

# SSBA Award of Distinction Nomination: Bert de Gooijer



**Board Member's Name:** Bert de Gooijer

**Nominating School Board:** Prairie Valley School Division

## Background Information

Prairie Valley School Division is located in the southeast area of the province and encompasses 27,000 square kilometres, spanning a geographic area from Regina Beach and Bethune to the west, Kelliher and Lipton to the north, Milestone, Sedley and Montmartre to the south and Whitewood and Kennedy-Langbank to the east.

With 39 schools located in 32 communities, Prairie Valley is unique in that it is entirely rural, consisting of towns, villages, resort villages and rural municipalities and no urban centre. There are two Hutterite colony schools in the division: Arm River and Lajord. Fifteen First Nations are in close proximity to the division: Piapot, Muscowpetung, Pasqua, Standing Buffalo, Little Black Bear, Okanese, Star Blanket, Peepeekisis, Muskowekwan, Carry-the-Kettle, Sakimay, Cowessess, Kahkewistahaw, Ochapowace and Pheasant Rump.

We serve a growing enrolment of more than 8,500 students. Over 1,300 students (16 per cent) self-declare as First Nation or Métis, more than 500 of whom reside on First Nations land. School sizes range from 30 to almost 700 students and encompass a variety of grade configurations. Our residents see schools as the heart of their communities and we have joint or shared use partnerships with licenced child care centres, pre-schools, municipal authorities, a regional college and local service groups.

Our geographic, demographic, cultural and community diversity make delivering equitable and high quality Pre-K to Grade 12 programming across all schools very challenging. Bert de Gooijer's deep understanding of the diverse communities we serve and his belief in our system philosophy of Every Student by Need are key reasons for this nomination.

## A DIVERSE SCHOOL DIVISION

Prairie Valley is unique in that it is entirely rural, consisting of towns, villages, resort villages and rural municipalities, with no urban centre and 15 First Nations within or in close proximity to the division.

## Rationale for Nomination

Bert resides near Kelliher where he and his wife Joy operate a grain and cattle farm. They have four adult children and five grandchildren. Bert is a graduate of the College of Agriculture at the University of Saskatchewan. He has 24 years of service in education with the Kelliher Local Board (1994-1999), the Cupar Board of Education (1999-2003), the Qu'Appelle Valley Board of Education (2003-2005) and the Prairie Valley Board of Education (2005 to present).

When asked about his reasons for being involved in education governance, Bert said in 2016: "I am committed to ensuring that our Board and province provide equitable, progressive, adequately funded Pre-K to 12 education to communities so our students grow into confident, knowledgeable, engaged citizens." In his 24 years in education governance, he has lived by these words and delivered on his commitments.

The Prairie Valley Board of Education is proud to nominate Bert de Gooijer for the 2018 Award of Distinction.

Bert has extensive experience as a board and committee member, demonstrating **outstanding contributions to education governance at the local level.**

Bert began his involvement at the local level in 1994, serving on the Kelliher Local Board of Trustees. This early local involvement set the stage for who he became as a trustee. Bert has consistently demonstrated his belief that School Community Councils (SCCs) and local communities need a voice at the board table. He works diligently to regularly attend SCC meetings and school events in order to bring Board voice to the SCCs and communities and to bring their voices up to the board by listening to and learning about local needs and priorities. By bringing education sector issues to SCC meetings and promoting discussion and debate, Bert has grown people in their knowledge and interest in education. He has an abiding belief in the voice of the public in public education. With a solid grounding of outstanding service at the local level, he is a true example of the foundation of trusteeship being the voice of the public voice in public education.

### LOCAL LEADERSHIP

*"Bert has been a longstanding board member who genuinely has the best interest of the community in everything he does. It is always evident that Bert appreciates the uniqueness of each community he is involved with. I have always been thankful to have Bert involved on the Board."*

Paddi Mohr  
SCC Chair, Robert Southey School

Local community involvement has always been part of Bert's life. As the saying goes, if you want to get things done, ask a busy person. He has been that person who has stepped up and taken on many local leadership roles, including:

- Kelliher Veterinary Board from 1984 to 2007.
- Kelliher Senior Hockey Club Board Chair for three years.
- Catechism coordinator and a catechism teacher.
- Church board from 1994 to present, serving as treasurer for the past 24 years.
- Minor hockey coach and manager.
- Member of the Kelliher Recreation Centre Board 25 years, including many years as chair.

- Organizer for recreation board local trade fair.
- 4H leader of the Kelliher Beef Club and Chair of the East Central 4H Regional Council.
- Member of the Highway 15 Feeder Association board for 30 years, including many as chair.

Bert has served on three Boards of Education; on two, Qu'Appelle Valley and Prairie Valley, he was a founding member and helped to shape the culture, define the direction and bring together LINC agreements during one voluntary and one government-mandated amalgamation.

