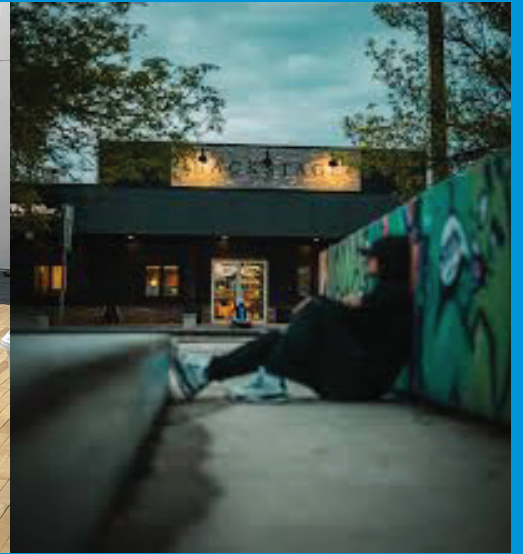


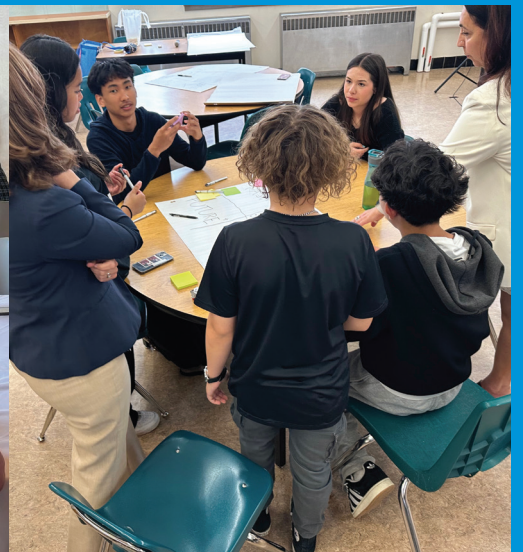
# MASS Journal

Fall 2025

The official magazine of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents



## Strengthening Communities *through Inclusive Leadership*





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## Up Front

- 5 A Message from the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning / Un message du ministre de l'Éducation et de l'Apprentissage de la petite enfance**
- 7 A Message from the Co-President of MASS / Un message de la co-présidente de la MASS**
- 8 MASS 2025/2026 Executive**
- 9 MASS 2025/2026 Strategic Plan**

## STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES THROUGH INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP

## Features

- 12 Ados en réseau: Connexions sans barrières**
- 18 Bridging Possibilities: Inclusive Leadership Through Alternative Education in Hanover School Division**
- 24 Educating the Whole Student: A Wholistic Journey Toward mino pimâtisiwin (the Good Life)**
- 30 Creating a System Founded on Love**
- 34 From Planning to Progress: Embedding Inquiry and Data into School Improvement**

## 38 Index to Advertisers

**On the cover:** On this issue's cover we have a collection of photos featured across the articles in this issue demonstrating strengthening communities through inclusive leadership. Flip to pages 12, 18, 24, and 30 to see more!





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## Strengthening Communities through Inclusive Leadership

**O**n behalf of the Manitoba government, I am pleased to bring greetings to the members of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) in this Fall journal edition. As the 2025-2026 school year begins, I extend my wishes for a successful and engaging year to all MASS members, educators and school staff.

Over the last year, it has been an immense privilege to engage with and learn from MASS members. As leaders of learning, your commitment to advocating for Manitoba students is invaluable as we work collaboratively to foster an equitable, high-quality education system for all children and youth, from every background and every part of Manitoba.

Inclusive leadership, grounded in equity, collaboration and a deep commitment to student well-being and success, is essential to ensuring that all children and youth find school to be a place where they belong, are supported and can thrive. Inclusive leadership is more than simply guiding schools and school divisions – it is about building relationships, honouring diverse voices, and creating learning environments where every student feels seen, heard, and valued. It is leadership that fosters cultures of care and belonging and ensures that Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing are meaningfully embedded in our schools.

Everyday, across Manitoba, we see education leaders rising to the challenge of leadership, working alongside educators, families and communities to create inclusive, engaging and empowering spaces of learning. MASS's commitment to inclusive leadership continues to grow and support this work.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all MASS members, educators and school staff who have supported the wildfire response across the province this year. Whether it was coordinating emergency transportation for communities, or supporting students and their families in uncertain times, many leaders throughout Manitoba worked quickly and compassionately to support the well-being and safety of Manitobans.

Thank you for your continued dedication to public education and your commitment to creating inclusive, learner-focused schools where every student can succeed and reach their full potential.

Sincerely,  
**Honourable Tracy Schmidt**  
Minister of Education and Early Childhood Learning



## Renforcer les communautés grâce à un leadership inclusif

**A**u nom du gouvernement du Manitoba, j'ai le plaisir de saluer les membres de la Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) dans ce numéro automnal du journal. En ce début de l'année scolaire 2025-2026, je souhaite à tous les membres de la MASS, aux

éducatrices et éducateurs ainsi qu'au personnel scolaire une année fructueuse et stimulante.

Ce fut un immense privilège pour moi de collaborer avec les membres de la MASS au cours de la dernière année, et d'apprendre à leurs côtés. En tant que leaders en éducation, votre engagement à défendre les intérêts des élèves du Manitoba est inestimable alors que nous travaillons ensemble pour favoriser un système d'éducation équitable et de haute qualité pour tous les enfants et les jeunes, quels que soient leur milieu et leur région du Manitoba.

Un leadership inclusif, fondé sur l'équité, la collaboration et un engagement profond envers le bien-être et la réussite des élèves, est essentiel pour garantir que tous les enfants et les jeunes trouvent à l'école un lieu où ils se sentent à leur place, où ils sont soutenus et où ils peuvent s'épanouir. Le leadership inclusif ne se limite pas à diriger les écoles et les divisions scolaires : il s'agit de nouer des relations, d'honorer la diversité des opinions et de créer des environnements d'apprentissage où chaque élève se sent vu, entendu et valorisé. C'est un leadership qui favorise une culture d'attention et d'appartenance et veille à ce que les perspectives et les modes de connaissance autochtones soient intégrés de manière significative dans nos écoles.

Chaque jour, partout au Manitoba, nous voyons des leaders en éducation relever le défi du leadership, travaillant aux côtés des éducatrices et des éducateurs, des familles, et des communautés pour créer des espaces d'apprentissage inclusifs, stimulants et habilitants. L'engagement de la MASS envers le leadership inclusif continue de croître et de soutenir ce travail.

Je voudrais profiter de cette occasion pour remercier tous les membres de la MASS, les éducatrices et les éducateurs, ainsi que le personnel scolaire qui ont soutenu les efforts déployés cette année pour lutter contre les incendies de forêt dans toute la province. Qu'il s'agisse de coordonner le transport d'urgence pour les communautés ou de soutenir les élèves et leurs familles en cette période d'incertitude, de nombreux dirigeants du Manitoba ont agi rapidement et avec compassion pour assurer le bien-être et la sécurité des Manitobaines et des Manitobains.

Merci pour votre dévouement continu envers l'éducation publique et votre engagement à créer des écoles inclusives et axées sur l'apprentissage, où chaque élève peut réussir et atteindre son plein potentiel.

Cordialement,  
**Madame Tracy Schmidt**  
Ministre de l'Éducation et de l'Apprentissage de la petite enfance



The Sam Waller Museum is the hidden jewel of Northern Manitoba. Located in The Pas, Manitoba, the museum is open year-round, allowing visitors to come learn and enjoy the history of the Tri-Community Area and that of its founder, Sam Waller. Sam Waller was a man who collected anything and everything that caught his eye. He was built in the mold of a Renaissance man as he moved from place to place and came into contact with a diverse number of people who helped him build this massive collection with which he used to found the original Little Northern Museum.

In 1991, the museum would be renamed The Sam Waller Museum and it was moved into the now vacant old courthouse, which itself has since been designated as a provincial historic site. The museum features three galleries, one dedicated to Sam Waller and his founding collection, another dedicated to the history of the Tri-Community Area and a third ever changing exhibition space that hosts anything from traveling exhibits to local art shows. The museum features a community space downstairs as well as a discovery centre. Finally, the museum also features an exhibit that uses the original jail cells from when the building operated as the regional courthouse. We also have a gift shop filled with artisanal works from local artists who we partner with in the community. At The Sam Waller Museum, there is something for everyone and we encourage you to visit when you get the opportunity.



