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Spring 2018

The official magazine of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents



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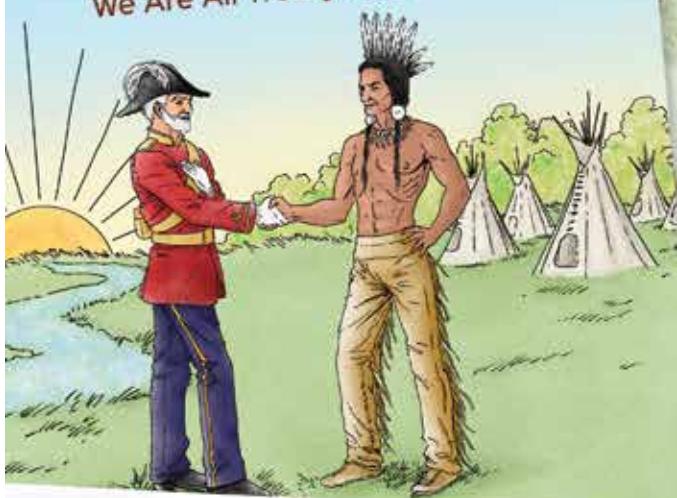
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**MASS Journal**

Published For:

**The Manitoba Association of School Superintendents**

900 St. Mary's Road  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R2M 3R3

Phone: (204) 219-7059

Fax: (204) 487-7974

E-mail: ken.klassen@mass.mb.ca

Web: www.mass.mb.ca

Published By:

**Matrix Group Publishing Inc.**

**Return Undeliverable Addresses to:**

**309 Youville Street  
Winnipeg, MB R2H 2S9**

Toll free: (866) 999-1299

Toll free fax: (866) 244-2544

www.matrixgroupinc.net

Canada Post Mail Publications

Agreement Number: 40609661

**President & CEO**

Jack Andress

**Operations Manager**

Shoshana Weinberg

sweinberg@matrixgroupinc.net

**Publisher**

Jessica Potter

**Editor-In-Chief**

Shannon Savory

ssavory@matrixgroupinc.net

**Senior Editor**

Alexandra Kozub

akozub@matrixgroupinc.net

**Finance/Administration**

Pat Andress, Nathan Redekop,

Lloyd Weinberg

accounting@matrixgroupinc.net

**Director of Marketing & Circulation**

Lloyd Weinberg

distribution@matrixgroupinc.net

**Sales Manager – Winnipeg**

Neil Gottfred

**Sales Manager – Hamilton**

Jeff Cash

**Matrix Group Publishing Inc.**

**Account Executives**

Andrew Lee, Bonnie Petrovsky, Brenda McPhee, Brian MacIntyre, Cheryl Klassen, Colleen Bell, Frank Kenyeres, Jason Wikis, Jim Hamilton, Julie Welsh, Renée Kent, Rob Gibson, Sandra Kirby, Tanina Di Piazza

**Advertising Design**

James Robinson

**Layout & Design**

Cody Chomiak

**For advertising information contact**

**Matrix Group Publishing Inc. at**

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# MASS Journal

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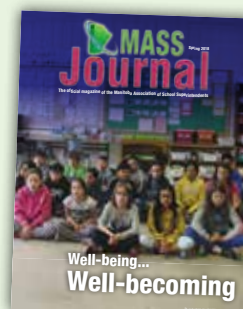
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**On the cover:** This issue's cover showcases students at Stanley Knowles School in Winnipeg, Manitoba, practicing mindfulness. Educators are employing mindfulness as a tool to help students focus and remain calm so that they can better manage the pressures of life. Photo by Alexandra Walld.





# Education That Works

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**W**elcome. I am pleased to present the spring issue of *The MASS Journal* on the theme Well-being and Well-becoming. These terms have moved to a place of prominence in the education milieu. Educational leaders and policy makers are sitting up and taking notice of their importance in the lives of children and adults.

A decade ago, *well-being and well-becoming* would have been foreign in school and division planning. As I reflect on my beginning years in educational leadership, the terms would not have been on my radar, especially the latter term—well-becoming, but the elements required to foster well-being would have been evident. Elements such as providing safe, nurturing learning environments, promoting positive relationships, and supporting the development of the whole child—mind, body and spirit—foster student well-being and well-becoming. Focusing on each is not necessarily new work, but it has taken on greater importance in schools.

MASS believes that the well-being of students is essential for student success, both academically and socially. The mandate of the MASS Mental Health and Well-being focus group is to take leadership in the area of well-being by collaborating with the Education for Sustainable Well-Being Research Group at the University of Manitoba and the Department of Education and Training to develop tools and indicators for assessing the well-being and well-becoming of students. Students with a strong sense of well-being perform better, create strong community connections, build and maintain healthy relationships and lead responsible lives.

We need to create students' positive sense of well-being by focusing on developing the learners' cognitive, emotional, social and physical well-being, in safe and welcoming learning environments. This work has already begun, as you will note in the articles highlighted in this edition. The articles examine work in the areas

*Continued on page 8*

**B**onjour. Je suis ravie de vous présenter le numéro printanier du *The MASS Journal*, qui a pour thème le bien-être et le bien-être en devenir, deux termes qui ont pris de l'importance dans le milieu de l'éducation. Les leaders pédagogiques et les décideurs se redressent et constatent leur importance dans la vie des enfants et des adultes.

Il y a une décennie, le bien-être et le bien-être en devenir auraient été étrangers à la planification scolaire et divisionnaire. En réfléchissant à mes premières années de leadership pédagogique, je me dis que ces termes n'auraient pas retenu mon attention, surtout le second, le bien-être en devenir, mais que les aspects requis pour favoriser le bien-être m'auraient semblé évidents. Leur procurer un environnement d'apprentissage sûr et stimulant, encourager les relations positives et soutenir le développement intégral de l'enfant, c'est-à-dire physique, mental et spirituel, voilà autant d'aspects qui favorisent le bien-être et le bien-être en devenir des élèves. Privilégier chacun d'eux n'a rien de nouveau, mais a pris une importance accrue dans les écoles.

À la Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS), nous croyons que le bien-être des élèves est essentiel à leur réussite, tant à l'école que dans la société. Aussi, le groupe de discussion sur la santé mentale et le bien-être du MASS a pour mandat de faire preuve de leadership en matière de bien-être en collaborant avec le groupe de recherche en éducation pour un bien-être durable (Education for Sustainable Well-Being Research Group) de l'Université du Manitoba et avec le ministère de l'Éducation, de la Formation professionnelle et de la Jeunesse pour mettre au point des outils et des indicateurs permettant d'évaluer le degré de bien-être de bien-être en devenir des élèves. Ceux d'entre eux qui ont un fort sentiment de bien-être affichent un meilleur rendement scolaire, créent des liens communautaires solides, nouent

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of advocating for well-being at the local and national levels, providing promising programs that promote well-being in students, staff and leaders, and examining the importance of positive mental health and well-being.

We have started this important journey and we need to build on the momentum we've started. This will require continued effort in building our capacity to provide quality learning environments which allow students to flourish, to reach their full potential and to have the skills necessary to seize the opportunities that their future brings.

