staff individually this past spring to identify their backgrounds, ignite their passions and enlist their expertise in moving forward. As a result they were able to double the options for students to consider with only the added expense of new materials. This is a true win-win for the students and the school.

Flex block is also new to the school this year. Every student has the opportunity to take advantage of one morning or afternoon per month for extra tutorial help. Teachers are assigned to the blocks to support student learning: this may be assisting with anything a student might be falling behind on, reviewing material or reinforce concepts they might be struggling with, or offering enrichment for those wishing to deepen their understanding in a particular area of study. Should a student miss an assignment, quiz, or exam due to absence or require additional time to complete, there is also the option of attending the assessment completion room. Flex block, as the name implies, offers students more options and flexibility in their learning.

Many of the school's changes have come directly from feedback received from Student Voices sessions, where students were asked what they would like to see at MHS. As a result of their input, class time has been shortened from 84 minutes to 66 minutes. A new rotation schedule allows for the shorter class times while still meeting Alberta Education requirements.

Brent Northcott
brent.northcott@ngps.ca

Have a SUCCESS Story to Share About Your School?

One of the most powerful ways of creating knowledge is to share examples of classroom and school practices with others. As you move forward at your school site with the implementation of the Foundational Principles, perhaps you have a story to share or would be willing to tell your school story in digital form. Please contact your consultants supporting Moving Forward with High School Redesign, Debbie Rowley (drowley@carcpd.ab.ca) or Myranda Shepherd (mshepherd@carcpd.ab.ca) for details.