The Sam Waller Museum  
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## Building Strong, Vibrant, and Equitable Communities

**A**s we enter into another school year, I am honoured to welcome you to the Fall edition of the *MASS Journal*. This issue explores a theme that is both timely and timeless: “Strengthening Communities through Inclusive Leadership.”

Across Manitoba and throughout Canada, public education continues to be one of our most powerful tools for building strong, vibrant, and equitable communities. Our schools are more than places of learning, they are spaces where relationships are nurtured, identities are affirmed, and futures are shaped. In these complex times, the role of inclusive leadership has never been more critical.

Inclusive leadership calls us to lead with humility, to listen deeply, and to act with intention. It means recognizing the diverse strengths within our communities and creating conditions where every student, staff member, and family feels a sense of belonging and purpose. It is about ensuring that our systems reflect the values of equity, reconciliation, and collective well-being.

This journal offers a rich collection of voices and perspectives that illuminate what inclusive leadership looks like in action – from classrooms to boardrooms, from policy to practice. These contributions challenge us to think critically, lead courageously, and continue learning alongside one another.

As you engage with the articles in this edition, I encourage you to reflect on your own leadership journey. How are you strengthening your community through inclusion? What stories are unfolding in your context that deserve to be shared and celebrated?

Together with Dan Ward, MASS Co-president, we express our deepest gratitude to the educators, school leaders, and system leaders across Manitoba who continue to show up with compassion, creativity, and commitment. Your work matters. Your leadership matters. And your impact is felt far beyond the walls of our schools.

Together, we are shaping a future rooted in belonging, justice, and possibility.

Warmly,

**Jeness Moffatt**

Co-President, Manitoba Association of School Superintendents



## Bâtir des communautés fortes, dynamiques et équitable

**A**lors que nous entamons une nouvelle année scolaire, je suis heureuse de vous présenter le numéro d'automne du *MASS Journal*. Le présent numéro explore un thème à la fois actuel et intemporel : « Renforcer les

communautés grâce à un leadership inclusif ».

Au Manitoba comme partout au Canada, l'éducation publique demeure l'un de nos outils les plus puissants pour bâtir des communautés fortes, dynamiques et équitables. Nos écoles sont plus que de simples lieux d'apprentissage, ce sont des espaces où les relations sont entretenues, les identités sont affirmées et les avenir façonnés. De plus, compte tenu de la complexité des derniers temps, le rôle du leadership inclusif n'a jamais été aussi crucial.

Le leadership inclusif nous invite à diriger avec humilité, à écouter attentivement et à agir avec conviction. Il s'agit de reconnaître les forces diverses au sein de nos communautés et de créer des conditions dans lesquelles chaque élève, chaque membre du personnel et chaque famille éprouve un sentiment d'appartenance et trouve un sens à son action. Il s'agit de veiller à ce que nos systèmes reflètent les valeurs d'équité, de réconciliation et de bien-être collectif.

Le présent journal offre un riche recueil de voix et de perspectives qui illustrent ce à quoi ressemble le leadership inclusif dans la pratique, des salles de classe aux salles de réunion, de la politique à la pratique. Ces contributions nous incitent à réfléchir de manière critique, à diriger avec courage et à continuer à apprendre les uns des autres.

Alors que vous prendrez connaissance des articles du présent numéro, je vous encourage à réfléchir à votre propre parcours en matière de leadership. Comment renforcez-vous votre communauté grâce à l'inclusion? Parmi les histoires propres à votre contexte, lesquelles méritent d'être partagées et célébrées?

Dan Ward, coprésident de MASS, et moi-même exprimons notre plus profonde gratitude aux éducatrices et éducateurs, aux dirigeants scolaires et aux responsables du système éducatif de tout le Manitoba qui continuent de faire preuve de compassion, de créativité et d'engagement. Votre travail est important. Votre leadership est important. Et votre influence se fait sentir bien au-delà des murs de nos écoles.

Ensemble, nous façonnons un avenir fondé sur l'appartenance, la justice et les possibilités.

Chaleureuses salutations,

**Jeness Moffatt**

Coprésidente de la Manitoba Association of School Superintendents

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Superintendent/CEO  
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Division



**Jason Young**  
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**Barb Isaak**  
Executive Director



**Karen Wohlgenuth**  
Executive Assistant

## MISSION

Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) provides leadership for public education by advocating in the best interests of learners and supports its members through professional services.

## VISION

In the next 3 years, MASS will enhance our ability and capacity to support professional learning, connection and advocacy among our members.



### LEARNING

Ensure professional learning:

- reflects the priorities of the strategic plan
- respects the diverse needs of members
- is responsive to needs in public education
- is practical/directly applicable to the work of senior leaders



### CONNECTING

Ensure our approaches to networking and connection:

- support members' sense of efficacy in their divisional leadership
- deepen their understanding
- lead to meaningful collaboration/co-construction



### ADVOCATING

Ensure a strategic approach to advocacy that:

- clearly outlines a compelling case for change/improvement within MASS priority areas
- maps out a cohesive plan for advocacy throughout the organization's areas of action
- ensures actions support and are aligned to the plan

## HIGH LEVERAGE STRATEGIES

1

Ensure internal and external clarity about who we are, what we do and how we operate.

2

Build our capacity through increasing human and financial resources.

3

Nurture a culture of positive, meaningful and constructive engagement with members and external partners.

4

Review, re-imagine and revise structures that support all areas of our work.

5

Develop a cohesive and strategic approach to advocacy and a concrete plan to support implementation across the organization.



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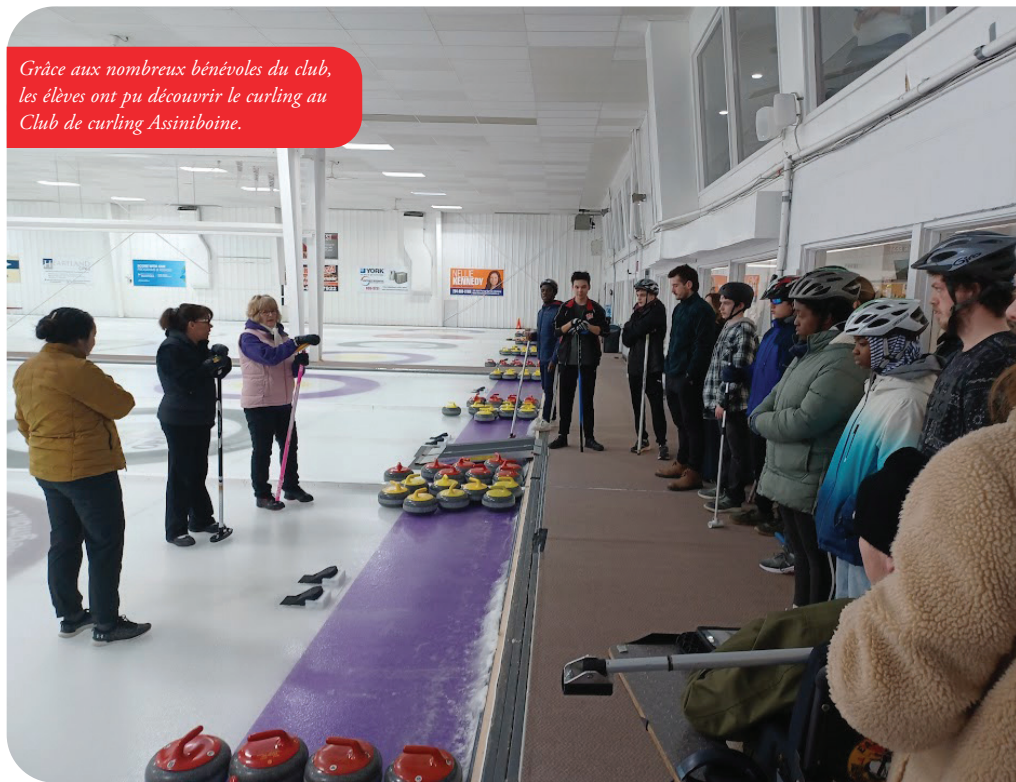
# Connexions sans barrières

Par Joel Mangin, Division scolaire franco-manitobaine

**L**a Division scolaire franco-manitobaine (DSFM) est la seule division scolaire francophone du Manitoba. Ses 25 écoles sont réparties à travers l'ensemble de la province. Cette répartition géographique, combinée aux grandes distances entre les écoles peut créer des sentiments d'isolement dans les communautés éloignées. Comme plusieurs des écoles ont une population relativement petite, il n'y a pas de programmes éducatifs spécialisés qui regroupent les élèves en fonction de leurs besoins spécifiques. Presque tous les élèves, peu importe le niveau de soutien requis, fréquentent leur école communautaire. Ils sont des membres actifs de leur communauté scolaire, où ils trouvent un sentiment d'appartenance et un but. L'inclusion est une valeur fondamentale de la DSFM, et nous sommes engagés à élargir notre portée pour offrir une éducation appropriée.