**Donna Davidson**

President of MASS

Superintendent, Mountain View School Division

*Suite de la page 7*

et maintiennent de saines relations et mènent une vie responsable.

Nous nous devons de créer un sentiment de bien-être positif chez les élèves en nous efforçant de susciter chez les apprenants un état de bien-être sur les plans cognitif, émotionnel, social et physique dans un environnement d'apprentissage sûr et accueillant. Un tel travail est déjà en cours comme vous le constaterez à la lecture des articles mis en vedette dans ce numéro, qui traitent des efforts consacrés à la promotion du bien-être aux échelons local et national, à la prestation de programmes prometteurs favorisant le bien-être des élèves, du personnel et des leaders, et à l'examen de l'importance d'une santé mentale et d'un bien-être positifs.

Nous avons entrepris cette démarche importante et nous nous devons de poursuivre sur notre lancée. Cela exigera des efforts soutenus pour renforcer nos capacités à offrir un environnement d'apprentissage de qualité qui permet aux élèves de s'épanouir, de développer pleinement leur potentiel et d'acquérir les compétences dont ils ont besoin pour saisir les occasions que l'avenir leur offrira.

**Donna Davidson**

Présidente du MASS

Surintendante, Division scolaire de Mountain View





Today's success in these initiatives is bound to have positive ripple effects in our communities and beyond, for years to come.



Les réussites d'aujourd'hui dans ces initiatives auront certainement des retombées positives en chaîne dans nos communautés et au-delà dans les années à venir.

**A**s Manitoba's Minister of Education and Training, I am pleased to express appreciation to the members of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) for your leadership and dedication to our provincial education community.

Our government strongly supports the value of quality education and training in promoting personal empowerment and setting the foundation for a bright future for all Manitobans.

I commend you for choosing to focus on well-being and well-becoming in this edition. Encouraging wellness helps students live happier, healthier lifestyles, which contributes to their personal and academic success. Increasing public awareness of mental health also helps alleviate social stigma and reminds those who struggle with these issues that they are not alone and help is available.

Accordingly, one of my department's K-12 priority areas is citizenship, sustainability and well-being—all considered essential to preparing our young people to be respectful, active global citizens. Today's success in these initiatives is bound to have positive ripple effects in our communities and beyond, for years to come.

Working together, we are making progress in ensuring our province's education and training system is inclusive and responsive to the evolving needs of students, teachers and parents, as well as in tune with the changing needs of the provincial and global marketplaces.

My department staff and I value our collaboration with MASS members, knowing our ultimate success will be the result of a complete team effort. Thank you for your continuing contribution to education excellence.

**Honourable Ian Wishart, Minister**  
Manitoba Education and Training

**E**n ma qualité de ministre de l'Éducation et de la Formation du Manitoba, je suis heureux de présenter mes salutations aux membres de la Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) et de les féliciter pour leur leadership et leurs efforts soutenus dans le milieu de l'éducation de notre province.

Notre gouvernement appuie fortement l'importance d'une éducation et d'une formation de qualité dans la promotion de l'autonomie personnelle et dans l'installation des bases d'un avenir meilleur pour l'ensemble des Manitobains.

Je vous adresse mes félicitations d'avoir choisi de consacrer vos efforts au bien-être et au bien-devenir dans cette édition. Favoriser le bien-être aide les élèves à vivre plus heureux et à adopter des modes de vie plus sains; ce qui contribue à leur succès au plan personnel et scolaire. L'augmentation de la sensibilisation du public à la santé mentale aide également à réduire la stigmatisation sociale et rappelle à ceux qui sont aux prises avec ce problème qu'ils ne sont pas seuls et qu'il y a des possibilités d'aide.

Conséquemment, quelques-uns des domaines prioritaires de l'éducation de la maternelle à la 12<sup>e</sup> année de mon ministère sont la citoyenneté, le développement durable et le bien-être - tous considérés comme étant des éléments nécessaires pour préparer nos jeunes à être des citoyens du monde, respectueux et actifs. Les réussites d'aujourd'hui dans ces initiatives auront certainement des retombées positives en chaîne dans nos communautés et au-delà dans les années à venir.

En travaillant ensemble, nous faisons des progrès qui vont nous permettre d'offrir à notre province un système d'éducation et de formation inclusif et répondant aux besoins en évolution des élèves, des enseignants et des parents et également adapté aux besoins changeants des marchés provinciaux et mondiaux.

Le personnel de mon ministère et moi apprécions la collaboration que nous avons avec les membres de la MASS, sachant que notre réussite finale sera le résultat d'un travail d'équipe. Je vous remercie pour votre contribution soutenue à l'excellence en éducation.

**Ian Wishart**  
Ministère de l'Éducation et de la Formation du Manitoba





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# Our National Voice

By Reg Klassen, Frontier School Division

**T**he Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) currently has a strong working relationship and partnership with the Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA). As the past president of MASS and current president-elect of CASSA, I know that finding our way in this partnership over

time has not been without challenges and it could be noted that this has helped forge the strength of the current relationship.

In 2012, CASSA invited the MASS Executive to consider renewing the conversation regarding membership in the organization. The MASS executive agreed to explore the possibility. Years earlier, MASS had withdrawn its CASSA membership for a variety of reasons, most significant being the cost of fees in relation to value received. At that time MASS was not alone in this, as

other provincial affiliates had also decided to withdraw from the national organization.

Armed with an updated constitution, formalized by-laws that govern the association, and a revamped fee structure creating a strong financial position, CASSA reengaged MASS in conversation by inviting them to be its guest at the annual planning session in Toronto. The result of these initial conversations and meetings was a trial membership for one year in 2013-2014. During that year, CASSA's vision, mission and belief statements were reviewed and realigned with an increased focus on becoming a national voice. The following year, MASS joined as a full-fledged member and has played an active role in CASSA ever since.





Since the return of MASS, other provincial and territorial organizations of school system leaders have also renewed their affiliation or joined for the first time. This list includes organizations from Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Yukon, Nunavut, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick. CASSA now represents all 10 provinces and three territories, making CASSA a truly national organization with representation from all parts of the country for the first time in its history.

Being a national organization made up of provincial and territorial bodies is not without its obstacles, not the least of which is the cost of meeting. More challenging is the reality that education in Canada is the responsibility of provincial and territorial governments, each with its own priorities and agendas. Providing voice to issues on a national level in this political environment is not always easily accomplished or accepted. The political environment makes it imperative that CASSA determine what educational issues and themes are common across the jurisdictions.

If CASSA is to be the national voice, it must coordinate for its membership opportunities to collaborate and share the educational challenges from the different political environments they each represent. Emerging from these conversations and discussions are educational themes that are common across the country. Recognizing these themes and their implications for the country is necessary for CASSA if they are to find the authority to speak to these issues with a national voice.

With each provincial and territorial organization having one or two sitting members on the board, the structure of CASSA lends itself well to sharing issues across the country. Each month the board meets via conference call. An integral part of each agenda is the “cross country check-in,” during which each member organization shares recent decisions or events that affect the educational landscape in their jurisdiction. It is from these conversations that CASSA identifies common country-wide educational themes.

