



MASS Journal

Fall 2022

The official magazine of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents



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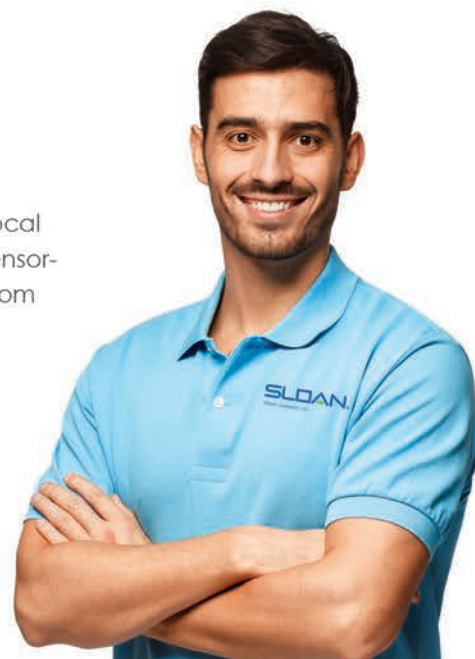
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On the cover: As a result of a student-lead collaborative and reflective project that spanned many months, this beautiful art piece was one of six designs selected to be built at a global architecture competition in Winnipeg, MB. This photo was provided by Frontier School Division. Learn more about Blossom and equitable spaces and places on page 27.



As I write these greetings for *The MASS Journal*, I am reflecting on the wonder we are gifted by living in a country with changing seasons. Some people feel that fall signals the end of something as flowers die and trees drop their leaves. I prefer to look at fall as a time of new beginnings, a chance to refresh and revamp some of the things we tried before, and as new cycle in the world of education. As the new school year begins, a focus on equity continues to be strong across the system.

When reading this edition of the journal, you will see several equity stories focused on Indigenous Education. You will learn about the progress made in working with Elders and Knowledge Keepers to bring Indigenous cultures, histories, and values into Manitoba schools. This article may provide you with ideas of where to begin the work in your schools and provides evidence that each small step is a step towards Reconciliation.

“Umbay Nagamon (Come Sing): An Invitation to Action,” shares the journey of being involved in a multimedia detailed examination of Indigenous culture and the Canadian government residential school policy and pausing to reflect on Residential Schools after. This project invited participants to review, reflect, and make commitments to implement the calls to action in their local community.

Technology is a tool that can be utilized to elevate equity for our students. Throughout COVID-19, there were lessons learned regarding technology that pushed the need for change and using technology to elevate student voice is an area that emerged. Three specific divisional initiatives will be shared with you that show the power of what can be done virtually and how students are empowered to lead in those scenarios.

Over time, the faces of leadership in MASS have looked different and the qualities to be an effective educational leader in the school and at the divisional level have shifted and changed. A historical look at MASS leadership statistics and an exploration of the changing qualities of leaders is presented. It is always interesting to look back and reflect on where we have come from and as society continues to change, think about what may be necessary to be a quality leader for equity into the future.

Regardless of where you find yourself in the world of education, the topic of equity permeates the work. The topic of the discussion may vary by location, but leaders at all levels in Manitoba are learning, reflecting, shifting, and implementing practices to improve equity. It is neither simplistic nor straightforward, but that does not deter the efforts being made. For all those whose experience in school and life is better because of your efforts I say thank you, your work is appreciated.

Krista Curry
President



Au moment où j'écris ces lignes pour le *MASS Journal*, je pense à combien il est merveilleux de pouvoir vivre dans un pays où les saisons se succèdent. Certains pensent que l'automne marque une fin puisque les fleurs se fanent et les arbres perdent leurs feuilles. Je préfère voir dans l'automne une saison de nouveaux débuts, une chance de rafraîchir et de remanier certains des efforts que nous avons déjà déployés, ainsi qu'un nouveau cycle dans le milieu de l'éducation. En ce début de nouvelle année scolaire, l'accent continue d'être mis sur l'équité à l'échelle du système.

À la lecture de ce numéro, vous verrez plusieurs histoires d'équité axées sur l'éducation autochtone. Vous découvrirez notamment les progrès réalisés grâce à la collaboration avec les aînés et les gardiens du savoir en vue de présenter les cultures, les histoires et les valeurs autochtones dans les écoles du Manitoba. Vous pourriez en retirer des idées sur la façon d'amorcer le travail dans vos écoles et constater que chaque petit pas est un pas vers la réconciliation.

L'article intitulé « Umbay Nagamon (Come Sing): An Invitation to Action » relate le cheminement d'un projet de participation à un examen multimédia approfondi de la culture autochtone et de la politique du gouvernement canadien en matière de pensionnats, ainsi que de la pause nécessaire pour réfléchir à la période suivant les pensionnats. Ce projet a invité les participants à examiner, à réfléchir et à s'engager à mettre en œuvre les appels à l'action au sein de leur communauté locale.

La technologie est un outil qui peut servir à améliorer l'équité pour nos élèves. Tout au long de la pandémie de COVID-19, nous avons tiré des leçons en technologie qui ont fait ressortir le besoin de changement, et le recours à la technologie pour renforcer la voix des élèves compte parmi les domaines qui ont vu le jour. Trois initiatives émanant de divisions vous sont présentées; elles vous révèlent l'ampleur de ce qui peut être fait en virtuel et la capacité des élèves à prendre les rênes dans ces situations.

Au fil du temps, les visages du leadership au sein de l'Association ont changé et les qualités requises pour être un bon leader de l'éducation dans une école et dans une division se sont transformées et ont pris de nouveaux aspects. La revue jette un regard historique sur les statistiques concernant le leadership de l'Association et se penche sur l'évolution des qualités des leaders. Il est toujours intéressant de prendre du recul et de réfléchir à notre point de départ et, à mesure que la société continue de changer, de penser à ce qui pourrait être nécessaire pour être un excellent leader pour l'équité dans l'avenir.

Peu importe la place que vous occupez dans le monde de l'éducation, l'équité y est un thème omniprésent. Le sujet du débat variera peut-être selon l'endroit, mais à tous les échelons, les leaders du Manitoba apprennent, réfléchissent, changent et mettent en œuvre des pratiques pour améliorer l'équité. Le processus n'est ni simple ni direct, mais il n'a pas d'effet dissuasif sur les efforts déployés. De la part de ceux et celles dont l'expérience à l'école et dans la vie se trouve améliorée grâce à vos efforts, je vous remercie; nous sommes reconnaissants de votre travail.

Krista Curry
Présidente

The work is not done
– though progress is
being made, there is still
much that demands our
leadership, commitment,
and attention.



Le travail n'est pas terminé;
des progrès sont réalisés,
mais il y a encore beaucoup
de choses qui exigent notre
leadership, notre engagement
et notre attention.

The beginning of the 2022/2023 school year has been filled with excitement and energy as schools have been returning to many more opportunities for in person participation and leadership. The fall 2022 edition of *The MASS Journal* focuses on some ways in which our public school system continues to move along a continuum of an *Equity Perspective to School Leadership*.

When the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) Executive met in August 2022, an extensive conversation about organizational priorities and 'next steps' was undertaken. As outlined in this Journal edition, MASS has some overarching priorities which guide the work of the Executive and committees including:

- Being leaders of learning;
- Improving achievement and well-being of all our students requires a shared commitment to raising both equity and quality; and
- Actively working towards equity and quality throughout the public education system with a special focus on three action areas: Early learning, Indigenous Education, and mental health and well-being.