Quand les élèves ayant des besoins exceptionnels arrivent au secondaire, ils peuvent parfois se sentir seuls, car il y a peu d'autres jeunes avec des profils semblables dans leur école. Ceci peut mener à un sentiment de détachement chez certains, qui ont de la difficulté à se trouver un groupe de pairs. Après plusieurs réflexions et un important travail d'équipe, le projet Ados en réseau a été lancé par un groupe de professionnels : des ergothérapeutes, des psychologues scolaires, des orthophonistes, des travailleurs sociaux et des coordonnateurs des services aux élèves. Le but du programme est de rassembler des adolescents ayant des besoins exceptionnels de partout dans la division dans un même lieu pour participer à une activité commune, favorisant ainsi

*Grâce aux nombreux bénévoles du club, les élèves ont pu découvrir le curling au Club de curling Assiniboine.*



la création de liens sociaux en dehors de leur école. Les participants peuvent rencontrer d'autres jeunes qui vivent des réalités semblables, quel que soit le niveau de soutien dont ils ont besoin. Les activités choisies sont alignées avec les plans axés sur l'élève et adaptées par des spécialistes qui connaissent bien leurs profils. L'objectif est de créer un environnement inclusif où chaque élève peut pleinement participer.

En 2023-24, le comité Ados en réseau a présenté son plan aux directions d'école pour sonder l'intérêt et surtout prendre en compte tous les besoins particuliers afin d'assurer le succès du projet. Un court sondage a été complété par les élèves et leurs gestionnaires de cas pour identifier les

types d'activités qui les intéressaient. Après plusieurs mois de planification, la première activité a eu lieu le 1er février 2024 à St-Norbert. Des élèves de partout dans la province se sont réunis pour jouer à des jeux adaptés et pour préparer une recette de bretzels mous, avec l'aide d'une animatrice culinaire du SSCY (Specialized Services for Children and Youth). Cette première activité a été un franc succès auprès des jeunes et leur a laissé le goût d'en faire plus.

« C'est important pour nous que nos élèves sentent que ces expériences sont authentiques, qu'ils se sentent accueillis et qu'ils ont leur place. Notre but, c'est de favoriser des amitiés qui peuvent se poursuivre dans leur vie personnelle,



*Des membres du comité organisateur d'Ados en réseau, composé de travailleurs sociaux, de psychologues, d'ergothérapeutes, d'orthophonistes, de coordonnateurs des services aux étudiants, ainsi qu'un élève qui a souhaité prendre une photo avec l'équipe.*

et même après leur passage à l'école », partage Carla Derksen, psychologue scolaire et membre du comité. « On sait aussi qu'en dehors de nos écoles, nos jeunes n'ont pas toujours des occasions de faire des activités récréatives à leur niveau, en français. Ce programme leur permet de s'amuser tout en vivant leur langue et leur culture, et de rencontrer


d'autres jeunes francophones qui partagent leurs intérêts ».

Le comité a amorcé le projet par une activité à petite échelle, avant d'organiser deux sorties plus ambitieuses durant l'année scolaire 2023-2024 : une partie de quilles et une visite au zoo du parc Assiniboine. Chaque activité a été soigneusement planifiée pour respecter les

besoins des élèves afin de leur permettre de travailler sur un ou plusieurs de leurs objectifs personnels. L'équipe de spécialistes a mis à profit son expertise pour rendre chaque événement accessible selon le profil de chaque élève.





« Avec Ados en réseau, c'est tellement spécial de planifier des activités inclusives pour aller chercher nos élèves ayant des besoins complexes. Au lieu de modifier des activités scolaires pour que ces élèves puissent y participer de façon authentique, nous planifions dès le début des activités pour eux. Pour nos élèves qui utilisent des fauteuils roulants, leur participation est souvent restreinte par des obstacles environnementaux. Mon rôle est de choisir des lieux accessibles pour nos activités, ou de trouver des solutions créatives », explique Annie Guzman, ergothérapeute à la DSFM.

Les participants ont rapidement tissé des liens significatifs ce qui a créé le besoin de maintenir les connexions au-delà des activités ponctuelles. Plusieurs élèves ont demandé d'échanger les coordonnées de leurs parents afin



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d'organiser leurs propres rencontres en soirée ou la fin de semaine. Pour souligner le succès du programme, le comité a préparé aussi un album souvenir à la fin de l'année pour tous les participants. Cet annuaire de photos servira de rappel tangible des amitiés développées tout au long de l'année.

En 2024-2025, le programme a pris de l'ampleur, tout comme le taux de participation. Le groupe a vécu des activités comme le curling adapté, des ateliers de cuisine, du karaoké, des jeux vidéo compétitifs (*e-sports*), ainsi qu'un dîner et le visionnement d'un film dans un théâtre. Une bataille de ballons d'eau mémorable était prévue pour clore l'année scolaire, mais elle a dû être annulée à cause de la mauvaise qualité de l'air. Malgré cela, la participation a été exceptionnelle.

Carla Derksen affirme : « C'est un projet qui remplit vraiment notre seau. On repart avec un sentiment d'accomplissement qui nous touche profondément, surtout en voyant les élèves s'épanouir dans ces contextes sociaux. C'est vraiment valorisant et ça reflète ce que l'éducation publique devrait être ».

### Retombées durables

Un des impacts les plus marquants du programme est le réseau social qui s'est développé entre les jeunes de différentes écoles et communautés. Les élèves s'inscrivent aux activités en sachant que leurs amis seront là. Plusieurs ont formé des amitiés durables qui dépassent le cadre scolaire. Cela a renforcé leur sentiment d'appartenance à la division et à la communauté francophone du Manitoba.

« En tant que travailleuse sociale, ma priorité est le mieux-être des élèves de notre division scolaire. Nous savons que l'adolescence apporte plusieurs changements chez nos élèves. Le sentiment d'appartenance et les relations positives jouent un rôle essentiel dans leur santé mentale et physique. Le programme Ados en réseaux offre aux adolescents ayant des besoins particuliers un espace sécurisant, à l'extérieur de leur école, où ils peuvent rencontrer d'autres jeunes partageant des intérêts similaires. Ceci leur permet de créer

des liens authentiques en participant à des activités conçues spécialement pour eux. Les effets positifs de ces rencontres sont déjà visibles à travers leurs sourires et leur engagement constant », déclare Josée Gowryluk, travailleuse sociale à la DSFM.

Le programme Ados en réseau entame sa troisième année en 2025-2026, avec l'intention de bientôt inclure des élèves du niveau intermédiaire. Une idée lancée durant une discussion d'équipe a évolué vers un projet à l'échelle divisionnaire qui

met en évidence les principes d'inclusion et de programmation appropriée. « On devrait faire... » est rapidement devenu « On fait ». ■

*Joel est le Directeur général adjoint (par interim) pour le Division scolaire franco-manitobaine.*

To read this article in English, please reach out to Barb Isaak at [barb.isaak@mass.mb.ca](mailto:barb.isaak@mass.mb.ca).