### **Across the country, mental health emerges as a major theme**

One recurring theme that has emerged consistently from all parts of the country is that of mental health and well-being. If

In addition to focusing school system leaders on common educational issues, CASSA helps prevent provincial and territorial school system leaders from existing and working in isolation. Our shared knowledge is more likely to provide solutions to the many challenges inherent in education.

divisions and districts are to find their way through the complexities of mental health and well-being, it is imperative that system leaders understand the key issues and resulting action for their schools and divisions.

MASS has played an integral role in facilitating the conversation about mental health and well-being at both the provincial and national level. The MASS position paper entitled, *Mental Health Framework for Students* (2012) has made a significant contribution to this dialogue. The paper states that the needs of children and youth in Manitoba are varied. Interventions are often delayed due to long wait lists and a lack of communication and collaboration between different services and systems.

The strength of the position paper lies in a six-point comprehensive Call to Action that underlines the critical need for a common vision, shared responsibilities and harmonized actions among education, health and all other provincial sectors, for progress in school-based mental health and wellness to be made (MASS, 2012).

The complexities of the health of our country are such that many leaders and organizations often become entangled in bureaucracy, skipping from program to program, hoping to find some magic formula that cannot be found without the collective effort of all citizenry. This takes on a new level of urgency when we remind ourselves that national data indicates that 20 per cent of our children are languishing and experiencing significant risk factors in mental health. The World Health Organization further emphasises the seriousness of the situation by predicting that by 2020, neuropsychiatric disorders will swell by 50 per cent in children. This poses

an ever-increasing challenge for school system administrators as they are expected to lead their organization through the myriad of strategies and responses.

It is a known fact that dollars invested in our children early in life pays dividends in the future and this is no less true for education than for health. Dr. Stan Kutcher states that we can't separate them and that we need to build models that link health and school (Kutcher, 2016). The MASS position paper supports the position of the Healthy Child Manitoba Office (HCMO) that, “Schools are in a unique position to have a positive influence on the health of children, youth and their families.” It is incumbent for educational systems to find ways to partner with health care agencies and organizations to provide the best education and care for students. This infers significant responsibility for school system administrators.

### **New funding available for First Nations children**

New on the national scene in health is *Jordon's Principle – A Child-First Initiative* funding, received by many First Nation Communities. One of the key operating principles is that the funding is equally accessible for all First Nations children, whether residing on or off reserve and regardless of need. This means that all the stringent funding restrictions that once applied have been lifted. A second principle ensures there are no gaps in government services for First Nations children.

According to their website, “from July 2016 to January 2018, there have been more than 36,000 requests for products, services and supports approved for First

Nations children under *Jordan's Principle – A Child-First Initiative*. These include mental health supports, medical equipment, speech therapy, educational supports and more,” (Government of Canada, 2018). This funding, now available for First Nations children in Canadian schools, provides a marvelous opportunity for schools, communities and health care agencies to work together to create programs that otherwise would not be available for many First Nation children. This funding adds another layer of complexity for school system leaders as they do their part to ensure

that funding finds its way to helping First Nation students.

### Addressing mental health in Canadian schools

In this context, CASSA, in conjunction with provincial and territorial school system leaders, plays an important role. Not only is CASSA bringing voice to educational issues at the national level, it also has a mission, “to strengthen the capacity of school system leaders and influence the directions that impact education and student learning” (CASSA) 2017). To that end, CASSA released a discussion

paper in 2017, entitled *System Leadership in School Mental Health in Canada*. The paper makes the point that school system leadership has been identified as a critical mediating influence for addressing school mental health, but to date, there has been a lack of national leadership and provision of related resources for leaders (Short, Finn, Ferguson, 2017, p. 1).

The challenge for CASSA is to create opportunities for system leaders to increase their capacity to lead the health conversation and planning in their district or division. What are the resources and tools that they will require to bring about systemic change that will result in healthier students in their system?

Both the MASS and CASSA discussion papers, even though differently focused, have outlined a three-tier pyramid model that will help guide school system leaders as they lead their students, staff and community through mental health education and programming. There is a strong similarity between the two models indicating related research foundations.

These parallel structures acknowledge that different organizations are recognizing similar systems of approach to mental health in schools:

1. Tier 1 outlines mental health promotion and education, well-being literacy and social and physical environments that involve everyone in the school;
2. Tier 2 involves targeted reduction of risk factors, selective interventions for social-emotional problems and support involving the entire staff but with more defined roles for some; and
3. Tier 3 outlines specific interventions that involve assessment and treatment which are dependent on the implementation of comprehensive Tier 1 strategies.

### Gathering to further conversation

CASSA's choice of recent and upcoming national conference themes, acknowledges the critical importance of children's health and well-being, including *Hearts and Minds Creating a Culture of Caring* (2016, Winnipeg), *Healthy Schools, Healthy Communities, Healthy Futures* (2017, Halifax) and the upcoming *Supporting Each Student* (July 2018, Ottawa). These recent three-day conferences have featured leading experts in children and youth mental health. They are rich in learning, collaborating and gaining new insights as school system leaders grapple with how best to lead the mental health work in their division or district.

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Each year the CASSA board meets to review and evaluate the work of the previous year. Paramount to every discussion is the focus on providing school system leaders with insight and learning opportunities so they can effectively lead their organization. Current planning sessions are designed to gain deeper understanding of school mental health and wellness initiatives from across the country. Mental health is clearly a nation-wide priority, but each province and territory has chosen different strategies to address the issues surrounding mental health and well-being in their systems.

CASSA brings school system leaders together from across our great nation to learn from each other, share successes and build leadership capacity. In addition to focusing school system leaders on common educational issues, CASSA helps prevent provincial and territorial school system leaders from existing and working in isolation. Our shared knowledge is more likely to provide solutions to the many challenges inherent in education.

According to Steven Colpitts, a previous CASSA board member, "CASSA is truly a forum for pan-Canadian exchanges on issues and best practices that affect all district leaders. Whether you are from the east or from the west, the current educational challenges can be similar. Some of the differences speak to our rich territorial and cultural diversity. CASSA unites Canadian school leaders with a common goal of doing what is best for students to succeed!" (Colpitts, 2015, P. 4).

We are educating and preparing our children for a world we expect will be vastly different from our current reality. If we want students to live in a democratic society that provides justice, equity and health for all citizens, we will need to teach them what it means to be well and to look after each other so that they can all flourish and live a good life. ■

*Reg Klassen is currently the Chief Superintendent of Frontier School Division and is past President of MASS and president-elect of CASSA. The Manitoba affiliate of CASSA is also represented by the current MASS President and Executive Director, and by Mike Borgford, who serves as the CASSA representative from Western Canada on the American School Superintendents' Association (AASA).*

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# Supporting the Well-being of Educational System Leaders



**By Celia Caetano-Gomes, Winnipeg School Division, Donna Davidson, Mountain View School Division, and Ken Klassen, MASS**

**T**he World Health Organization (2013) has defined mental health as, “a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community,” (page 6).<sup>1</sup>

When considering the well-being of professionals, it is important to reflect on the work environment and membership organizations, which contribute to the well-being of employees and individuals. Established in 1968, the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) provides leadership and responsive support to superintendents, assistant superintendents and directors in public education. This work contributes to and promotes the well-being of senior administrators in Manitoba’s public education system.