Those of you who have reviewed our priorities in previous years will recognize that similar priorities have been the focus for several years. The work is not done – though progress is being made, there is still much that demands our leadership, commitment, and attention. The conversation reminded us that our work in achieving greater equity, diversity, and inclusion in our schools and public education system is a continuum, a journey that we are committed to.

The professional learning undertaken by MASS members focuses on granular and systemic work which moves us towards better outcomes for students. We appreciate working together with our educational partners to explore additional ways to create and facilitate an integrated support network for those who attend our schools. Thank you for your ongoing commitment to supporting our students and their families as we forge new and deeper pathways for success.

Barb Isaak
Executive Director

L'année scolaire 2022/2023 a débuté avec enthousiasme et énergie alors que les écoles ont pu saisir beaucoup plus de possibilités de participation et de leadership en personne. Le numéro de l'automne 2022 du *MASS Journal* présente certaines des manières dont notre système scolaire public continue d'évoluer le long du continuum du thème *Une perspective d'équité dans le leadership en milieu scolaire*.

Lorsque la direction de la Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) s'est réunie en août 2022, il a beaucoup été question des priorités organisationnelles et des « prochaines étapes ». Comme le révèle le présent numéro, l'Association s'est fixé des priorités globales qui orientent le travail de la direction et des comités, à savoir :

- Être des chefs de file de l'apprentissage;
- Améliorer le rendement et le mieux-être de tous nos élèves exige un engagement commun à l'égard de l'amélioration de l'équité et de la qualité; et
- Travailler activement en vue de l'équité et de la qualité à l'échelle du système d'éducation publique en mettant l'accent sur trois domaines d'action : l'apprentissage précoce, l'éducation autochtone ainsi que la santé mentale et le mieux-être.

Ceux et celles d'entre vous qui ont passé en revue nos priorités des années précédentes auront constaté que des priorités semblables sont demeurées au cœur des préoccupations pendant plusieurs années. Le travail n'est pas terminé; des progrès sont réalisés, mais il y a encore beaucoup de choses qui exigent notre leadership, notre engagement et notre attention. La conversation nous a rappelé que le travail que nous accomplissons pour arriver à une plus grande équité, diversité et inclusion dans nos écoles et dans notre système d'éducation publique suit un continuum, un parcours dans lequel nous sommes engagés.

L'apprentissage professionnel entrepris par les membres de la MASS se concentre sur le travail granulaire et systémique qui nous permet d'obtenir de meilleurs résultats pour les élèves. Nous nous réjouissons de travailler de concert avec nos partenaires du milieu de l'éducation pour trouver d'autres moyens de créer et de favoriser un réseau de soutien intégré pour ceux et celles qui fréquentent nos écoles. Nous vous remercions de votre engagement soutenu à appuyer nos élèves et leurs familles alors que nous traçons des voies nouvelles et approfondies en vue de la réussite.

Barb Isaak
Directrice générale

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STAFF:



Barb Isaak
Executive Director



Karen Wohlgemuth
Executive Assistant

Mission:

MASS provides leadership for public education by advocating in the best interests of learners and supports its members through professional services.

MASS believes that our mandate is to be *leaders of learning*, in our local school systems and in the broader domains of provincial, national, and global public education. MASS believes a quality education empowers the whole child to constructively participate in global society.

We model learning that is:

- Active and visible;
- Based on robust research;
- Tested through purposeful application in the field; and
- Evaluated using a wide range of meaningful data.

We take responsibility for our own continuous learning and the learning of everyone we lead:


- Creating and fostering safe, supportive, inclusive and challenging environments;
- Ensuring essential learning for each and every child; and
- Preparing others to go beyond our own learning.

We are guided by our learning in shaping policy and practice to achieve what is best for the learners in our care.

MASS believes that *improved achievement and well-being for all our students requires a shared commitment to raising both equity and quality.*

- A conscious and persistent commitment to equity, system-wide and across sectors, leads to poverty reduction, greater inclusion, and an appreciation for the riches that diversity brings.
- A purposeful and sustained commitment to quality education for every student increases the capacity for teaching, learning, and leading throughout the system.
- A strong grounding in literacy and numeracy and a rich learning experience involving inquiry, curiosity, creativity, and artistic expression enables all students to achieve success and to flourish in life, academics and career.
- A respect for and openness to authentic youth voices and support for meaningful student action are critical for building capacity and self-efficacy in our students.

MASS actively works towards *equity and quality throughout the public education system, with a special focus on three action areas:*

- 
1. Early Learning
 2. Indigenous Education
 3. Mental Health and Well-Being



The **Early Learning Committee** will take leadership to ensure that MASS:

- Advocates for full implementation of the Calls to Action in the MASS position paper on Early Childhood Education.

The **Indigenous Education Committee** will take leadership to ensure that MASS:

- Builds capacity in MASS and school divisions to address the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action.
- Promotes ever increasing academic achievement, graduation, school completion and positive life outcomes for Indigenous students, informed by collective inquiry into evidence.
- Actively supports the teaching of Indigenous perspectives, corrective history and culture and the use of Indigenous languages.

The **Mental Health and Well-Being Committee** will take leadership to ensure that MASS:

- Advocates for an implementation of a comprehensive provincial Children and Youth Mental Health Strategy.
- Collaborates with The Education for Sustainable Well-Being Research Group at the University of Manitoba and Manitoba Education and Training to develop tools and indicators for assessing the well-being and well-becoming of students in schools.
- Pursues inter-sectoral liaisons with public and mental health organizations and agencies.
- Contributes to a national voice on mental health through CASSA and through input into the Canadian Mental Health Strategy.
- Promotes Mental Health Literacy in mental health for all educators and pre-service educators.
- Sharing of Mental Health & Well-being paper with community and provincial partners. ■

Working with Elders and Knowledge Keepers:

Hanover School Division Learns

By Leanne Peters and Brett Schmall, Hanover School Division

It was a privilege for Hanover School Division to partner with Manitoba Education and the Indigenous Education Directorate in the Elders and Knowledge Keepers Pilot Project in spring 2022. Three schools were chosen to participate based on their number of self-declared Indigenous children, socio-economic status of the catchment area, and perceived school readiness to engage in the work. According to Manitoba Education, “the Elders and Knowledge Keepers in Schools Initiative supports students, educators, and families to learn First Nations, Métis and Inuit histories, cultures, traditional values, contemporary lifestyles, and traditional knowledge systems across all learning environments.”¹

In their research about the value of embedding Indigenous perspectives across curricula, Restoule and Chaw-win-is (2017) say, “Meeting the educational needs of Indigenous peoples and increasing all Canadians’ knowledge of Indigenous values and perspectives is vitally important.”² They provide three reasons for this:

1. To provide Canadians a more comprehensive understanding of all school subjects;

2. To address the social problems of today that disproportionately affect Indigenous people (homelessness, unemployment, and mental health); and

3. To improve our relationship with the land in support of ecological sustainability.²

Southwood School (K-4), Stonybrook Middle School (5-8), and Niverville High School (9-12) engaged with Elders in their schools. Each school had a unique approach which was appropriate for their context and each school emerged with new lessons learned from the experience.