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# Bridging Possibilities:

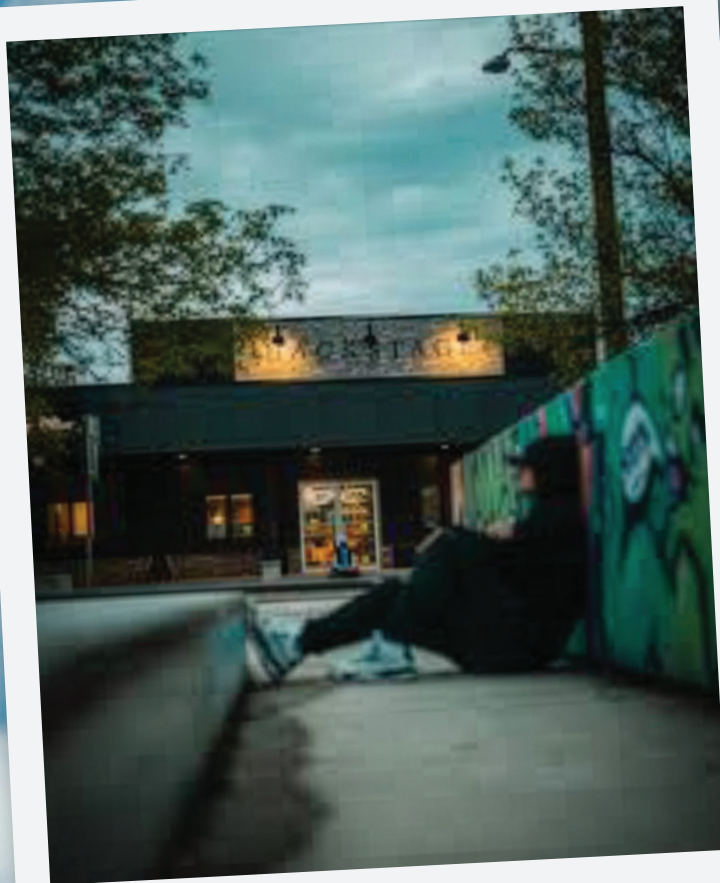
## Inclusive Leadership through Alternative Education in Hanover School Division

**By Corinne Thiessen and Rod Kehler, Hanover School Division**

**W**hen it comes to public education, leadership is often tested not in moments of certainty but in moments of challenge, especially when we are called to support students for whom the traditional system is not working. Inclusive leadership is not simply about adding support; it's about creating structures, relationships, and visions that allow all students to belong, engage, and thrive. Nowhere is this more evident than in the development and implementation of the Bridges Educational Program in Hanover School Division.

Over the past decade, schools across Manitoba have seen a growing number of students facing significant challenges, including chronic absenteeism, involvement with the justice system, and mental health concerns. These barriers often lead to disengagement from school, limiting future options and increasing risk. In these circumstances, the role of inclusive leadership becomes not just beneficial but essential.

Inclusive leadership begins by recognizing that equity is not about treating



*Hanover School Division is proud to partner with local community organizations to create meaningful learning environments. The Bridges Program offers students unique spaces that inspire engagement, growth, and connection. Photo courtesy of Rod Kehler.*

all students the same; it is about reimagining education to meet students where they are. For learners coping with mental health issues, legal complications, or inconsistent attendance due to personal or family challenges, the conventional classroom structure often fails to accommodate their needs. In response, Hanover School Division undertook a bold and intentional redesign of alternative education. Drawing on past experiences with programs like The Learning Centre and SOS and informed by collaboration with colleagues in other divisions and community organizations, the division developed the Bridges Program.

The success of Bridges is not rooted solely in its programming design, but in the leadership decisions that underpinned its creation. From the outset, Hanover's leaders prioritized authentic engagement with external partners, including mental health services, partnering with outside organizations/agencies, and social supports, to ensure a holistic model of care for students. Resources were allocated with purpose and patience, allowing the program to open only when qualified staff were in place and the foundations were strong. Support from the school board played a crucial role in bringing this vision to life, with trustees providing the financial resources necessary to launch the program. Clear expectations and transparent referral criteria ensured that all schools in the division understood the program's purpose and maintained responsibility for their students, even when served outside the traditional setting.

Bridges is designed for students who face barriers to success in a regular classroom. The program provides a personalized educational experience that includes project-based learning connected to student interests, flexible timetabling, volunteerism, and experiential learning. Clinical support is integrated into the daily experience, and students learn in small-group settings that allow for individualized attention. Despite the alternative setting, students maintain access to core academic subjects, the arts, and physical education. These features are not incidental; they are possible because of a leadership

## The program provides a personalized educational experience that includes project-based learning connected to student interests, flexible timetabling, volunteerism, and experiential learning.

philosophy that prioritizes flexibility, personalization, and unwavering belief in the potential of every student.

The referral process begins with a thorough identification of student needs through the school's support team and clinicians, followed by a comprehensive review of student records, strengths, and barriers. Community agencies are consulted when needed to ensure a full understanding of the student's situation. Students and their families are directly involved in the decision-making process, with opportunities for visits and meaningful discussion about goals and expectations. Once a referral is finalized and approved, the intention is that the referring school maintains a lead role in the student's progress, with monthly visits, shared planning responsibilities, and ongoing communication with the Bridges staff.

This structure reflects a leadership culture that is collaborative, accountable, and committed to equity across the system. A defining feature of Bridges is its insistence on preserving connection to the student's home school. This is not just a procedural requirement; it is a leadership choice to reinforce that students in alternative settings remain members of the school community in some way when possible. Monthly visits from the school-based case manager, twice-yearly Student Specific Planning meetings, and shared responsibility for curricular content are all part of a purposeful effort to ensure that no student feels cast aside or forgotten.

The creation of the Bridges Program was intentional. It was the result of a sustained vision by school leaders at every level of the system. Divisional and school leaders asked difficult but necessary

questions about how to better support students who were falling through the cracks. In the central office, divisional leaders shaped policies and procedures grounded in dignity, access, and student-focused solutions. In schools, principals, case managers, and teachers committed to walking alongside students in need of alternative pathways.

Our hope is that Bridges becomes a bridge not only back to school, but forward to adulthood. For many of the students it serves, success has often felt out of reach. This program offers them the chance to re-engage with education on their terms, with the support and flexibility they need to move forward. Success here is not standardized; it is defined by individual growth, resilience, re-engagement, and progress toward personal goals. In this context, success is led. It is led by inclusive leaders who believe in every learner, who make courageous decisions in the face of constraint, who resource wisely and advocate persistently, and who never give up on a student.

As we look ahead, Hanover School Division remains committed to evolving the Bridges Program to meet the changing needs of our students. Inclusive leadership, after all, is not static. It flexes, adapts, and grows, just like the students it serves. Our role as leaders is not simply to manage the education system we have, but to build the one our students truly need. ■

---

*Corinne Thiessen is the Student Services Administrator and Rod Kehler is the Assistant Superintendent of Student Services for Hanover School Division.*



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## UPCOMING EVENTS:

### November 2025

November 14, 2025  
Virtual Executive Meeting, 9:00AM CST

### December 2025

December 12, 2025  
Executive Meeting, 9:00 AM CST

### January 2026

January 9, 2026  
Virtual Executive Meeting, 9:00 AM CST

January 14, 2026  
New Members Session, 9:00 AM CST  
Professional Learning with MSBA Labour Relations Staff, 1:30 PM CST

January 15, 2026  
Leadership Development Session, 9:30 AM CST

### February 2026

February 6, 2026  
Executive Meeting, 9:00 AM CST

### March 2026

March 5, 2026  
Executive Meeting, 9:00 AM CST  
New Members Session, 1:00 PM CST

March 6, 2026  
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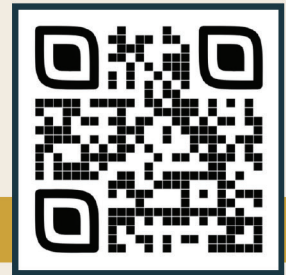
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*Assistant Superintendents of Academics, Indigenous Way of Life, and Student Services and Wellness leading their first combined divisional personal development day. Photos courtesy of Erica Hildebrand.*

# **Educating the Whole Student:** **A Wholistic Journey Toward** **mino pimâtisiwin (the Good Life)**



*Rina Whitford led administrators and senior administrators in a group activity.*



Academics, Indigenous Way of Life, and Student Services and Wellness staff collaborating to create a shared vision of learning for their students.