Mental health and well-being are increasingly recognized across the country as a fundamental basis for flourishing as an individual or as an organization. Healthy Families BC (2017) identified key strategies to well-being as, “connect, be active, notice, keep learning and give,” (paragraph 3).<sup>2</sup>

These same strategies can be applied to the organization, priority areas and advocacy of MASS. The Manitoba Association of School Superintendents has articulated core beliefs about public education and has committed to leading learning, improving student achievement and advocating for equity. These core values contribute to the well-being and culture of the organization and its members.

## **Connecting and building relationships**

MASS supports educational system leaders (superintendents, assistant superintendents and directors) to learn together, collaborate and advocate for public education. The organization supports new members with the transition to the role of educational system leader, offers opportunities to work on priority areas and leads professional learning. Through these opportunities, members are encouraged to connect and build relationships while sharing experiences and successes across 37 school divisions.

One of the central mandates of this organization has always been to provide job-related services and supports to senior administrators as they manage their increasingly complex and challenging roles as educational

and organizational leaders. This includes support for individual member concerns, such as contracts and conditions of employment, providing targeted professional learning in both leadership and management, and advocating on behalf of members for a diverse and inclusive public education system based on equity and quality.

All the activities of this organization take place within a broader desire to bring individual members together in a meaningful way, to create caring and supportive networks and to forge a common sense of purpose and commitment as a group. Senior administrators face daily decisions in their home divisions, which are challenging at many levels, including personal and ethical engagement in “doing the right things, for the right reasons, at the right time.” Meeting and sharing in a supportive group environment helps individual members grow both professionally and personally.

As an organization, MASS strives to be democratic and non-hierarchical. In a membership that includes superintendents, assistant superintendents and directors, no distinction is made based on role. It is common for assistant superintendents to chair committees and regional groups, and they are just as likely as superintendents to be elected to serve as MASS president.



A commitment to nurturing relationships has been well established by this organization. The executive invites new members to a welcoming dinner and a mentoring program to ensure that new members are well-supported and integrated into the membership. Professional learning opportunities purposefully mix new and veteran members as they learn from each other. All events are planned carefully to address priority areas, share division perspectives and strengthen the senior administration network.

### **Noticing within and across systems and roles**

MASS's Summer Institute brings members and educational partners together to work with a national or global facilitator to reflect on research and the Manitoba context. Through conversations, reflection and critical thinking, members are challenged to gain perspective and develop plans of action. This process models the element of noticing what is around us and acknowledging strengths and experiences.

For example, the 2017 Summer Institute with Simon Breakspear offered members the opportunity to reflect on programs currently being offered in school divisions to support student learning while using strategies to be mindful and honouring of those that have impacted students and staff. It is this commitment that contributes to the well-being of members and the organization.

Through member services, MASS provides additional supports to new members as they enter senior school administration positions. This mentorship program provides an overview of public education in Manitoba, legislation and budgets, policy development and job-embedded training. The well-being of new senior administrators is linked to strong supports within and outside the workplace. MASS fulfills this role by connecting new members with an experienced superintendent and establishing opportunities to learn from the broader senior administration network.

In addition to the mentorship program, the ethical leadership initiative supported members working in small cohorts to reflect on their role, study ethical decision-making cycles, analyse case studies and develop core values. This initiative led to shared understanding, a culture of trust and strengthened sense of belonging.

Job-embedded learning that is just in time and relevant, strengthens the value and engagement of superintendents. The structured mentorship, ethical leadership initiative and Summer Institute contribute to personal and professional growth while building on the expertise of its members and collective responsibility.

### **Keep learning**

Coming together to learn together is critical to the success of any professional organization. MASS values the importance of professional learning and this is evident in the plethora of professional learning opportunities provided by the organization. The Leadership Development Committee spearheads one of these learning opportunities, the leadership development series. The goals of the leadership development sessions address both learning and networking. Each leadership development session focuses on either a managerial undertaking or an educational leadership aspect of the school system leader's role.

The leadership development sessions are purposefully designed to hear voices from the field, followed by input from an external or internal source, and then they are completed with group discussions regarding the information and what it means to each member, as a leader. Over the past five years, the sessions have addressed topics such as student success, human resources, financial resources, political realities, instructional leadership, crisis management, communication and the law, and managing the message. The sessions allowed for opportunities to network and to share the topic material with others as it related to each leader's current circumstance.

The Professional Learning Committee coordinates presenters, book clubs, activities and discussions with the support of other MASS priority committees. This committee is critical in ensuring a strong focus on addressing student and system learning, as well as identifying and strengthening effective practices. In the past, we have targeted mathematical learning programs, early years models, outreach programs, mental health interventions, EAL strategies and Indigenous education policies and initiatives. Members have reported that the leadership development and professional learning opportunities are invaluable as they share, reflect and learn from each other thus strengthening their ability to lead effectively and in turn contribute to their well-being.

### **Giving and advocating for public education**

Advocacy is one of the organization's core mandates. MASS is committed to giving back, and influencing the political agenda to support and ensure equitable and quality educational programming is available to all Manitoba children. Advocacy for strong and broad support for public education brings members together with a common purpose and mission.

At the local level, MASS facilitates understanding of fundamental and emergent societal and educational issues among our members. The organization supports individual members to develop a strong voice for public education in their school communities. MASS produced a series of videos on the importance of public education. These videos were extremely informative and supported members in advocating for a robust, diverse, publicly-funded education system for all children.

Additionally, position and discussion papers are published by MASS and are instrumental in supporting members as they advocate for strategies pertinent to address issues or challenge of public education. Whether it be early learning, Indigenous education, mental health or student assessment, the papers are a valuable resource for leaders of school systems, as they strive to meet the diverse learning needs of all Manitoba children and address the issues facing public education.

MASS meets regularly with educational partners to advocate for the importance of providing quality public education. MASS embraces a "can do" mindset and members thoughtfully, deliberately and unequivocally strive to make education reform a priority. By working tirelessly with other educational stakeholders, a strong culture of valuing education is created and an alliance of advocating for all Manitoba children is strengthened.

Membership in the Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA) and Canadian Education Association (CEA), provides MASS with an opportunity to contribute to a national and international voice on public education. CASSA is a national organization and its purpose is to promote and support quality education for the success of each student, while CEA is a network of educators in Canada with a focus on education and student learning.