Southwood School focused on ideas of caring for others as they engaged in their work with Elder Chickadee Richard. Learning what it means when we care for others was an essential take away for the Southwood School community.

Partnering with a small group of Elders, staff and students revisited their prior understanding of how to

be a good host/neighbour, while also expanding their understanding of gift giving. “When an Elder shares their story, they are giving a gift,” one student noted. This resulted in students offering the visiting Elders a variety of gifts in return. Grade 5 students welcomed Elder Martha Peet to their classroom as they studied the North. Their teacher had done a beautiful job of teaching the students to receive this knowledge and built a positive relationship. The experience was also positive for the Indigenous students in the school who had the opportunity to see themselves in the visiting elders.

At Stonybrook Middle School (SMS), students were invited to explore culture through language. Opportunities with both Cree and Anishinaabemowin were made available, piquing students’ interest, as they made meaningful connections to the learning. Elder Jason Parenteau connected with the Grade 7 classes as he shared his knowledge, culture, and



language with the students and teachers. The experience overall invited the SMS community to further extend their understanding of relationship building, while inviting them to dream about further learning possibilities (infusing Indigenous perspectives in science). The students could be overheard in the hallways sharing their new knowledge with their friends as they walked around.

Grade 5 students participated in the Gathering of Friends at Ginew School. This opportunity saw them immersed in morning workshops, exploring drum making, dancer regalia, and stick games, in addition to a number of other workshops specific to Anishinaabe culture. In the afternoon they had the chance to see a variety of dancers, while listening to the big drum.

The students and staff at Niverville High School learned about perspective and community. Staff and students were invited to listen as a host of Elders and Knowledge Keepers from Roseau River Anishinaabe First Nation visited to share stories and

cultural teachings. Staff met with a small group of Knowledge Keepers several times to start, to build relationship and learn from, before the Grade 9 and 10 student body took part in a day of learning. Students heard about the Anishinaabe Life Cycle from Josephine Hartin and Lucy Ducharme, spoke some Anishinaabemowin with Wanda Levasseur, and learned about Treaty from Terry Nelson, among others. The partnership culminated with a mini powwow that saw an end of day round dance celebration. A notable takeaway from one teacher was, "... before anything else can happen, we need to be in relationship. The time needed to establish this may feel counterintuitive from a systems world, productivity-oriented perspective, but it is vital, and truly at the heart of everything."

The partnerships, and subsequent pilot were an invitation for our schools to make meaningful connections with neighbouring Indigenous communities. This is something that we will

continue to grow, and nurture as we extend our understanding of what it means to be Treaty people. ■

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Brett Schmall, M.Ed., is an Indigenous Learning and Assessment coach in Hanover School Division. He can be reached at bschmall@hsd.ca or you can follow him on Twitter @BrettSchmall.

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1. Manitoba Education (2022). *Indigenous Education Directorate*. <https://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/iid/elders.html>
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Embracing Change:

By Michelle Jean-Paul,
Louis Riel School Division

Leveraging Technology to Elevate Student Voices

The pandemic has presented educators with some enormous challenges. Many of these challenges forced us to “pivot” as a school system, changing practices that have been deeply entrenched seemingly overnight. While the reason for these necessary adaptations is one we could all do without, we would be remiss if we did not take advantage of some of the lessons learned along the way. COVID-19 disrupted our sense of community with virtual learning, but it also provided us with a new way of connecting with one another we had not explored quite as closely in the past.

Technology was crucial in our response to home learning and social distancing. Video conferencing became a way of life. In the 2021/2022 school year, the Louis Riel School Division (LRSD) renewed its commitment to its Multi-Year Strategic Plan. Despite the obstacles introduced by COVID-19, technology was leveraged to support our “Strategic Priority 1: Creating a Culture of Equity and Inclusion.”

Students like Mohamad, pictured here alongside Debbie Hoffman, a teacher librarian, took a big risk getting in front of an audience. Photo courtesy of Michelle Jean-Paul.



Inspired by the leadership students were demonstrating at a school level, LRSD introduced three virtual initiatives as part of our work around Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI)

and Anti-Racism in the latter half of the 2021/2022 school year. The intent behind these programs was to encourage our community to engage more deeply in this work by centering

student voices on issues of belonging. Using Microsoft Teams meant schools did not have to contend with bus requests, field trip permission slips, or other factors that complicate in-person gatherings. Where else would we have been able to accommodate thousands of students at a time?

The first initiative was a weekly virtual story time launched in February 2022. Students, teacher librarians, members of the Senior Leadership Team, and other divisional staff introduced classrooms across the division to stories promoting themes of diversity, equity, and inclusion. A student who shared some graphic novels he has authored and illustrated kicked off the initiative. Richard captivated the crowd with his dynamic presentation and inspired students to get involved in future story time sessions. Kathy Atkin, coordinator of library services, did a fantastic job of providing overall support to this initiative that we look forward to resuming in the 2022/2023 school year.

Two virtual DEI initiatives were facilitated entirely by students from across grade levels and language programs. Those involved decided what they felt the broader LRSD community needed to know to develop our collective proficiency and fluency. Student organizers developed content based on the needs identified within their school communities. Teachers were then able to address the various topics dependent on age. The underlying message was that topics of diversity, equity, and inclusion are appropriate for all, and students' prior knowledge is a great place to begin!

I think it is important for students to share their ideas with fellow students because they can better understand one another and have a better chance of empathizing with each other. Students are better at relating with one another than adults since they are living in similar circumstances and can better interpret and comprehend each other's sentiments. But as much as it is important to share ideas with fellow students, sharing ideas with adults can help

students make the changes they want. – Raessa, student facilitator.

On March 21, 2022, a virtual Teams assembly recognized the United Nations' International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. Students shared the significance of the date, defined racism and microaggressions, explored the importance of embracing one's cultural identity, introduced the impacts of colonialism, and offered practical strategies to address racism.

I think a lot of students learned something from the anti-racist presentation. I also think that the teachers learned some new things. I got some very positive feedback after the presentation. A lot of people liked it. I think that you should continue to do this presentation every year! – Fatou, student facilitator.

Fatou's reflections align with the Multi-Year Strategic Plan's¹ Strategic Goals 1.1 and 1.2 in that students and staff had the opportunity to deepen their understanding of issues of racism and learn concrete ways of addressing it within our schools. Our commitment to creating a culture of belonging extends far beyond the curriculum taught in classrooms.

We kicked off Pride/Fierté week with our third virtual student initiative. Again, Microsoft Teams gathered students and staff across LRSD to learn about the history of Pride in Winnipeg, the use of pronouns, the meaning behind the different Pride flags, and the concepts of homophobia and transphobia. Students also shared personal reflections on Pride.

As for last year's divisional virtual events, I participated in the PRIDE assembly because I think it's important for everyone, no matter their age, gender, or race, to learn how to accept everyone for who they are. As a queer person, and someone of colour, I think these events are very important to keep around, for it gives people of their respective "groups" a safe place to share and teach others about themselves and how to be a good ally. It may also show people who feel weird or like being different is bad that there are, and will always be, people who support them, as

well as people who are willing to learn and do more to help and move forward from a harmful past. – Neesa, student facilitator.

