

# Road safety concerns: Parents take action - LaGlance

Ivan Crabbe's office has gotten a lot quieter in the past year and a half. It's not that the children are better behaved, but that the traffic on the secondary highway beside the school is literally slowing down.

"I've noticed a big change," says Crabbe, the principal of LaGlance School. "I used to be able to hear trucks just whizzing by. It was a real problem here."

About a year ago, the school division became a leader in improving safety for students who attend schools on secondary highways when it developed a study to see if flashing radar signs cause drivers to reduce speeds.

With funding from an Alberta Traffic Safety grant and the County of Grande Prairie, the school division installed radar cameras at each end of the school zone. The electronic signs flash each vehicle's speed as it enters the school zone on Highway 59.

The cameras and the study began with worried parents. In an independent traffic count, parents observed that in any given hour 60 to 70 per cent of drivers passing the school ignored posted school zone speeds. Although there has never been an accident involving a child crossing the street to the school on Highway 59, there have been close calls, and parents were worried that it was only a matter of time before tragedy struck.

They developed ingenious solutions; such as, a suggestion for crosswalk lights that flashed yellow continually, then turned red when someone was crossing, but the province said this wasn't allowed on a highway. They did traffic counts. They bought a speed radar gun, clocked the speeds of vehicles, recorded license plate numbers and contacted companies with speeding vehicles. They phoned radio stations imploring drivers to slow down. A parent stood at the crosswalk with a sign to help students cross. They set a dummy by the side of the road to alert motorists to the school zone, but the dummy ended up hit by a vehicle and dragged about a mile down the highway. They asked about installing school zone radar signs, but were again turned down.

Rules for highways – that fall under provincial jurisdiction – are different than those for town or city roadways. While all road signs on provincial highways need to be approved by Alberta Transportation, currently, there are no established standards or guidelines for the use and placement of radar signs within school zones on secondary highways.

The solution was a proposal to the Alberta Traffic Safety Fund to do a study. With financial assistance from the grant and from the County, the school division was able to spend \$17,000 installing the cameras that are sometimes turned on and sometimes turned off. The study will look at the effect the flashing speed signs have on driving behaviour.

Crabbe hopes that at the end of the 18-month study, LaGlance School will be able to keep its speed signs and keep trucks from roaring past the Kindergarten to Grade 8 school. He estimates 30 per cent of drivers reduce their speeds when they see their speed flashed, but the study, with actual data, won't be complete until the end of the school year.

The study also has implications provincially. If the LaGlance study proves that radar signs have a positive effect on reducing speed, Albertans may see more of them cropping up on secondary highways where schools are located.