Involvement with CEA offers members another forum to share their views on the

*Continued on page 22*



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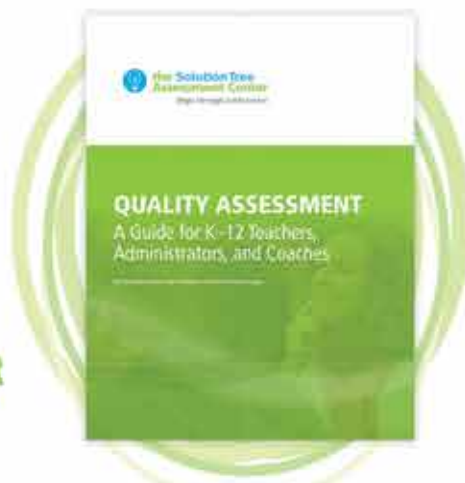
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importance of education and raise awareness of Manitoba issues and successes. Memberships in CASSA and CEA provide MASS members with relevant and pertinent research on best-practices, latest policy issues in education, as well as an opportunity to influence educational direction in Canada.

## Being active

On a daily basis, members face the very real occupational hazard of sitting in back-to-back meetings from early morning to late in the evening. MASS recognizes that our events should not replicate this environment. Planning for all professional learning events and members' sessions includes consideration of improving the emotional and even physical well-being of members.

Agendas are reviewed to ensure there is a balance of structured learning, responding to individual and group members' feedback and opportunities for making connections with colleagues. Interaction has become increasingly important, with round table talk and large group discussion replacing longer formal presentations.

To combat the negative physical impact of a traditional meeting structure, MASS encourages members to *Get a Life*—an initiative that emphasizes the importance of physical and emotional health and a better work-life balance. Short interactive sessions of 20 to 30 minutes have included physical fitness, yoga mindfulness and healthy cooking with student chefs. The Summer Institute also builds in time for golf, cycling, walking or self-directed physical activity during non-learning times. Members are encouraged to bring their families and events for the evening are planned with families in mind.

## MASS and the future: Building on well-being

As we look ahead to the future, MASS will continue to pursue meaningful leadership opportunities for members. The purpose and design of the organization have contributed to the well-being of members and it is the responsibility of the executive to advocate and bring the voice of all members across the different regions to the discussion. It is only through this ongoing commitment that all members will feel their priorities and challenges are being represented.

Through fostering relationships and identifying a common vision, members are engaged in professional learning, advocacy and personal growth. It is key to continue to identify MASS leaders to facilitate learning for members and build on each others' experiences in areas such as Indigenous learners and education, mental health, inclusion and early learning. By acknowledging the strengths and experience of members in the organization, MASS further contributes to the well-being of senior administrators.

MASS has established a strong network of educational partners provincially and nationally which will need to be strengthened. With the evolving complex nature of education and its learners, it is integral that partners and agencies work together to address barriers and identify strategic plans of action. It is through ongoing efforts of the MASS president, vice-president and directors that new partners will be identified and nurtured. As such, these networks will offer opportunities for connecting and shared advocacy.

Senior school administrators will continue to be faced with unique challenges, competing portfolios and increased public accountability, which may isolate them from other staff in their own organization. MASS will continue to contribute to the well-being of its members by creating a culture of trust, collaboration and

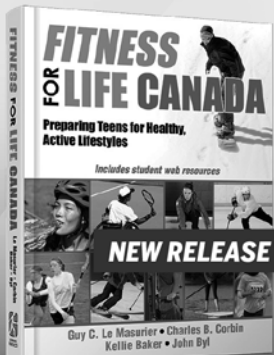
strong leadership. Core values, member sessions and position papers bring the members together and lead to a strengthened sense of purpose across school divisions.

Through MASS organized initiatives, education system leaders have an opportunity to learn, problem-solve and flourish together. The well-being of its members will have a significant impact on the superintendents, assistant superintendents and directors' ability to advocate for equity and quality public education. It is only through purposeful attention to learning and leading that MASS and its members will continue to thrive and together contribute to the well-being of the educational system leaders network. ■

*Celia Caetano-Gomes is the Superintendent of Education Services-Curriculum and Learning Innovation at Winnipeg School Division. Donna Davidson is Superintendent/CEO of Mountain View School Division and current President of MASS. Ken Klassen is Executive Director of MASS.*

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# Promoting Positive Mental Health Across Manitoba

*Mental health is the capacity of each and all of us to feel, think and act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face. It is a positive sense of emotional and spiritual well-being that respects the importance of culture, equity, social justice, interconnections and personal dignity.*

– Manitoba Association of School Superintendents, Belief Statement

**By Verland Force, Seven Oaks School Division, MASS Mental Health and Well-being Focus Committee**

**S**chools play an essential role in promoting student health and well-being. Over the past five years, the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) has taken a leadership role in promoting positive mental health and well-being for Manitoba children and youth. MASS has taken an active role in advocating for a provincial framework for child and youth mental health promotion. In addition, MASS representatives advocate in support of mental health and well-being initiatives at the federal level through the Canadian Association of School Systems Administrators (CASSA).

In partnership with outside organizations, MASS continues to stay current with mental health research and best practices that fit within the framework of the *Comprehensive Collaborative Mental Health Service Framework*. This multi-tiered model continues to be identified as the most promising model for school-based mental health services. The framework consists of three tiers of support: universal, selective and intensive.

**1. Tier 1:** Universal interventions are intended for all children, youth and their families. They include mental health promotion,

education programs such as suicide prevention, drug and alcohol awareness, social and emotional skill development, professional learning for staff and creating positive school and community environments. Schools have a vital role to play in the provision of universal interventions to promote mental health.

**2. Tier 2:** Selective interventions are offered to children and youth who are at risk for or are beginning to exhibit signs of serious mental health concerns. Such interventions can be offered in small group settings or to individual students. School-based staff and community health professionals can provide selective interventions to students.

**3. Tier 3:** Intensive interventions are required when mental health concerns are critical and result in social or educational disruption. A small proportion of the student population exhibits severe maladaptive behaviours and requires intensive treatment by qualified mental health professionals. These services go beyond the scope and role of school division personnel. Educators are not qualified to provide treatment for serious and chronic mental illness. Collaboration and communication

between systems of support are essential for successful long-term treatment (MASS position paper).

The multi-tiered framework recognizes that, “student health and well-being cannot be accomplished in isolation from community agencies and resources. To ensure that all students receive the right level of services at the right time, these school-based multi-tiered systems must be nestled within a broader system of care that includes community partnerships working closely alongside community and health care organizations to ensure support for students who need more intensive clinical supports,” (Short 2016).

In response to a broader system of care, MASS drafted a position paper in 2012 entitled, *Mental Health Framework for Students*. The paper sets out to describe the health needs of Manitoba’s children and youth, identify current challenges, and make recommendations for comprehensive responses. The position paper focused on Tier 3 in the development and implementation of the *Comprehensive Collaborative Mental Health Framework* for the province. It includes the following components;

- **Provincial plan:** A strategic, provincial plan for a comprehensive, collaborative

three-tiered mental health framework for all children and youth (ages 0 to 18) developed and implemented by all Ministries of the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet.

- **Timely and universal access to mental health professionals:** Timely, responsive access to the services of mental health professionals for all Manitoba's children and youth.
- **Psychiatric services:** Enhanced psychiatric services for all Manitoba's children and youth requiring Tier 3 intensive interventions and supports.