Our students took a big risk getting in front of an audience to share their understanding, learning, and themselves in this virtual space. Listening to the feedback from students and creating authentic spaces for them to share their voices and what is important to them through these virtual environments is essential in our response to diversity, equity, and inclusion as a school division. Neesa's reflections further solidify the importance of open dialogue around the work we as a system need to engage in to create more equitable and inclusive spaces.

Technology has taught new ways of bridging barriers and building belonging. How do we ensure these initiatives aren't isolated activities, but that student voices are woven into the fabric of our work? This fall, the Louis Riel School Division will launch a Student Advisory Group to formalize the feedback process so that students can more concretely play a role in divisional planning and connect directly with members of the Senior Leadership Team. Utilizing this group is another strategy to ensure we are elevating student voices in our work to address diversity, equity, and inclusion issues. ■

Michelle Jean-Paul is Divisional Principal of DEI and Anti-Racism Services for Louis Riel School Division (LRSD). She supports LRSD in creating a culture of equity and inclusion. Fatou, Raessa, and Neesa, are three LRSD students who were actively involved in the virtual DEI initiatives and contributed their voices to this article.

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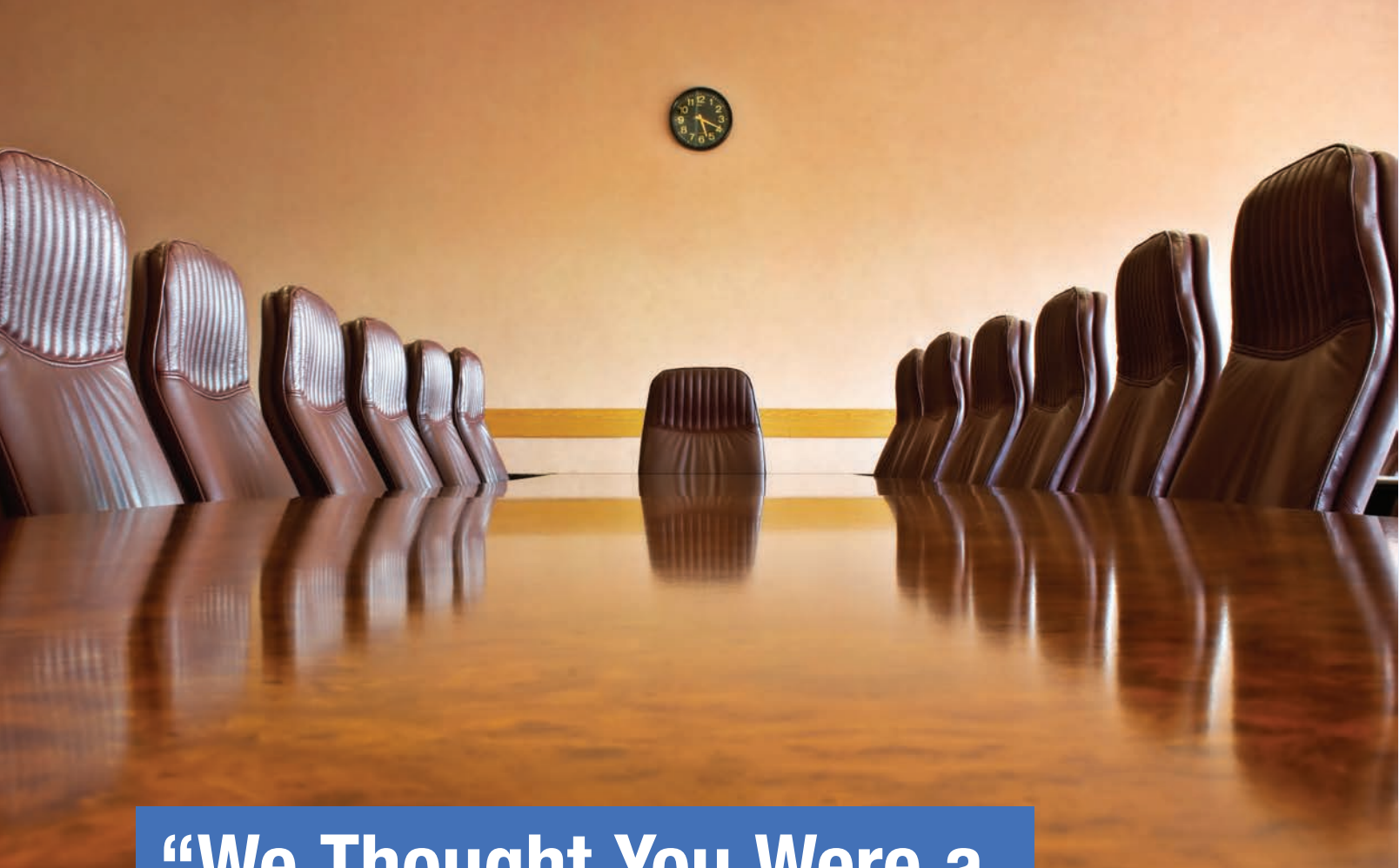
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“We Thought You Were a Career Woman”

By Roza Gray,
Evergreen School Division

With a measure of accusation and disappointment, “We thought you were a career woman” was among the first responses I received when I informed the Board that I was pregnant and would require a maternity leave. In the minds of at least some of the Trustees, there were ambitious, career minded individuals, and there were mothers.

In the Board’s defense, this was 22 years ago and there was not yet another example of a Superintendent in Canada who required maternity leave. Further, we were anticipating amalgamation, so the timing was a challenge. In fact, the Minister’s letter formally declaring new Division boundaries arrived the day I went into labour. I recall speaking to the Board Chairman about next steps while I was between contractions

and packing for the hospital. As it turned out, the amalgamation presented opportunities for improvement and renewal and my Board, gratefully, created a part time role for me, because the Superintendent position during the transition was fundamentally incompatible with a meaningful family life.

We’ve come a way since then. However, in 1998 when I was first hired, I was often the only woman at the table. If not for the *leadership in education* assessment used by the consultants who recommended my hire, my selection was highly improbable. According to the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) membership list of the time, just three of the 52 division leaders in Manitoba were women. Among Assistant Superintendents, women were better represented at 29 per cent of the group, but still far from equitable (see note on page 19).

Perhaps it is no wonder that there were difficulties to overcome. At first, I was often mistaken for the hotel staff at meetings and conferences. In my second year, I learned that during my first year’s tenure I had been the subject of a bet to see how long I would last in the position. The measure was in months, with the outside bet at one year. Even within my own Division, a subject of discussion at the Board table included musings about whether women ‘at the top’ could get along and how their instincts to ‘mother’ would interfere with the expectations of the role.

Yet, despite what these recollections reveal about attitudes and expectations at the time, I found my colleagues to be generally very helpful and kind. I would not have managed the tremendous learning curve if not for the time, support, and encouragement I received from my male and female colleagues.

From my very first day in the role, I have been blessed by a supportive professional community at the local, regional, and provincial levels.

By the numbers

By 2002/2003, amalgamation had changed the Manitoba landscape, creating the Divisions we have today. The MASS pocket directory data reveals that in that year, male Superintendents outnumbered females 32 to 5. Among Assistant Superintendents, men outnumbered women by a margin of 63 per cent to 37 per cent. All but one of the MASS Executive positions was held by men, and all but one region was chaired by a man.