The path toward *mino pimâtisiwin* – the good life – is much more than educational attainment based upon academic achievement. The journey calls for a wholistic approach that nurtures the mind, body, and spirit of students. At the heart of our work in Frontier are three interconnected pillars: Academics, Wellness and Student Services, and Indigenous Way of Life. While these areas have traditionally operated in silos, but parallel, we are now working to bring them together as one integrated team. Inside the classroom, these pillars do not exist in isolation – each plays a vital role in guiding students to become not only educated, but also empathetic, caring, and responsible human beings that know who they are, where they come from, where they are going, and why they are here. By unifying our efforts, we aim to create a learning environment – a community, where every student can thrive fully and authentically.

**By Erica Hildebrand, Rina Whitford, and Meghan Clements De Silva, Frontier School Division**

**W**hen we first came together as a team across several departments, what struck us immediately was how excited we were to dismantle the longstanding divisions between our areas. We next realized we weren't

starting from scratch. As Meghan Clements De Silva often reminds us, we are working within a 30/70 model – our schools and educators already bring 70 per cent of the knowledge, wisdom, and context. Our work as a divisional team is to contribute the additional 30 per cent by fostering collaboration,

facilitating connections, and providing meaningful guidance.

We needed a place to begin aligning our work, so we started with three foundational documents that serve as the backbone of everything we do: *Mamâhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With* – Manitoba's Indigenous Education Policy Framework, *The Framework for Learning*, and the *Standards for Appropriate Educational Programming in Manitoba*. These documents not only guide our practice but also keep us aligned in our purpose, ensuring that we work together – not in silos, but as one cohesive team – with students at the centre.

Our goals are clear: first, we want students to experience a genuine joy for learning. That means classrooms filled with engagement, curiosity, and the smiling faces of students who see themselves as learners. Second, we want to foster student voice and leadership. Classrooms should be spaces where student knowledge is honoured – where they are not just learners, but also teachers, growing into the role of “Elders-in-training.” Lastly, we aim to foster a deeper connection between students and the Land, themselves, and their communities. We want to see students on the Land, developing and applying meaningful skills, building self-awareness, and cultivating care for others through community and intergenerational connections.

What we are building is not meant to be a model of integrated learning, but systemic adherence to learning that is grounded in culture and community, supported by wellness and inclusion, and powered by high expectations and shared responsibility.

Achieving these goals requires more than good intentions – it demands a wholistic approach to teaching and learning. We recognize that best practices and high expectations have always been embedded in Indigenous ways of knowing and doing. Embracing these practices alongside western models calls for humility, effort, and genuine collaboration. This journey must be a collective one. Our students cannot reach their full potential solely through academics. For schools to foster *the good life*, they need classrooms that are inclusive, culturally safe, and supportive of diverse ways of learning. That is not possible without the full integration of Student Services, Wellness, and Indigenous Way of Life into the division, school, and classroom community.

Rina Whitford reminds us that “two-eyed seeing” – the merging of Indigenous and Western knowledge systems – is not a choice, but a necessity. It ensures that students are at the centre of all we do and that they learn in environments where their identities, cultures, and abilities are respected and valued. As outlined in the Standards for Appropriate Educational Programming, inclusive schools are spaces where all students can grow, participate fully, and enjoy the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

To guide our planning and vision, we reflected on the four fundamental questions shared by the Honourable Murray Sinclair: Who am I? Where do I come from? Where am I going? Why am I here? These questions helped us frame not only our students’ journeys but also our own as educators and leaders. We embraced a shared belief: all students can learn, but not in the same way or at the same speed. Every student brings strengths, gifts, and challenges, and our role is to recognize and support differences through intentional and appropriate planning. We must uphold high expectations while also committing to the right information-sharing practices across our teams so we can do this work well.

We also recognized that strengthening relationships with families and communities is essential. As human

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beings, we need social connections to thrive – and students are no exception. Strong bonds with caregivers, involvement of Elders, and local community voice provide the context and support needed for students to succeed along the path they choose.

When planning instruction, Erica Hildebrand often emphasizes the principle of “Maslow before Bloom.” That means recognizing that students must have their basic needs met – safety, belonging, purpose – before they can engage in meaningful learning. The Framework for Learning reminds us that students need hope, voice, agency, and opportunities to shape their future. Much of this is grounded in relationships and classroom culture. Routines, norms, expectations, protocols, and relationships – they aren’t peripheral to learning; they are central to it.

Purposeful planning is also the cornerstone of wholistic instruction. How we teach is just as important as what we teach. When we intentionally design learning experiences that include global competencies – such

as communication, creativity, citizenship, collaboration, critical thinking, and connection to self – we support students in becoming whole learners. These aren’t just skills; they are complex ways of knowing, being, and doing that prepare students to navigate the world beyond the classroom doors.

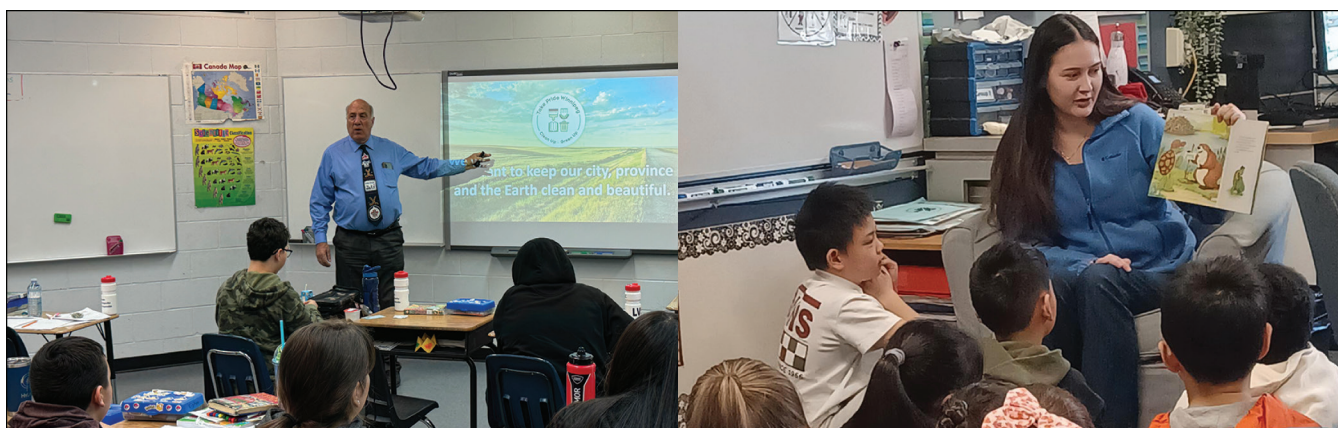
We also recognized the need to shift assessment practices to become more learner-centered and culturally responsive. By integrating diverse perspectives, lived experiences, and worldviews into our assessment models, we are building shared understandings that are authentic, social, and purposeful. We are encouraging autonomy and responsibility, allowing students to be active participants in their learning.

This shift began with shared professional learning at divisional PD, where we introduced our multifaceted, integrated approach to staff across the division. From there, we worked with school administrators to ensure that school plans were rooted in these principles. We then brought

our three teams together to build relationships, deepen understanding, and give voice to a shared goal of student learning. This collaboration was central to fostering a common purpose and a collective drive toward success – one we all understood and recognized our role in achieving.