- **Collaborative community-based planning:** On-going school-based collaboration with mental health professionals to plan and deliver universal, selective and intensive tiers of programming, supports and services for children and youth.
- **Communication protocol:** A communication protocol, including common language, to improve the communication between mental health professionals and all inter-sectoral partners.
- **Equitable services for all Manitoba school divisions:** Equitable mental health

services for the rural, northern and urban regions of the province.

MASS reaffirms the positions expressed in the 2012 position paper and continues to recognize the importance of working in partnership with government and community agencies in providing the necessary services for intensive interventions. MASS will continue to take an active leadership role in pressing the current provincial government to honour the long-term commitment to the provincial framework for child and youth mental health promotion and services including provincial budgetary measures.

As a further support to the 2012 position paper, a MASS *Well-being and Well-becoming Comprehensive Research and Support Document* is being developed. MASS, in consultation with Thomas Falkenberg and Grace Ukasoanya (from the University of Manitoba), will examine positive mental health promotion through the concept of student well-being and well-becoming.

Substantial progress in mental health research has been made with respect to moving away from the conceptualization of mental health as a state of absence of mental illness. In a background paper in support of the development of a MASS supporting position paper, Falkenberg and Ukasoanya describe student well-being and well-becoming as a more comprehensive, holistic approach to children and youth's mental health.

Student well-being and well-becoming is more concerned with student experiences as they live their lives as students (their well-being) and with the development of students' capabilities to live a flourishing life now and in the future (their well-becoming). This shift moves to a child centered model with a focus on quality of life and child development versus an individual, clinical model.

With a shift to a more child centered model, a reconceptualizing of student success will need to be examined. From a lens of well-being and well-becoming, students' flourishing in schools and the development of their capabilities needed to live a flourishing life—now and in the future—should be part of what defines success.

With the re-conception of student success comes the re-examining of the school-ecological factors in promoting student well-being and well-becoming, as well as key indicators of success. As earlier noted, mental health literature is clear in identifying schools as an excellent venue for promoting positive mental

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*"Based on our mandate from First Nations leaders in Manitoba, our organization will continue to work with First Nations to develop a supportive school system that will enable our children and grandchildren to achieve their dreams and visions. As stated by our visionary First Nations leaders in "Wahbung" (1971)—we believe in education, and through education, our young people can acquire the tools they need to succeed in life."*

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health. We know when students are doing well in school they are more likely to be successful in their curricular learning.

Research will indicate that school culture and school climate provide support and risk factor for individual students' well-being and well-becoming. It further states that school culture and climate are impacted not just by what is taught and done, but also by how it is taught and done.

The identification of key indicators is important in assessing student success. Assessing student well-being and well-becoming needs to be systematically and regularly assessed in order to inform practice. Assessing and monitoring of students' well-being also needs to include student voice as well as reflect the diversity of the student population within the school, division and province.

The Pan Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health (JCSH) has developed and revised key indicators of success through a *Core Indicator Model* (CIM) 2016 that supports the concept of well-being and well-becoming. Three categories of indicators were identified:

1. Environmental, which includes a person's physical surroundings that extends to the social and cultural conditions.
2. Health, that encompasses the physical, mental and social well-being.
3. Educational indicators that refer to the process of learning: personal growth (learning about oneself in relation to others) and academic (learning about subject matter content).

The concept of student well-being and well-becoming and the reconceptualizing of student success, educational-ecological factors and assessment will be further developed in the *MASS Comprehensive Well-being and Well-becoming Research and Support Paper*.

In further development of the well-being and well-becoming concept, MASS has partnered with the University of Manitoba and Manitoba Education in a three-year pilot project (2017-2020) with a focus on Manitoba middle years students.

Six Manitoba school divisions were selected based on an expression of interest and a demonstrated level of commitment in the division to student well-being. The divisions selected are diverse and are representative of all MASS regions. The intent of the pilot is to:

- Involve Manitoba school divisions and middle schools at the ground level in developing educational practices and assessment tools that promote positive student mental health well-being at the local level.
- Through a collaborative approach, assess the process and outcomes of the working groups to provide a broader approach to mental health well-being practices, key indicators and assessment tools at a provincial level.

MASS is committed to playing a leadership role in student mental health

well-being. It will continue to work in partnership with agencies and resources in providing a comprehensive, collaborative mental health framework for all Manitoba children and youth. ■

*Verland Force is the Assistant Superintendent of Student Services in the Seven Oaks School Division and Chair of the MASS Mental Health and Well-being Focus Committee.*

*To receive the full list of references for this article, email Editor-in-Chief Shannon Savory, at [ssavory@matrixgroupinc.net](mailto:ssavory@matrixgroupinc.net).*



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# Mental Wellness and Well-becoming in Pembina Trails



*Mental health discussions were added as part of regular P.E. classes.*

**By Geoff Brewster, Whyte Ridge Elementary, and Jane Friesen, Pembina Trails School Division**

In Pembina Trails, our journey of mental wellness and well-becoming began in the fall of 2009, bringing a group of staff together to explore and establish a divisional voice and strategic plan for our schools and community.

This plan was spearheaded by our Senior Years Leadership Council that had examined the work

of Dr. Stan Kutcher, recognizing that good mental health was an essential component of overall health. It was recommended that as a division there needed to be increased understanding by educators, youth and parents, of mental wellness and well-becoming.

At that time a divisional steering committee followed up with a needs assessment and

established goals in the areas of initiatives/programming in mental wellness, organizing professional learning for staff and students, collecting data that informed our practice and expanding our outside partnerships.

One ongoing item of discussion within the mental health steering committee was how to further develop mental health education in our schools. In Pembina Trails we strongly believe that mental health education plays a crucial role in providing relevant mental health information to students so that they can make appropriate healthy choices about their mental health. Through discussions, our mental health steering committee approved an initiative to create a mental health curricular support document to assist educators in teaching mental health within their school communities.

The mental health steering committee also felt strongly that teachers within Pembina Trails School Division should have a voice in creating the divisional mental health curricular resource. We believed that having a team of teachers involved in the process was critical in making the document relevant and immediately impactful for both teachers and students.

Our research and writing team was composed of physical education teachers and guidance counselors from a range of Grade 7 to 12 schools from Pembina Trails. These teachers developed lessons specific to mental health education which met the existing Manitoba physical education and health education grade level specific learning outcomes. The lessons became part of document called *Mental Health: Curriculum Resource* for Grade 7 to Senior 2.

The *Mental Health: Curriculum Resource* for Grade 7 to Senior 2 is organized to provide teachers with suggestions for instruction, assessment and resources to help students develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes they need at various stages of their lives to make informed and health-enhancing decisions related to mental health. It is based around the four pillars of positive mental health, stigma, mental illness and help seeking strategies. The lessons challenge students to:

- Examine their assumptions about mental health and wellness;
- Combat stigma;



- Be aware of warning signs that may indicate a mental health and wellness concern for themselves or their peers; and
- Identify appropriate mental health resources in both their school and community.

Four or five lessons were created at each grade level with at least one lesson per grade level focusing on each of the four pillars.

The mental health resource was successfully piloted in physical education classes in three high schools and five middle schools within Pembina Trails. Pilot schools were provided with the opportunity to create conversations around mental health in formats that best fit with the existing school culture and to use the *Mental Health: Curriculum Resource* lessons as the backdrop around which to frame those conversations.