Twenty years later, the gender make-up of our organization has shifted to be more equitable and representative (see graph on this page). Our total membership is more evenly divided among men and women. In the Superintendent role, the margin by which men outnumber women in the role is shrinking (57 per cent male and 43 per cent female). This ratio is similar among Assistant Superintendents

(men make up 54 per cent of our group and women 46 per cent). Our MASS Executive composition is also more evenly balanced, with six women and eight men. Regional chairpersons (seven men; two women) is balanced by a female as professional learning chair, and the purposeful recommendation for two female directors-at-large.

Effective this fall, four of six of the Winnipeg school divisions are led by women. This is especially noteworthy given the national and international pattern in business that the largest organizations tend to be the most difficult for women to break into the most senior role.

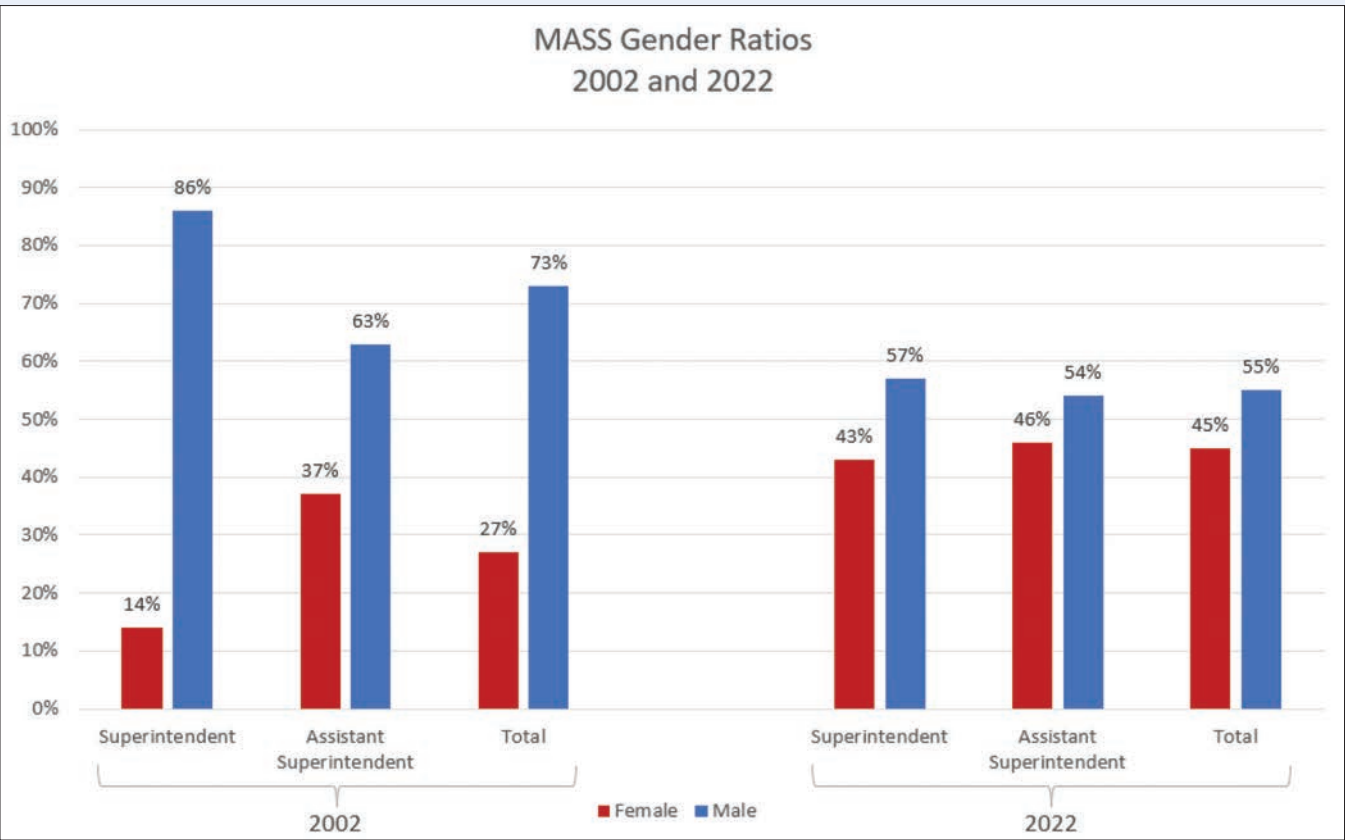
The narrowing of the gender gap in the last twenty years is an accomplishment worth celebrating. However, given that the profession is predominately female, leadership is not yet representative of those who serve our profession. According to the most recent census data (2016), 72 per cent of Manitoba teachers identify as female. Encouraging though, is that greater than half (54 per cent) of school principals are women. This

strong foundation suggests a continuing trend to narrow the gender disparity in division leadership.

The impact of increased numbers of women in senior leadership

It is my observation that the interpretation of what it means to be a Superintendent has changed as the gender balance has shifted. Twenty some years ago, when MASS was largely an organization of men, how one led was defined and crafted men, often influenced by management in business.

The men with whom I worked, and the Boards who were influenced by them, largely believed a measure of success was the degree to which one was constantly busy, had difficult problems to solve, and was prepared to sacrifice family for the job. One had to work at an unrelenting pace, sparing little time for anything but work. Identities were indistinguishable from positions, meetings had overtones of competition, and there was little time for reflection or personal sharing. Discussions tended to emphasize the ways in which problems were a sort of game one might win with



the right strategy, a show of power, or personal influence.

To penetrate the group and to belong, one needed to adopt a similar orientation to the role of Superintendent. It is my observation that women successful in these roles were required to compete by 'doing the job' as men did, or at the very least, by employing a no nonsense and forthright approach. Certainly, there were men who were not disposed to a masculine approach which emphasized power, competitiveness, and a singular

focus on the job. Among them I found encouragement to both lead in the way I was comfortable, and to admit when I was not.

For nearly two decades, I felt I could not, for example, divulge at work the complicated planning that was required for me to also be a mother. To do so would have undermined my credibility and suitability for the role. At the same time, I felt I could not reveal to friends and family the time I dedicated to work, lest I be judged an inadequate mother. With gratitude

to changing attitudes, influenced, no doubt, by human rights legislation protecting family status and a broader understanding of well-being, it now more acceptable to have a life outside of one's job, even as Superintendent! Nevertheless, especially for mothers in the workforce who shoulder more of the responsibilities for the home, guilt management can be just as important as time management, in both domains.

Over time our organization has welcomed more women, become more inclusive, and evolved with research regarding effective leadership. A growing body of research supports that women's natural tendencies contribute to their success as leaders. These skills and ways of knowing and leading, "though gender related, are not gender specific, thus suggesting that whilst these ways of knowing might be held in common by women, they are also accessible to men."¹

The tendencies of women to be more collaborative and focused on creating and maintaining relationships are being leveraged as key to "stress-ing empowerment and human development."² Neuro-scientific research informs us that nature and nurture attune effective communication and listening skills as another 'female advantage.' Further, 'soft' skills related to emotional intelligence, empathy and compassion are increasingly recognized as critical in developing responsive, inclusive workplaces capable of adapting to change.