What we are building is not meant to be a model of integrated learning, but systemic adherence to learning that is grounded in culture and community, supported by wellness and inclusion, and powered by high expectations and shared responsibility. This is what it means to walk alongside students on their path toward *mino pimâtisiwin*. And while the journey is ongoing, the direction is clear. ■

*Erica Hildebrand is the Assistant Superintendent of Academic Programs and Instruction, Rina Whitford is the Assistant Superintendent Indigenous Way of Life, and Meghan Clements De Silva is the Assistant Superintendent Student Services and Wellness for Frontier School Division.*



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# Creating a System Founded on Love

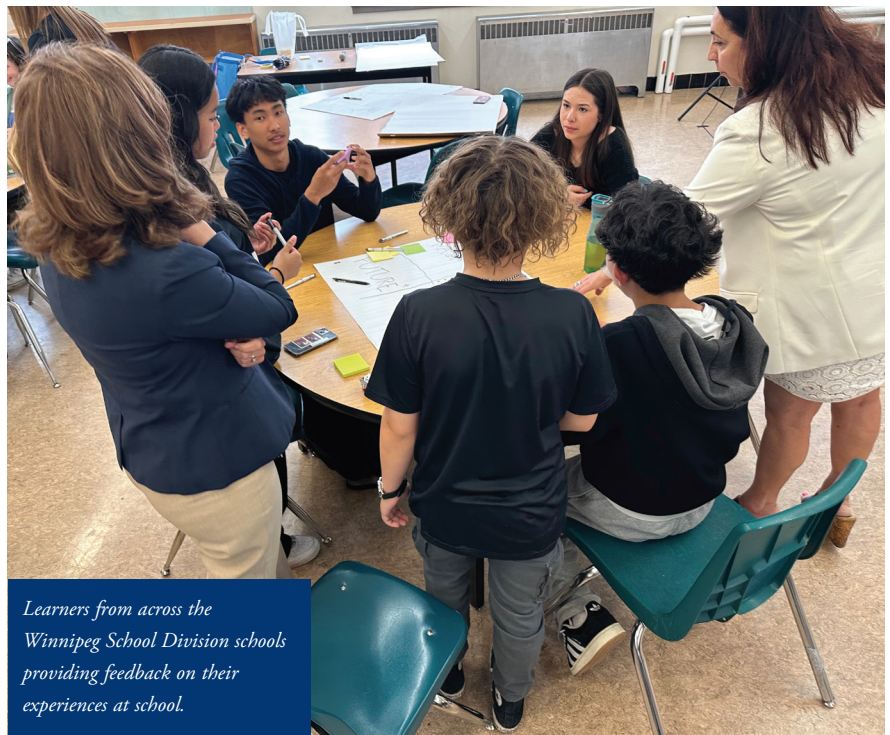


*Trustees engaging with families to inform the strategic planning process. Photos courtesy of Matt Henderson.*

## By Matt Henderson, Winnipeg School Division

In the *Fifth Discipline*, Peter Senge describes a system as a whole comprising many interconnected and interdependent parts that influence each other and the overall whole. Understanding the parts and their relationship with each other, is paramount to understanding the system.

For many of us who work in systems – like in public education – making sense of all the parts can be overwhelming, as connecting the myriad of parts, or people, can often present as an impossibility. Fully visioning how thousands of adults impact tens of thousands of children, coupled with the intricacies of facilities, transportation, IT, and nutrition, is daunting at best.



*Learners from across the Winnipeg School Division schools providing feedback on their experiences at school.*

The temptation for a public school system might be to focus on the whole. Top-down systems that create strategic plans with missions and visions that are alien to the needs of learners and families. System cultures that are devoid of contributions from community, while doubling down on data that fails to conjure the questions that tie complexity, interconnectivity, and humanness together.

Over the past two years, the Winnipeg School division (WSD) has focused its systems thinking fully on love. While many might roll their eyes at the actioning of love as a means to bring coherence and collective purpose, WSD views it as the throughline on everything it does.

Eric Fromm, the Frankfurt School psychoanalysts, defines love as “the active concern for the life and growth of that which we love.” WSD has doubled down on love. In 2024, the Board of Trustees began extensive public consultation with families, learners, staff, and community partners. In collaboration with the Critical Thinking Consortium, to which WSD is a proud member, three central themes emerged: Joy, Love, and Rigour. The strategic plan is fully focused on love – ensuring that all learners and families feel that they belong and are known, while all 6000 staff members are committed to the active concern for each and every child.

Dozens of feedback sessions were facilitated by trustees at WSD advisory council meetings and special sessions to elicit the voices of community members. Families, staff, community partners, and learners were asked these key questions:

- “What is school like for you?”
- “How does school help you learn?”
- “How does school make it harder for you to learn?”
- “How does school make you feel like you belong?”
- “How does school make you feel like you don’t belong?”

The feedback from learners and families, and the community, coupled with WSD achievements data clearly told the story that the system had been underserving Indigenous children living in poverty. Kids were telling us they didn’t

The graphic is a vertical poster for the Winnipeg School Division's Strategic Plan 2025-2030. At the top left is the WSD logo, which depicts two stylized figures holding hands above a blue wave, with the text 'WINNIPEG SCHOOL DIVISION' to its right. The main title 'STRATEGIC PLAN' is in large, bold, blue letters, with '2025-2030' in a smaller, lighter blue font below it. The background features a stylized landscape with rolling hills in shades of blue, green, and yellow, and a winding river or path in white and light blue.

**MORAL PURPOSE**  
Winnipeg School Division provides a learning environment that fosters the growth of every learner's potential and provides equitable opportunity to develop the knowledge, skills, and ways of being necessary for nurturing a just, sustainable, and democratic society where everyone belongs, thrives, and is included.

**GUIDING QUESTION**  
What are the most powerful actions WSD can take to ignite and cultivate paths to the good life, Mino-Pimatisiwin, for all learners, particularly those most underserved?

**JOY**  
Creating a sense of community  
Provide opportunities for learners to feel confident in the future, inspired, fulfilled, engaged, and full of hope.

**LOVE**  
Supporting a sense of belonging  
Where every learner is known by multiple adults and they feel safe, respected and free to express their true selves.

**RIGOUR**  
Preparing learners for excellence  
Where every learner feels supported and challenged to excel every day through meaningful activities and lessons to achieve their goals.

**HIGH-LEVEL STRATEGIES**

- Seek Truth & Reconciliation**
  - Answer Calls to Action related to the cultivation of culture, community, language, and land in our schools.
  - Remove barriers for Indigenous Peoples to lead WSD and contribute to the WSD community.
- Build Community Schools that are Barrier Free**
  - Eliminate barriers to education, including all exclusionary practices.
  - Create sticky schools that extend the day and keep learners close.
  - Nurture neighbourhood schools that support all learners.
- Develop a Culture of Thinking & Shared Sense of Responsibility for all Children**
  - Develop the capacity in school leaders to unleash the power of the classroom teacher.
  - Cultivate the conditions for the highest quality teaching and deepest learning.
- Equitable Distribution of Resources**
  - Distribute resources to have maximum impact for the learners who need them most.
  - Empower and support schools to shift resources for maximum impact.

The Winnipeg School Division's strategic plan for 2025-2030.

feel known and heard and families vocalized powerfully about the barriers the system, all the interconnected parts, were putting in front of them.

And so in response, WSD moved away from a mission statement. Rather, as a community of inquiry and deeper

learning, we decided to develop a guiding question. One that we could go back to anytime we feel astray. Whether we are a trustee, custodian, bus driver, classroom teacher, or a superintendent, our laser focus is on moving the needle for Indigenous learners and families by

answering the Calls to Action. Similarly, through consultation, WSD carved out a moral purpose – one that charges all of us to move forward cohesively to make things better, day-by-day, for everyone in our community.

**Guiding question**

What are the most powerful actions WSD can take to ignite and cultivate paths to the good life, *Mino Pimatisiwin*, for all learners, particularly those most underserved?

The feedback from the consultative process also lent itself to four high level strategies. While on the surface these strategies may seem simple. But each focus on critical aspects that WSD needs to get better at based on the lived experience of the community: decolonizing our schools, reducing barriers,

ensuring high quality instruction, and allocating resources with equity in mind. These high-level strategies, identified by the WSD community, helped to establish our moral purpose, rather than a mission statement.

**Moral purpose**

Winnipeg School Division provides a learning environment that fosters the growth of every learner’s potential and provides equitable opportunity to develop the knowledge, skills, and ways of being necessary for nurturing a just, sustainable, and democratic society where everyone belongs, thrives, and is included.

bell hooks in *All About Love* argues that, “There is no better place to learn the art of loving than in community.” To love, fully acknowledging it is a

verb, takes time, care, knowledge, and a way of being. The WSD community, from caregivers to staff, have told us boldly that the system wasn’t working. We needed to move the system to a movement.

Belonging or Interpersonal fusion, as Fromm posits “is the force which keeps the human race together, the clan, the family, society.” As a species, we are perpetually attempting to overcome what Fromm frames as “separateness.” We are constantly trying to make sense of our purpose through connecting with others. How do we make sense in this system? Through a community that is actively concerned with the life and growth of every member.

Casey Plett in *On Community* argues that compassion is a pillar of loving and powerful communities. For Plett, “to withhold compassion, especially on a community level – even when it seems as if there’s plenty of reason – it’s amazing how easy it seems to do. Pay attention when you’re asked to do it.” Many communities and systems lack compassion. Love. And a moral purpose. When our cultures, practices and public-facing documents are void of compassion, respect, and love, the parts become lost within the whole.