All teachers responsible for teaching mental health in Pembina Trails School Division were strongly encouraged to take Mental Health First Aid as a precursor. Teachers were adamant that having Mental Health First Aid training greatly assisted them in establishing a level of comfort and understanding of mental health and illness.

In September 2016, after feedback from pilot schools, Pembina Trails School Division divisionally implemented the *Mental Health: Curriculum Resource* for Grade 7 to Senior 2. Teachers have remarked on how the lessons acted as catalysts for honest and thoughtful conversations around mental health and wellness. Additionally, teachers have remarked that students have demonstrated strategies for mental health self-care and are capable of having conversations about mental health. They are empathetic towards persons with a mental health concern and are willing to initiate and/or participate in initiatives promoting positive mental health and combating the stigma surrounding mental illness.

As a school division, we have educated our school teams over the past four years through Family of School sessions that targeted divisional topics such as mental health literacy, understanding trauma of our newcomer students, school-based programming (i.e. PATHS), sources of strength and Project 11. We continue to review programs that adhere to “fidelity” criteria and diversity.

These Family of School sessions have equipped school teams with common messages towards flourishing and provided materials that school teams shared with entire school communities. Our steering committee has been comprised of internal and external



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partnerships that have enhanced our division's programming.

The Winnipeg Regional Health Authority's (WRHA) perspectives and contributions have been an integral part of extending mental wellness into middle and high school settings. As of 2017, Sources of Strength, a comprehensive wellness program that works to use peer leaders to change norms around codes of silence and help-seeking, was implemented into a middle and high school in partnership with the WRHA. This programming has ignited student voice and built cultures of positive well-being.

Our school-based mental wellness programming incorporates our values of student voice, school voice and divisional voice that are infused in our framework of building safe, caring and inclusive communities within Pembina Trails School Division.

For 2018, Pembina Trails is one of the school divisions working with MASS, the University of Manitoba and Manitoba Education on assessing student well-being. Our topic on transition involves identifying meaningful indicators of student well-being through transition. We are in the process of developing relevant indicators and

assessment tools that will assist us in determining if our student transition processes are effective.

Pembina Trails' journey of infusing mental wellness and well-becoming into the present curriculums and culture of our school communities continues to shape student's self-esteem, self-efficacy and sense of control over their own lives. ■

*Geoff Brewster is the Interim Principal at Whyte Ridge Elementary. Jane Friesen is the Director of Clinical & Extended Services for the Pembina Trails School Division.*



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# Working for Wellness in the Frontier School Division

By Robert N. Chartrand and Cindy Allum-Searle, Frontier School Division; and Laurie Fourre, Grand Rapids School

In September 2017, Frontier School Division and five other school divisions within the province responded to an invitation to participate in the Well-being and Well-becoming (WB2) Working Group, jointly chaired by Ken Klassen (MASS), Thomas Falkenberg (the University of Manitoba) and Rob Santos (Manitoba Education and Training).

This was our mission statement: “The intent of the work is to jointly identify meaningful indicators of student well-being and develop tools to assess student well-being in Manitoba based on the indicators. The assessment data would be collected for a range of purpose that the group establishes, such as formative assessment and reporting to students, parents, educators and communities at large. The long-term goals (three years) centre around integrating student well-being/well-becoming into student success and on-going assessing of student well-being/well-becoming for different purposes at different levels. The short-term goals (one year) centre on at least one round of assessing student well-being/well-becoming and utilization of findings, learning about process (project) and learning from process (participants).”

Frontier is responsible for educating students who live within a huge territory, from the farthest northern region to the farthest southern region and to points east and west of the province; our division covers approximately 75 per cent of Manitoba or 440,000 square kilometres.

In the spring of 2017, after much planning and deliberation with the senior leadership

team, discussions with school committee members and hearing from communities about what is most important in the lives of our students, the Board of Trustees refined the three focus areas of their strategic plan to include, “Wellness: Every school will provide a caring, healthy, safe and inclusive learning and working environment for students, staff and community.”

The outcomes of this focus area include respectful and caring communities, support for students and staff in achieving both healthy lifestyle and mental wellness, and providing safe and secure learning environments conducive to learning.

“Flourishing School Communities” was the theme of this year’s 40th Annual School Committee Conference, which brought together school committee representatives from each of the schools in Frontier School Division. In Linda Ballantyne’s board report as chairperson, she stated, “The wellness focus title is more inclusive in its language, encompassing all aspects of being well.” Our schools have many programs that support our wellness focus area. Wellness is about having the resilience to overcome the most challenging situations life places in our way. It is our expectation that all our staff and students will flourish and are able to accomplish ‘Mino Pimatisowin’ (the good life).”

In the area of physical activity our division supports such activities as Frontier games, high school games, Health Week, the Terry Fox Run, the Manitoba Marathon, and track and field meets. It also includes outdoor education, such as the annual fish derby and canoe clinic training.

Mental wellness programs, such as Friends for Life, Second Step, RespectED, Mental Health First Aid, suicide exploration, and Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women Awareness, guide our students to address those issues that undermine their state of mental wellness. Students participate in character education through the PAX Good Behaviour Game, Seven Teachings and Roots of Empathy, to name a few.

In September 2017, Frontier School Division entered into a partnership with Health Canada—First Nations and Inuit Branch, to participate in the *Jordan’s Principle – A Child-First Initiative*, “Actioning the Dream,” to enhance service coordination, service access resolution and the engagement with First Nations and jurisdictional partners on a long-term approach. The purpose of this initiative is to complement the service delivery model for student services at the school level with a focus on mental wellness through partnerships with government and community partners. To date, a coordinator and five mental wellness workers (one for each of the five areas in Frontier) have been hired and work has begun to roll-out this initiative.

The opportunity to participate in the WB2 Working Group seemed to naturally complement the work that the division has been doing, particularly in terms of furthering our understanding of wellness, well-being and well-becoming and how we continue in our journey to hear the voice of students and respond to

their needs. Specifically, we decided to focus our efforts on the Grade 7 and 8 students at Grand Rapids School. The third largest school in Frontier SD is located approximately 430 kilometers north of Winnipeg and provides nursery to adult education programs for both the community of Grand Rapids and the Misi-pawistik Cree Nation. The initial divisional working team consisted of the area superintendent, the divisional student services coordinator and the school vice-principal.

The first phase for the Frontier working group was to gain a clear understanding of

the intent and both long-term and short-term goals of the WB2 initiative. Given the scope and magnitude of "wellness" (and well-being/well-becoming), we needed to focus our sights on what could be both manageable and achievable, and have direct impact on students. After much reflection and conversation, it was agreed that our guiding principles would include student voice, curriculum connection, building on what we already know and then planning next steps based on the voice of students.

As educators and caregivers, much of what we do is rooted in both the objective and

subjective. Our plans and actions stem from research, best practice and as the adults, knowing "better" than those in our care, all with the best of intentions in mind. In the area of wellness, we continue to know and understand more from research, yet often our day to-day judgement is subjective.