Bert's experience as a trustee was evident during the challenging period during and after the provincial amalgamation process. He served as chair of the Qu'Appelle Valley board during the 2005 transition period. He served on the calendar committee for Prairie Valley School Division in 2009 which was instrumental in bringing seven legacy divisions together under a single calendar structure and building trust, cooperation and unity to move past the former "east side-west side" and create a unified Prairie Valley School Division culture.

Bert has served as Vice Chair of the Prairie Valley Board of Education since 2012, providing leadership and stability during some challenging years. As Vice Chair, he works in a true partnership with the chair. Bert works hand in hand with the chair, being a sounding board, presenting alternative points of view and making sure all bases are covered.

Bert served on Prairie Valley's Audit and Risk Management Committee, including four as chair from 2012 to 2016. Bert's strength in understanding the Division's financial statements and what questions to ask as a board member to ensure proper oversight are examples of his contributions to board effectiveness. He was supportive of expanding the role of the committee beyond traditional financial oversight into non-financial audits of school division practices such as adherence to instructional minutes and compliance with division processes around staffing and criminal record checks. In addition to his extensive experience on the Audit and Risk Management Committee, Bert served on Board committees on Capital, Employee Wellness and First Nations and Métis Education. He also served as the Board representative to the Saskatchewan High School Athletics Association and as a Board representative on the LINC bargaining committee for a number of years. [see attachment for details of committee work]

Over the years, Bert has evolved his knowledge and practice to keep pace with changing expectations of school board members. In his early years, board governance was hands-on (including removing gym flooring with his own hands!) and shifted to a policy governance role following the 2005 provincial amalgamation. He now regularly observes that the challenge is "finding the right mix." Bert constantly seeks to learn, analyze the board's role and strives for the right balance between the roles of the board

## DIVISION LEADERSHIP

*As Vice chair, Bert works hand in hand with me, acting as a sounding board, presenting alternative points of view and making sure all bases are covered. He is a true "right hand man".*

- Janet Kotylak, Board Chair

*As a newly elected Board member in 2014, I quickly came to appreciate Bert's passion and commitment to education and his willingness to act as a mentor to me and others as we grew into our roles as Board members.*

- Terry Berglund, Board Member

and administration. At the same time, he is cognizant of the need for a strong board-director relationship in order to devote maximum energy to our main job - student achievement for all.

Bert has helped to guide and teach both new and continuing board members to ensure the board pays attention to the essential parts of the board's work. He truly understands the focus on developing a strategic plan and the board's role in monitoring the plan for results regularly, reviewing the plan annually, renewing the plan at the start of each term and ensuring both public and staff voice is taken into account in the development of the Board's strategic plan.

Bert has also been active beyond the boundaries of Prairie Valley School Division, demonstrating **outstanding contributions and commitment to public education at the provincial level.**

Bert covers the duties of the chair whenever asked, serving as the representative for the Board at the Board Chair Council since its inception. At this provincial table, Bert has brought forward agenda items including the recent item on transportation which drove the formation of the provincial transportation committee to consider how boards can better work together in this area. He actively participates at SSBA events, engaging in table discussions and regularly posing tough questions for provincial officials.

Bert has a particular interest in facility maintenance and modernization. He believes in investment in infrastructure has lobbied provincially for adequate and equitable infrastructure funding. He is an advocate for sound long-term facility planning and supported the preparation of two successive long-term facility master plans in Prairie Valley School Division and has advocated for a similar plan at the provincial level.

Bert consistently demonstrates that he looks out for the greater good of education and lives the SSBA Education Equity Position that states education equity for Saskatchewan boards of education requires a fair distribution of necessary resources to ensure all students have access to comparable school programs, facilities and services to achieve at the highest levels regardless of where they live in the province and their personal

## PROVINCIAL LEADERSHIP

*"Bert has served the children of this province and more specifically the children of Prairie Valley in the best tradition of trusteeship and service. He represents with distinction the benefits of local school board representation in a democratic society and speaks to why Saskatchewan has one of the finest public education systems in the world."*

- Larry Huber, former Executive Director, Public Section

*"Bert was the right person at the right time, a great liaison between Public Section and school boards with excellent communication skills and always professional."*

- Lois Smandych  
Board Chair, Good Spirit School Division

*"I had the privilege of serving with Bert on the executive of the Public Section. Bert led the Public Section through some challenging times with integrity, open, honest, and clear communication. His leadership is indicative of his strong belief and advocacy for public schools and public education in our province."*

- Ronna Pethick  
Board Chair, Living Sky School Division

circumstances. He worked tirelessly to ensure adequate resourcing for our students and took the time to understand the new funding formula after the 2009 funding model change. In doing this work, he consistently kept an eye on the bigger provincial picture to advocate for equitable funding allocations for all school divisions, not just what was good locally. He used his strong ability to understand numbers and funding formulas to advocate with other boards and with the Minister and Ministry of Education, helping to bring changes to the funding formula that all boards could live with.