Often as systems – namely school divisions – we get bogged down with trying to implement stuff. We can often lose sight of the interconnected pieces while simultaneously losing touch with the purpose of the whole. We become obsessed with busy work that might not have an impact on those who need us most. This is equity – ensuring those who need more get more. When we actively listen to our families and learners, when we sit together in partnership, the parts and the whole create a synergy that leads to revolution.

A revolution founded fully in creating a society and public that is actively concerned for the life and growth of every one, every species, and the planet. ■

*Matt Henderson, Ph.D., is the Superintendent of Winnipeg School Division.*

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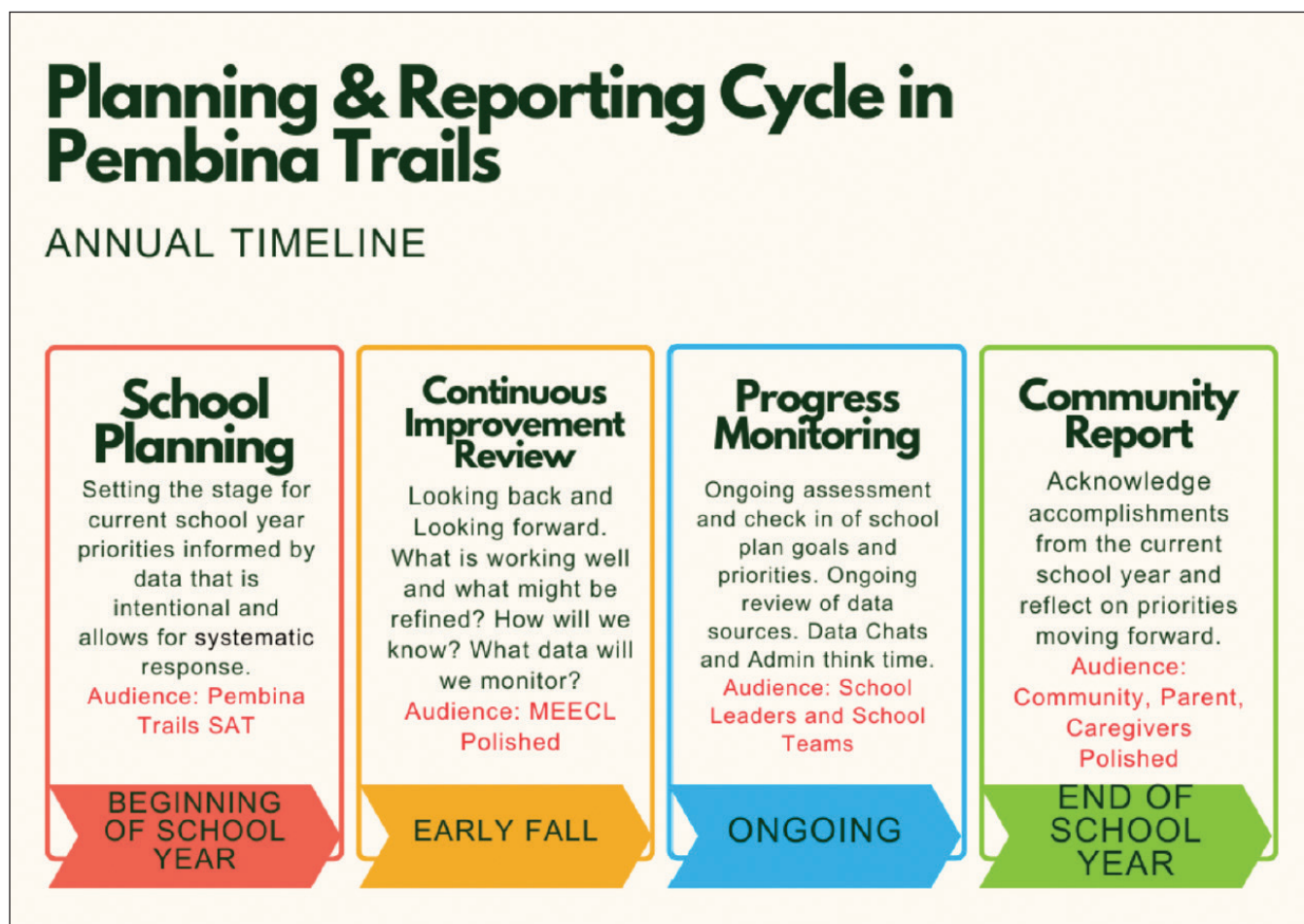

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# From Planning to Progress: Embedding Inquiry and Data into School Improvement

By Julie Cordova and Colleen Roberts, Pembina Trails School Division



Planning and reporting Cycle in Pembina Trails Annual Timeline graphic. Graphics courtesy of Colleen Roberts.

## Defining a shared purpose:

“A school plan is a local response to the school community, divisional and provincial priorities, and the compelling data which in turn guides all student success”. (Divisional School Plan Working Group, 2024)

## Why planning matters

Planning and reporting are integral parts of school improvement, but too often they become procedural exercises rather than transformative tools. In our

division, we have shifted our planning paradigm to centre on a core inquiry question: *For whom are our current practices not yet working?* This guiding question ensures equity remains central, progress remains visible, and all learners are supported with purpose and care.

## A living process, not a static product

Our updated school planning framework positions school plans as living documents. These documents are dynamic

and responsive, shaped by ongoing reflection and data-informed action.

A Meaningful Inquiry Based School Plan Process is:

- **Visionary:** hopeful and inspiring; intentional.
- **Purposeful:** clearly guides the inquiry cycle.
- **Inclusive:** keeping students at the centre.
- **Aligned:** informed by the divisional strategic plan and provincial directives.

- **Practical:** doable, timely, achievable, dynamic, impactful.
- **Responsive:** to compelling evidence that emerges.

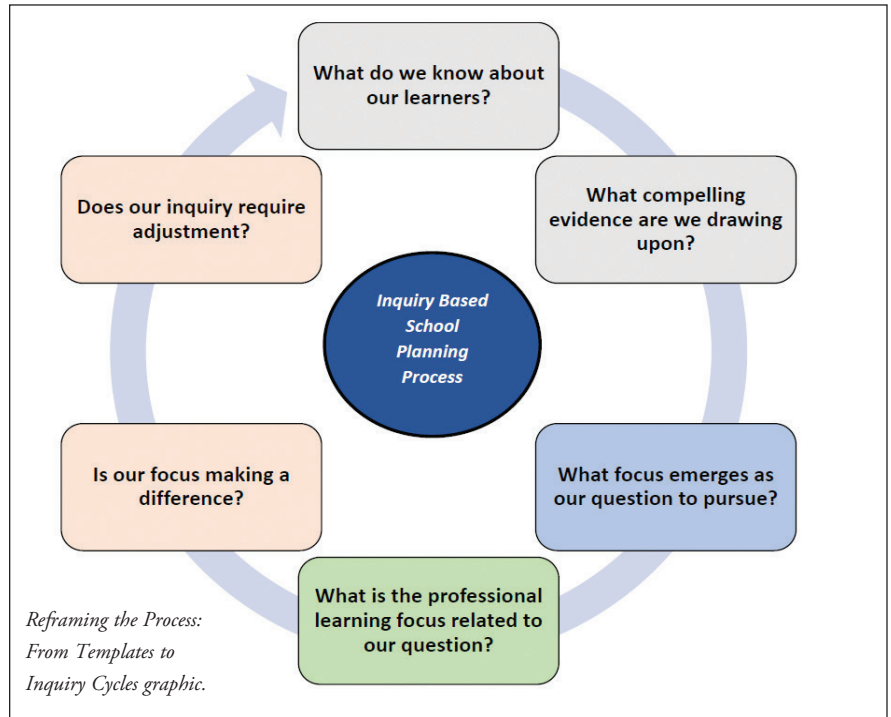
These quality criteria transform the school plan from a compliance document into a tool of instructional leadership and student-focused action.

**Reframing the process: from templates to inquiry cycles**

The work began not with a new template, but with a shift in mindset. We embraced a cycle of inquiry-based planning focused on:

1. Identifying learner needs through multiple sources of evidence.
2. Naming a compelling question grounded in equity.
3. Aligning professional learning and intervention to meet those needs.
4. Monitoring impact and adapting in response to evidence.

