



Business and Community Engagement Report

Overview

On April 15, 2025, Sturgeon Public Schools hosted a Business and Community Engagement Evening at the Morinville Community Cultural Centre. The event brought together 26 partners representing local businesses, agricultural leaders, social service organizations, post-secondary institutions (such as NAIT), municipal representatives, and public corporations with local ties. Also in attendance were three school board trustees, one consultant, and four members of the Central Office team.

The evening aimed to move beyond the question, “What kind of graduates do you want to see?” Instead, participants were invited to explore how we can collaborate now—during students’ K–12 education—to provide real-world experiences that prepare them for future success in trades, agriculture, aviation, and other emerging fields.



Guests were encouraged to connect with others, enjoy refreshments, and engage in meaningful dialogue about expanding and strengthening partnerships between schools and the broader community.

Evening Highlights

The evening began with a welcome from Board Vice-Chair Stacey Buga and a land acknowledgement, followed by remarks from Deputy Superintendent Jonathan Konrad outlining the goals of the evening and the broader direction of Sturgeon Public Schools.

A keynote presentation by Division Principal Dan Stephen highlighted the Division’s growing focus on career-connected learning. This included:

- Dual credit opportunities and partnerships with post-secondary partners, such as NAIT to provide high school students with experiential, post-secondary experiences (e.g., Saturday Heavy Equipment Technician sessions).
- The Building Futures program in partnership with San Rufo Homes, where 28 Grade 10 students complete core subjects while also building a house alongside skilled tradespeople.
- A developing aviation pathway at Villeneuve Airport, where students engage in flight training and industry exploration in partnership with Elevate Aviation and Centennial Flight School.





Following this, attendees participated in a World Café–style dialogue. Each table responded to three core questions about student readiness and partnership opportunities, recorded their thoughts, then rotated to build on other tables’ ideas. In the final round, each group refined and pitched their best “blue sky” idea—a bold vision for doing education differently in Sturgeon.



Themes from the Evening

- **Employment Readiness and Essential Skills**

Participants emphasized the importance of preparing students with essential professional skills such as resume writing, interview techniques, financial literacy, digital literacy, workplace communication, and understanding employer expectations (e.g., punctuality, no cell phone use, dress code). Many business partners also identified a need for soft skill development—confidence, teamwork, problem solving, and etiquette.

Students need to understand the ‘rules’ of work—how to show up, how to behave, and how to contribute meaningfully.

- **Confidence, Leadership, and Mentorship**

Building confidence and leadership capacity in students emerged as a clear priority. Many groups encouraged ongoing mentorship opportunities between students and professionals in agriculture, trades, tourism, and other sectors. Interactions like guest speaking, shadowing, and collaborative projects with community leaders were seen as key to helping students envision successful futures.

Mentorship should start early—junior high at the latest—to build trust, excitement, and personal connections to work and community.

- **Broadening Career Pathways Beyond Traditional Trades**

While skilled trades remain a core focus, attendees stressed the importance of exposing students to a wider array of industries—especially agriculture, tourism, small business, entrepreneurship, and arts. Sturgeon’s unique economy and rural setting offer rich career possibilities that should be celebrated and embedded in learning.





We need students to see that farming, tourism, and small business ownership are not only valid—they're vital to our region's success.

- **Real-World, Out-of-the-Box Experiential Learning Experiences**

Innovative, hands-on programs such as school-run businesses, farm placements, mock villages, and greenhouses were championed across all groups. These immersive experiences help students build confidence, apply their learning, and understand responsibility in a meaningful context.

Students gain pride and purpose when they see the direct impact of their work—whether feeding animals or growing produce for their own cafeteria.

- **Early Exposure and Community Connection**

A recurring theme was the need to begin career exploration and community connection much earlier—well before high school. Suggestions included elementary mentorships, volunteering at events, and scaffolded exposure to different careers and community roles. Community partners also expressed a desire for better mechanisms to partner with schools and access key planning contacts.

Let's start early. Give kids a glimpse of what's possible—then keep opening doors all the way through high school.