Over time, and with greater numbers of women in MASS, the culture of the organization has shifted to become more collaborative, reflective of women's strengths and favours a balance of work and home. However, it remains true that women in our organization still feel they need to insert themselves into meetings and conversations for their important contributions to be heard.

"I agree with ----"

Although the culture of MASS has changed dramatically towards more equitable gender representation and inclusion, I believe many in MASS would agree that there is room for



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continued progress, as vestiges of the 'ol' boys club' continue to resurface from time to time. These traces are evident whenever men gather in a way that excludes their female colleagues and whenever men disproportionately amplify each other's voices; inadvertently diminishing the contributions of women in the room/chat room.

I believe this exclusion and minimization of women is unintentional, a result of unexamined practices and patterns. At our best, we are leaders who are attuned to each others' needs, keen to be respectful and inclusive, and alert for opportunities to improve our practices. I have seen first-hand the efforts of my colleagues to intentionally disrupt patterns which no longer serve us. We might further enhance greater inclusion with purposeful reflection, dialogue, and adjustment to those practices which are not in keeping with our values.

Moving forward

Although some echoes remain, as an organization, MASS no longer looks like, sounds like, or feels like the one I entered so many years ago. MASS has changed dramatically in the last twenty or so years. With a greater proportion of women, the organization reflects a broader orientation and skillset identified in research as helpful to all leaders.

As Superintendents, we are aware that many voices need to be heard and amplified if we are to create diverse, inclusive, and strong systems. We are not 'there yet' with respect to equally including and valuing women's voices. However, even though our composition does not yet reflect the teaching profession, it is encouraging and hopeful that the gender gap in leadership roles is narrowing.

Each of us has a part to play to encourage and support members in our organization so that "we thought you were a career woman" includes and

honours our strengths, our attention to family, and our ways of leadership. ■

Roza Gray is the Superintendent for the Evergreen School Division and a member of the MASS Student Learning and Mental Health and Well-Being committee.

Note: Although the terms man/woman and male/female appear throughout this article, the author recognizes that gender is not binary.



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Umbay Nagamon (Come Sing): *An Invitation to Action*



The Come Sing Reconciliation Circle during the Umbay Nagamon. Photos courtesy of Suzanne Cottyn.

**By Carole Shankaruk and
Suzanne Cottyn, Mountain
View School Division.**

Over the past decade, Mountain View School Division (MVSD) has been on a journey of learning to support our educators in growing into their role of embedding Indigenous Education within our school communities. In 2018, under the direction of our Indigenous Education Steering Committee, MVSD developed an Indigenous Education Framework, in partnership with local Indigenous communities and stakeholders.

The Framework supports the teaching of Indigenous perspectives and outcomes through the provincial curricula in appropriate and culturally relevant ways for all students. MVSD



The Umbay Nagamon team.

recognizes that everyone can benefit from Indigenous Education as it can enrich the experiences of all learners represented within the Medicine Wheel, while also supporting academic success for Indigenous learners. The Medicine Wheel philosophy of holism applies here also in terms of the principle, “it takes a village to raise a child.”

One of the recommendations within our framework is to provide professional development opportunities that enable our staff to increase their knowledge and awareness of Indigenous cultures, histories, traditions, and perspectives, and enhance their capacity to support all learners more effectively.

When Canadians learn the true history of Canada and Indigenous Peoples, the reaction always seems to be the same: “What can I do? Where do I fit in this?” Umbay Nagamon (Come Sing) was born under those intentions: “What role does each of us play moving forward with Truth and Reconciliation? Where am I within reconciliation? What part do I have to support my children, my family, my community?”

Umbay Nagamon is a multi-media workshop that supports this partnership within our communities. Our goal is to create a safe, welcoming space where we can share and discuss our history as Canadians and engage in conversations of the many past and current policies that affect us all today. Within our workshop, we assist the participants in examining their role within reconciliation. Through a five-year Teacher Idea Fund grant, MVSD will be providing this workshop across the Division’s seven communities and 16 schools.

“Let us find a way to belong to this time and place together. Our future, and the well-being of all our children, rests with the kind of relationships we build today.” – CHIEF JOSEPH

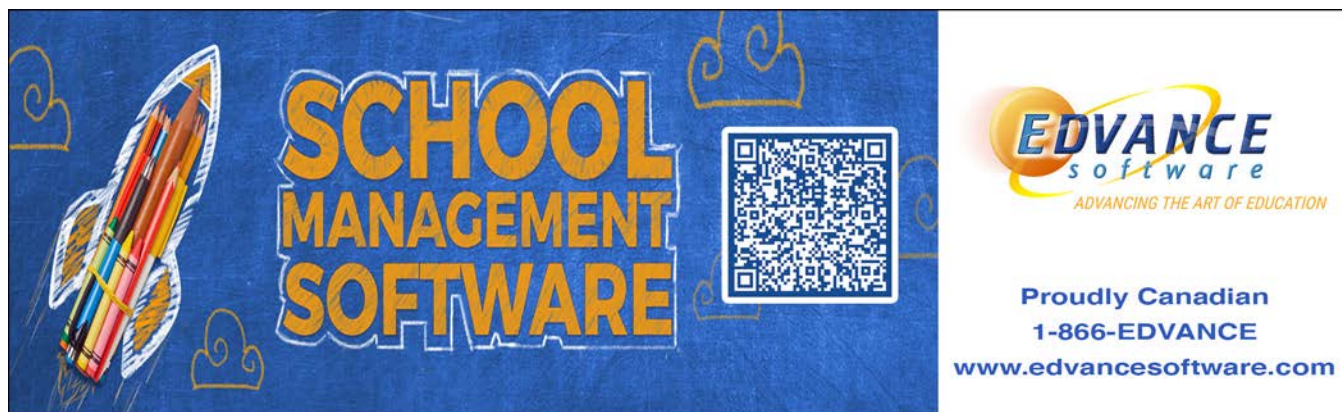
To begin the workshop, participants are invited to sit in circle and are welcomed in with an opening Drum song. This assists participants to feel the Drum, the heartbeat of Mother Earth, the first heartbeat that all human beings experience in utero. We contemplate our lives within the complete lifecycle: child, youth, adult, and Elder. We examine our history collectively and are honoured to have an Elder share their personal experience within the residential school policy. Embracing drumming, singing, and music allows our participants to move their emotions through the music.

Within the circle, we are witnessing participants’ stories and it is with great honour that we all learn and share together. Each of us within our communities are impacted by intergenerational

trauma and these stories are shared and discussed. We have witnessed healing in action within our circles and it is very profound and moving.

Participants then move out of circle to gather in a lunch-and-learn setting, where time is provided to discuss anti-racism education, systemic racism, and the importance of having these conversations together. As community members, we still struggle with talking about racism and its negative impacts in our homes, schools, systems, and communities. Our workshop aims at helping us to sit in the messiness, the uncomfortableness, and work through it.

We also ask our participants to examine the Truth and Reconciliation 94 Calls to Action and try to make a personal connection with them. Where do they fit in this; what is their personal



commitment to reconciliation moving forward? They are asked to document their commitment on a Star Blanket diamond. Our goal will be to create beautiful Star Blankets to share within the Parkland within the next five years as we continue to do this work.