This process supports school leaders to move beyond intuition and anecdote, and instead engage in intentional, evidence-informed decision-making.



**Making data accessible and actionable**

To support this work, we invested in building school-level capacity in using data to sustain decision-making. Our

Research Information Officer curated School Leader Data Binders, offering easy access to student achievement, engagement, and well-being data. Key tools include:



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## The Critical Thinking Consortium's Framework for Nurturing Quality Thinking



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- Divisional Academic Dashboards: highlighting trends in achievement by strand and subject.
- Learning Behaviours Dashboards: visualizing student engagement and work habits.
- School-Specific Reports: including attendance, office referrals, and risk assessments.

By triangulating data sources, school teams gain a richer picture of student experience, sharpening focus and making plans more responsive.

### Equity in focus: “For whom are our practices not yet working?”

This inquiry lens invites school teams to consider:

- Students achieving at an academic level of IN, one, or two.
- Students rated as “Sometimes” or “Rarely” in learning behaviours.
- Students not yet earning compulsory credits.

The simple but powerful addition of “yet” reflects a growth mindset and affirms our belief in student potential and our commitment to ongoing improvement.

### Responding with intentional action and instructional interventions

Our division has implemented a range of structured literacy interventions to support students who require more targeted instruction. The implementation of an evidence-based early reading screening tool

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## In our division, we have shifted our planning paradigm to centre on a core inquiry question: *For whom are our current practices not yet working?*

in early years was a key component of a consistent and ongoing assessment process that informs and enhances literacy instruction. Schools emphasized a comprehensive approach to literacy, integrating phonological awareness, phonics, word study, and orthographic mapping across language programs.

In Numeracy, we introduced NAP 2.0 (Numeracy Achievement Project) in partnership with the Manitoba Rural Learning Consortium. This was a middle years pilot designed to build teacher capacity, promote data-informed instruction, and support flexible, responsive teaching. Launched with 16 educators, the program will

expand next year to include nine more participants. NAP 2.0 is grounded in the principles of targeted support, evidence-based practice, and sustained professional learning.

### **Progress monitoring: the heart of the work**

Ultimately, planning must lead to progress. The school plan is a living document. At regular intervals, school teams return to the core question: *Is our focus making a difference?*

If yes, the plan continues. If not, we pause, reflect, and recalibrate. This approach reinforces a culture of continuous improvement, where actions

are responsive, and all students remain at the centre of our work.

Our updated planning model is a system-level response to a shared goal: improved student outcomes through instructional leadership. It creates alignment across schools, fosters professional collaboration, and strengthens our collective capacity to respond to students.

By embedding inquiry, data, and reflection into planning, we ensure our efforts are not only well-intentioned but also impactful. Every school. Every student. Every day. ■

*Pembina Trails has partnered with The Critical Thinking Consortium and worked with Usha James (Executive Director) to select a compelling guiding question, rethink school planning, and support administrators in engaging with data in critically thoughtful ways.*

*Julie Cordova is the Divisional Principal of Curriculum and Learning and Colleen Roberts is the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Learning Services for Pembina Trails School Division.*

## Write for the *MASS Journal!*

The *MASS Journal* reaches readers every spring and fall, sharing stories of best practices, challenges and how they've been overcome, thoughts on leadership, and much more! If you would like to write for the Spring 2026 issue, please send an abstract to Executive Director Barb Isaak ([barb.isaak@mass.mb.ca](mailto:barb.isaak@mass.mb.ca)) and copy editor Jenna Collignon ([jcollignon@matrixgroupinc.net](mailto:jcollignon@matrixgroupinc.net)). Include your name, position, and division, and two to three sentences on your topic.

### **Here are details for the Spring 2026 issue:**

Theme: Public Education: to come!

Abstracts due November 28, 2025

Final articles due March 6, 2026



### **Notes:**

If your abstract is accepted, you will be notified and provided with a word count and further details.

Articles cannot be company or product promotional.

The preference is to have articles written by school and division senior leadership (superintendents, principals, etc.). If you do not fall within this category but have a great idea, please work with your senior leadership on the abstract and, if accepted, the final submission.

# Index to Advertisers

<b>ADVENTURE CAMP</b> Camp Arnes ..... 22	<b>ELECTRONICS RECYCLING</b> Electronics Recycling Association..... 11	<b>INTERACTIVE ONLINE WORKSHOPS</b> Scientists in School..... 11
<b>AFTER SCHOOL READING PROGRAMS AND ONE TO ONE</b> United for Literacy..... 11	<b>EMERGENCY SERVICES OF INSURANCE RESTORATION</b> Winnipeg Building and Decorating ..... 36	<b>INTERNET PROVIDERS</b> Valley Fiber..... IFC
<b>ARTS AND CULTURE</b> Red River North Tourism ..... 33	<b>ENERGY EFFICIENCY</b> Efficiency Manitoba..... 14	<b>LAWYERS, BARRISTERS, SOLICITORS AND TRADEMARK AGENTS</b> Filmore Riley LLP ..... 36
<b>CAREER EXPLORATION</b> Skills Canada - Manitoba ..... 38	<b>ESCAPE ROOM</b> Enigma Escapes ..... 21	<b>MOBILE CRISIS</b> THELINK..... 29
<b>CHARITY</b> Take Pride..... 27	<b>EXOTIC ANIMALS</b> Prairie Exotics..... 17	<b>MUSEUMS</b> Dalnavert Museum and Visitor Centre ..... 16 National Indigenous Residential School Museum of Canada ..... 36 Prairie Mountain Regional Museum..... 15 Le Musée De Saint-Boniface Museum ..... 23 Manitoba Museum ..... 21 Sam Waller Museum..... 6
<b>CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL</b> Children's Hospital Foundation of Manitoba..... 28	<b>FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION</b> Keewatin Tribal Council..... 32	<b>NEUROPLASTIC TRAINING</b> Ck2 Inc. .... 23
<b>CHILDREN'S REHABILITATION</b> Children's Rehabilitation Foundation ..... 29	<b>FOOD AND NUTRITION EDUCATION FOR TEACHERS AND ECE'S</b> Dairy Farmers of Canada..... 20	<b>PARKS AND RECREATION</b> Brandon Community Sportsplex..... 28
<b>CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH</b> Mood Disorders Association of Manitoba (MDAM)..... 29	<b>GOLF COURSE</b> Pleasant Valley Golf Course ..... 16	<b>STEAM EDUCATION</b> Engineering for Kids..... 11
<b>DISCOVERY CENTRE</b> Asessippi Ski Area and Resort ..... OBC Bruce D. Campbell Farm and Food Discovery Centre ..... 22	<b>GYMNASIUM EQUIPMENT</b> Royal Stewart Ltd..... 35	<b>TEACHERS RESOURCES</b> Manitoba Council for International Cooperation..... 10
<b>EDUCATIONAL SUPPLIES AND EQUIPMENT</b> Quality Classrooms ..... 32	<b>INDIGENOUS EDUCATION</b> Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba ... 33	<b>TRAINING FOR EDUCATORS ABOUT FACILITATING SEX ED.</b> Sexuality Education Resource Centre..... 29
	<b>INDIGENOUS EDUCATION SUPPLIES</b> FN Supply and Utility ..... 26	<b>TREATY KNOWLEDGE CENTRE</b> Treaty Relations Commission of Manitoba..... 17
	<b>INSPIRE RECONCILIATION IN YOUR CLASSROOM</b> The Gord Downie and Chanie Wenjack Fund ... 33	<b>TUTORS</b> Grant's Tutoring..... 4
		<b>WATER BOTTLE FILLING STATIONS</b> Dobbin Sales ..... IBC

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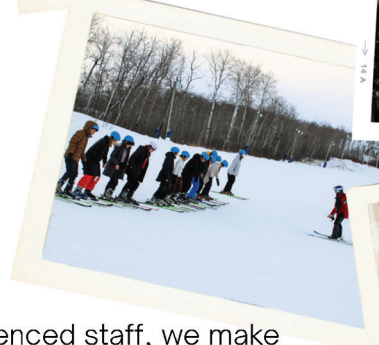
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