Bert has served on the Public Section (formerly the Public Caucus) from 2008 to present, including serving as secretary-treasurer from 2008 to 2011 and as chair from 2011 to 2017. The Public Section is guided by the SSBA bylaw to advocate on education issues that are distinctive to public boards, to communicate to the public the value of public education and to articulate issues unique to public boards. While the mandate issue was challenging for the sector, Bert brought a balanced perspective, integrity and credibility to the Section's pursuit of this matter in an effort to resolve a longstanding issue in the sector.

In his leadership role with the Public Section, Bert has fulfilled the Section's mandate while also addressing provincial issues around funding formulas and infrastructure funding for the benefit of all students. He was a strong and consistent advocate for equitable funding for all boards of education through a fair and transparent funding distribution formula and advocated for long-term investments in school facilities.

Bert also took a leadership role in January 2017 by writing and presenting, along with Public Section colleagues, "A Response to the Perrins Report". In it, he urged the Minister of Education to take further amalgamation of public school divisions off the table and continue to enhance the student achievement and efficiency initiatives that had produced positive results, an approach consistent with the Saskatchewan education culture of partnership.

After almost 20 years as a board member, Bert has demonstrated he is **a leader of positive change and commitment to achievement for students:**

- Following the 2005 amalgamation, Bert embraced the challenge, understanding that larger school divisions with more capacity could provide more and better opportunities for students. He took on leadership roles within Prairie Valley School Division with the school calendar, on LINC bargaining and as Audit and Risk Management Committee chair. He mentored other board members in the new board's policy governance role, notably supporting our division's development of multi-year strategic plans with performance measures and targets and a rigorous system of reporting on results, well before the Education Sector Strategic Plan required boards to do so.
- Bert's number one focus is student achievement; he defines student achievement broadly, believing it is the role of the education system to grow citizens and develop well rounded young adults who will leave our school division and contribute to the world. His community, school division and provincial work certainly show that Bert leads by example.
- Bert's involvement in the Qu'Appelle Valley District Association and the Saskatchewan High School Athletics Association are testament to his belief in the importance of athletics in the context of education.

- During the 2016-2017 provincial education governance review, Bert ably articulated the value of publicly elected boards of education publicly and through the Public Section and SSBA.

Over the course of his 24 years in education governance, Bert has consistently demonstrated:

- **Leadership** – locally, on the Prairie Valley Board of Education and provincially through the Public Section of the SSBA.
- **Effective governance** – by adapting to a policy governance role and demonstrating strong oversight over the school division’s strategic plan, financial operations and student achievement results.
- **Commitment** – by consistently putting his work as a board member ahead of himself, giving up time to serve ahead of his own livelihood as a farmer and time away attention away from his wife, his children and grandchildren.
- **Advocacy** – by consistently making the case for fair and adequate operating and capital funding and the importance of public education.
- **Ethics** – by acting as a mentor for other board members and in his approach to every aspect of his work.
- **Participation in professional development** – Bert’s recognition of the importance of trustee professional development is evident in his attendance at opportunities such as CAPSLE, CSBA and SSBA events. Bert is a constant presence at every SSBA Spring and Fall Assembly along with past Members Councils and currently at Board Chair Council meetings. He has regularly been the board spokesperson at AGMs, regularly bringing resolutions to the convention floor. He also regularly attends the National Congress on Rural Education and has participated in Prairie Valley School Division presentations.

In closing, Bert de Gooijer is knowledgeable, dependable, level-headed, selfless, humble, patient and a big picture thinker. His record of service to public education spans nearly a quarter century and truly demonstrates unwavering service to public education.

**Bert de Gooijer's Board Committee/Representative Roles  
with Prairie Valley School Division**

2007-2008	Education Equity Committee PVSD Calendar Committee LINC Negotiating Committee Board Representative to the SSBA Public Boards Caucus Board Representative to the Saskatchewan High School Athletics Association
2008-2009	Education Equity Committee PVSD Calendar Committee LINC Negotiating Committee Board Representative to the SSBA Public Section Board Representative to the Saskatchewan High School Athletics Association
2009-2010	Board Representative to the SSBA Public Section Board Representative to the Saskatchewan High School Athletics Association
2010-2011	LINC Negotiating Committee Capital Committee Employee Wellness Committee First Nations and Métis Education Committee Board Representative to the SSBA Public Section Board Representative to the Saskatchewan High School Athletics Association
2011-2012	LINC Negotiating Committee Capital Committee Employee Wellness Committee Board Representative to the SSBA Public Section Board Representative to the Saskatchewan High School Athletics Association
2012-2013	Audit and Risk Management Committee Employee Relations Committee Board Representative to the SSBA Public Section
2013-2014	Audit and Risk Management Committee Employee Relations Committee Board Representative to the SSBA Public Section
2014-2015	Audit and Risk Management Committee Board Representative to the SSBA Public Section
2015-2016	Audit and Risk Management Committee LINC Negotiating Committee Board Representative to the SSBA Public Section
2016-2017	Audit and Risk Management Committee Board Representative to the SSBA Public Section
2017-2018	LINC Negotiating Committee Board Representative to the SSBA Public Section