We are doing this work within all our schools, but we also feel it is important that we mirror the work within the communities. Many Canadians never received the true history of Indigenous peoples within the public education system – we believe it is important that we educate community members alongside their children within our communities.

Within MVSD, as in many other school divisions, we were heartbroken to hear the findings of our 215 children discovered on the former Kamloops residential school on Tk'emlups te Secwépemc First Nation in Kamloops, BC. The Truth that was unfolding in terms of our Canadian history within the residential school policy catapulted our organization to develop ways to assist all our schools

and communities with reconciliation, enabling community members, students, and staff to understand the deep impacts of intergenerational trauma that our Indigenous families – and ultimately each and every one of us – were facing. Many of us may think, “This does not affect me; this does not have anything to do with me.” However, the reality is that Canada’s true history affects all Canadians across this country. Canada was founded on a partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Moving forward within Canada today, our partnership is critical and the concepts of equity, inclusion, diversity, kindness, and basic respect between *All Peoples* is imperative.

MVSD is embracing reconciliation as we are very aware of the high priority for this work to be done. It is imperative for every child, every family, every school to continue to work together in partnership in a healthy way. We are doing the work at the grassroots level to assist with moving reconciliation and the 94 Calls to Action forward

within the geographical areas of the Parkland region. We have also partnered with Brandon University Cares, a rural research group who can assist us with research and the possibility of publishing our work to help other school divisions and all Canadians on reconciliation and their personal commitment. Umbay Nagamon, an invitation to action, please join us. ■

Carole Shankaruk is the Indigenous Education Facilitator for Mountain View School Division. She currently sits as a board director for the Mental Health Commission of Canada. Carole is of Metis descent and the great-great-great-great granddaughter of the Metis leader Cuthbert Grant.

Suzanne Cottyn is the Assistant Superintendent of Programs and Planning for Mountain View School Division. Suzanne is a white settler who was born on Treaty 1 Territory and who was raised and currently resides on Treaty 2 Territory and the homeland of the Red River Nation.



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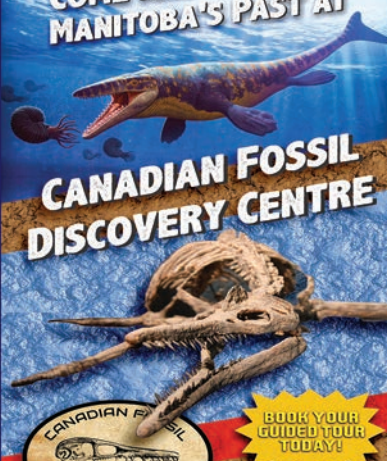
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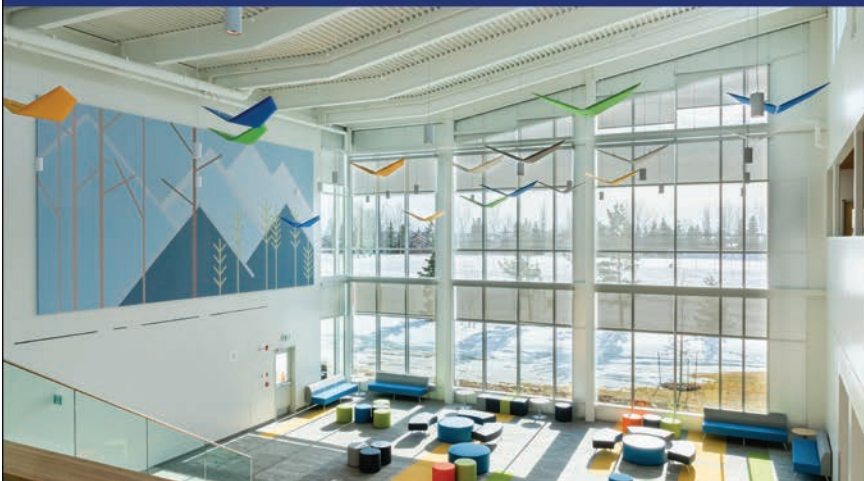


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Voices from the North: Representation and Opportunity

By Selena Mell,
Kelsey School Division

All school divisions aim for educational excellence and academic productivity. Within each unique context, leaders grapple daily with the means to create access to programs and provide measures of success by removing barriers and adding support to create a fair education system for all. Conceivably, there has been a no more significant challenge

to ensuring equity than during the COVID-19 pandemic.

If *equity* is defined as providing everyone access to the same opportunities, rights, and resources in whatever endeavour they pursue, then the pandemic exposed a sobering northern reality. Addressing challenges created by the current funding model will need to be addressed if our smaller school divisions are to surmount their unique issues successfully. With each student living in different circumstances, the allocation of resources, personnel and opportunities need to assist each student in reaching an equal outcome, despite family income or where they may reside in the province.

Northern living

While the possibilities of an urban setting abound, the rural lifestyle provides other opportunities, including a strong sense of local community, a preponderance of natural settings and open spaces, and a potentially more

relaxed pace of life. Northern residents know that remote living means fewer amenities and reduced access to varied professionals and specialists. As northern dwellers, they enjoy the small community connectedness and knowing their neighbors which improves their sense of well-being and quality of life. Small towns often rely on the efforts of local volunteer groups and schools to foster or provide cultural, linguistic, artistic, academic, and athletic opportunities for youth.

Our school division offices and schools enjoy a more casual atmosphere and welcome the familiarity of the insular surroundings. However, with the provincial spotlight in recent years on the emphasis on efficiency, the reduction of operational costs and graphing of savings has highlighted a superficial understanding of the actual needs while exposing flaws in the financing model. When a managerial approach focuses solely on the dollar by reviewing program outlines,

*A beautiful shot of the
Kelsey School Division
region in The Pas. Photo
courtesy of Selena Mell.*

schedules and space, resource costs, equipment, and personnel numbers, it fails to note the actual factors impacting teaching and learning.

Barriers to equity

The reality of the north is that the status of revenues vs. expenditures has failed to meet ever-increasing demands. Accessing professional development (PD), school trips, or academic challenges requires the Division to pay the additional costs to supplement more days required for travel, providing hotel and meals, and multiple days of classroom coverage. These additional factors hinder budgeting and frequently restrict or highly limit opportunities for northern staff. Each clinician who renders short-term assessments for the division equally requires the same travel (mileage), hotel, and meal allotment when hired to provide services to students. Little consideration is afforded to the insufficient transportation options for students, the sparsity of facilities, resource constraints, or increasing needs due to poverty.

Ensuring equity in the educational system requires equal access to resources, but often many opportunities elude the rural learner. Unpredictable yearly grant allotments and government claw back further create the inability for smaller divisions to develop multi-year plans to manage opportunities and challenges.

Facing the adaptive challenge

Smaller communities have demonstrated that they can work towards innovative solutions to re-imagine a thriving educational community. Each year we see students achieving success and moving forward in their personal and educational pursuits, despite systemic barriers, racism, or persistent inequities. Academic achievement and graduation rates result from support systems, resilience, individual persistence, and self-efficacy. Following the pandemic, we knew a new paradigm needed to be explored with broader attempts to influence the whole organization at a macro level.

The Pas sits 624 kilometres from Winnipeg and 138 kilometres from its

neighbouring community in Flin Flon. The opportunity to collaborate with colleagues is possible but limited due to distance and time. The Kelsey School Division's (KSD) senior administrative team consists of two staff. The Superintendent, who further undertakes the role of Student Support Services Coordinator, and a Secretary-Treasurer. Additional support includes a Director in charge of the Division's transportation, maintenance, and custodial services.

In reviewing the challenges KSD has faced since 2018, new initiatives were considered to address both the financial shortfall and staffing limitations. We needed to develop a streamlined procedure that engaged different members from throughout the educational system and focused on aligning the strategic goals and school improvement plans.

Division Oversight Teams (DOT) were created to inspire innovative ideas and to empower staff to succeed in times of uncertainty. This process aimed at creating change and transforming people is concerned with harnessing ideas, values, standards, and



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long-term goals. DOT consists of one school representative attending quarterly meetings on one strand of the strategic plan. Two school administrators co-chair meetings, serving as the educational leaders and providing oversight for the team.



The DOT aims to review areas such as data collection, focusing on division goals, determining program success and challenges, reviewing expenditures, and pinpointing the learning gaps affecting the Division's K-12 learners. Each committee prioritizes needs and makes recommendations based on the highest demands and is tasked with determining and locating professional development opportunities for staff. Rather than having senior administration attend provincial training or meetings, the chairs or a DOT member would now gain expertise by attending regional sessions which also increases our shared learning capacity.

KSD strengthened relationships with the neighbouring school division of Flin Flon and the Opaskwayak Educational Authority. Division leaders share resources, plan, and meet to support and strengthen individual efforts. KSD provides seats for regional divisions and local organizations (RCMP, NRHA, The Pas Immigration) to assist in our PD sessions as it bridges learning while further building community. Flin

Flon and Kelsey have further endeavoured to support shared learning cohorts to help staff connect to new ideas and programs – and the new initiative from the Manitoba Rural Learning Consortium will be a great support for aligning this vision.

Seeking reformation of past practices, adapting programs to better identify student circumstances and working with northern allies are a path forward to help us reach our goals. Providing educational equity meant working past barriers and disrupting our practice to ensure minority and marginalized students would thrive. We are only beginning this journey, but we know that success is possible and students are worth our efforts. ■

Selena Mell was the Kelsey School Division (KSD) Superintendent/CEO in The Pas until September 2022 and later assumed the role of KSD Special Advisor. She will soon undertake a new appointment as a Provincial French Director of Education for Newfoundland and Labrador.

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**By Jackie Connell and
Reg Klassen, Frontier School
Division**

“nequity is perhaps the most serious problem in education worldwide. It has multiple causes, and its consequences include differences in access to schooling, retention and, more importantly, learning.”²¹ Equity in education is complex, multifaceted, and necessary to ensure student access to and success within our public education system in Manitoba. It’s a lens in which we can choose to operate, make decisions, set priorities, and demonstrate beliefs with intention. Equity is not easily achieved when students in a school, community, or division come from a variety of backgrounds, experiences, or circumstance. Equity often assumes different definitions and takes numerous forms



Students being interviewed in front of the warming hut. Photos courtesy of Scott Carnegie, Creative Director of Sugar Cube Entertainment.



The new warming hut, called Blossom.

The Engaged Learners Program is in and of itself a program rooted in equity.

as educators, leaders and schools work towards an equitable education system for the students and families they serve.

A goal of public education is to help prepare children to assume their role in community as contributing members of society, and aims in its truest form, to support all youth in living a “good life.” “When we are born into this world, we come with a gift to help people live a good life. A person becomes an *okihcite* (great heart) when they begin to share their gifts.”²

To find and ensure equity in curriculum delivery within a school setting is no easy task. It requires understanding, experience, and humility on the part of educators, and a willingness to do for some, not all, to level the playing field for our young people. Although students become disengaged from school for a variety of reasons, it took a global pandemic for many individuals to see the existing disparities that have existed for generations within our education system. So it was that Frontier School Division (FSD) began to think about how to create opportunity for young people whose life and school experiences were filled with inequities.

Approximately 11 years ago the idea for Engaged Learners Program

was born, designed specifically for students who are disengaged with school. Students for whom the system has, for a variety of reasons, left behind, given up on, or not provided an opportunity to ensure a sense of belonging.

The Engaged Learners Program is in and of itself a program rooted in equity. It offers individualized support (academic, social, emotional, and financial) to students and aims to remove all barriers to participation. The program model covers transportation, meals, supplies, and all extra-curricular costs for students attending. The students are provided with the resources they need to re-engage with our public education system should they choose to do so.

In the fall of 2021, The Engaged Learners Program, previously located on Opaskwayak Cree Nation on Egg Lake, was informed that their lease was coming to an end. This information was somewhat sudden and challenging especially since The Engaged Learners Program had only known one location since it’s inception. To continue with such a successful program, a new but very temporary home was found using one of the wings at Frontier Collegiate

for lodging, the Cranberry Portage Curling Club for classroom and food services, and a vacant heavy equipment garage for other programming. This quick and successful transition was a way of stating how committed staff and students are to the program. After much searching since that move, we were able to purchase Caribou Lodge in Cranberry Portage Manitoba, 700 kilometres north of Winnipeg on highway 10 this past summer. This new home is where the program will be housed permanently, another step towards equity.

The Engaged Learners Program brings together students from across northern Manitoba for land-based learning, high school credits and vocational learning opportunities with a focus on Indigenous Education. The program supports a predominately Indigenous student population of approximately 60 students per year from across 25 northern and First Nation Communities that are not attending school. Students leave their home community and live on site at the Engaged Learners Program for a period of two to three weeks while attending class. This model is followed between September to June.

Classes focus on supporting students with building skill in reading, writing, and mathematics. Students have opportunities to explore carpentry, welding, culinary arts, and early childhood education both on site and in the community. The program staff also strives to provide youth with a variety of recreational opportunities outside of the school day. Following a year or two at the Engaged Learners Program, students have an interest in returning to their community school, or directly into the workforce.

In winter of 2022, students from the FSD's Engaged Learners Program participated in an experiential learning opportunity involving architects, their carpentry teacher, a Knowledge Keeper, and an Indigenous artist from Northern Manitoba. Throughout this process, students worked together to combine both new and traditional perspectives of design. Over the course of many months, students were encouraged to reflect, discover, design, and express themselves creatively. What resulted was truly a piece of art, a

warming hut, developed, designed, and build exclusively by youth. The student group named their project Blossom. Blossom was one of six designs selected to be built at a global architecture competition in Winnipeg, MB. The annual competition attracts submissions from across the globe and generated 100 entries from artists and architecture groups in 27 countries.

The program fosters and a sense of community, identity, and growth in all students. To date, the program has had great success to preparing students for further pursuits. Although students do not leave the Engaged Learners program with a Grade 12 diploma, they do leave with a greater confidence in themselves knowing more clearly who they are and where they come from. Their disengaged outlook on school and perhaps on life has been realigned to one of possibility and promise. An outcome that we hope to achieve with all youth because of our service in education. ■

Jackie Connell is an Assistant Superintendent in Frontier School

Division and currently the Project Leader for a provincial task force established on Poverty and Education for the Government of Manitoba.

Reg Klassen is the Chief Superintendent of Frontier School Division and a past president of the Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA) and the Manitoba Association School Superintendents (MASS).

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