To understand the highly complex nature of wellness we need to be mindful of many environmental factors, yet even then we need to be mindful to hear and listen to the voices of our students or we may completely miss the mark. To that end, it was agreed that we would need to include a survey and focus groups. Only after we gathered the feedback from students could we begin to develop the plan for the next steps.


It also became clear that in order to engage students in conversations and provide feedback it was imperative that the students have a good understanding of what "wellness" means. To engage staff, students and parents there needed to be clear connections to the curriculum so that whatever we were going to undertake was not seen as an "add on."

This led us down the path to review curriculum and therein found clarity and purpose in the Grade 7 and Grade 8 Physical Education/

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Health Education curricula (Personal and Social Management – Knowledge and Skills). Upon further reflection and conversation, we focussed even more so on “belonging” as in the *Circle of Courage* (Brendtro, Brokenleg and Van Bockern) and their reference to the Search Institute’s *Developmental Assets*®. The developmental assets include both internal and external assets as well as context (personal, social, family, school and community).

The next phase involved the working group expanding to include classroom teachers and the physical education teacher,

as well as the counsellor and mental wellness worker. This team collaborated on the teaching and learning that needed to take place, ensuring the students had an understanding of concepts and vocabulary. The students found trust in the school to provide a safe and caring place to participate in conversations and give their voice.

The survey will be completed prior to spring break. The next steps are not known at this time but will be rooted in what we hear from students, who will be included in the planning for how we can engage parents

and perhaps the larger community in our commitment to lifelong learning, citizenship and well-being ... Mino Pimatisowin. ■

*Robert N. Chartrand is the Area 2 Superintendent in Frontier School Division. Cindy Allum-Searle is the Divisional Student Services Coordinator for Frontier School Division. Laurie Fourre is the Vice-Principal for Grand Rapids School.*

*To receive the full list of references for this article, email Editor-in-Chief Shannon Savory, at [ssavory@matrixgroupinc.net](mailto:ssavory@matrixgroupinc.net).*

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# Using Data and a Multi-Faceted Approach to Promote Student Well-being

By Tim De Ruyck, Turtle Mountain School Division

**F**or the past number of years, the mental health and well-being of students has become as much a focus for public school divisions as academic programming. We know student mental health and well-being has a direct impact on student learning and overall success. In a report published by the Manitoba government in June 2011, it is noted that, "one in four Manitobans experienced at least one mental illness diagnosis in a five-year period from 2001 to 2006. This included depression, anxiety, substance abuse, schizophrenia and personality disorder. Estimates suggest that at least 70 per cent of mental health problems and illnesses have their onset in childhood or adolescence," (p. 4).

Like many divisions within Manitoba, Turtle Mountain School Division (TMSD) has taken a multi-faceted approach to assist students with their mental health and well-being. This includes being proactive with school-wide programming, as well as responding with appropriate interventions on a student-by-student basis. The approach is very much aligned with the *Response to Intervention* (RTI) model.

In the *Canadian Journal of School Psychology*, an article called *Response to Intervention in Canada*, notes, "In Canada today, most school psychologists are still commonly viewed as 'testers', as opposed to educational leaders in instruction and mental health promotion (Saklofske et al., 2007). Yet, many Canadian school psychologists would prefer more of a focus on prevention and intervention, consistent with an RTI model," (Corkum, French and Dorey).

In considering how best to assess the state of student mental health and well-being within the student body of TMSD, there was a desire to gather student feedback in a manner which will allow for targeted and focused intervention.

During a recent Manitoba Safe Schools conference, a keynote was presented by Dr.

Wayne Hammond, a clinical psychologist who focuses on strength-based practices and resiliency development. Dr. Hammond spoke of a resiliency questionnaire he developed through OnBoard Education ([www.onboardinitiatives.com/explore-education](http://www.onboardinitiatives.com/explore-education)). Upon further review of the questionnaire and supporting materials, the decision was made to engage with Dr. Hammond and OnBoard Education.

The questionnaire was administered to Grades 4 to 12 students within TMSD in the fall of 2016 and again in the fall of 2017. The data gleaned from the questionnaire enables school and division administration to review how students responded by grade, gender and as individuals. This allows schools to plan for programming at school and classroom level but also to plan accordingly for specific students who require targeted intervention.

School and divisional administration can view results based on student strengths, resiliency, core competencies and from any customized questions a division or school may wish to include. Data can be filtered in a variety of ways, including year-to-year comparisons. In addition to using this data to plan school and division wide programming and supports, administration can drill down to individual student responses. Those who may require targeted and individualized interventions are flagged within the program as "mayday" students and school administration can then work with support teams to plan accordingly.

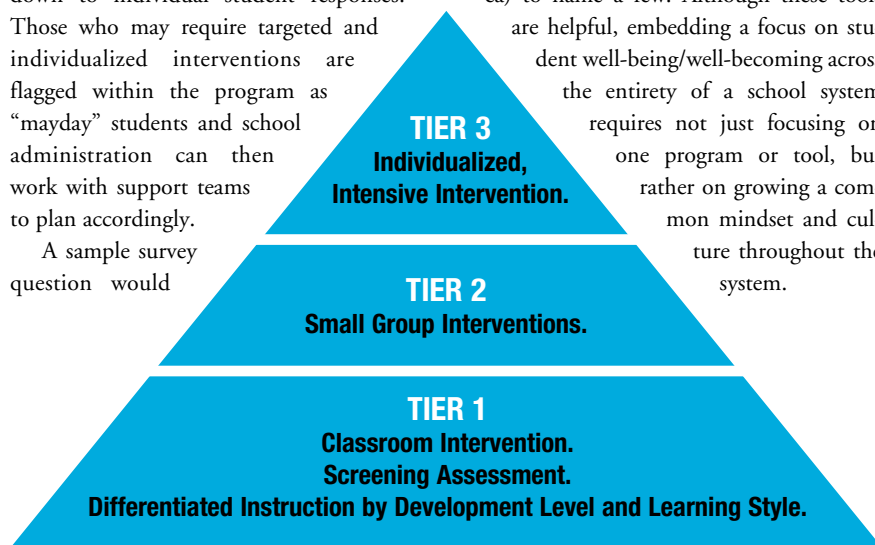
A sample survey question would

be: Are there caring, positive role models at your school who you could go to for support, guidance, encouragement and/or advice?

OnBoard Education also provides modules which can serve as tools for classroom teachers when working with students. When going through the activities, the focus remains strength-based, highlighting several things a student is good at as well as areas where a student may work to improve. Each student receives a profile page that includes this information and it is shared with parents as well.

Beginning on a pilot basis in the fall of 2017, we have dedicated time for staff to work within classrooms both with students and alongside classroom teachers in one of our schools. The intent is to promote character development and resiliency among our students and to do so in a manner that empowers classroom teachers to be actively involved. In early and middle years this occurs with the classroom teachers and for high school students this occurs within teacher advisor groups.

Various resources are used, Mind Up ([www.mindup.org](http://www.mindup.org)), Respect Education Courses (offered by the Canadian Red Cross), and Project 11 ([www.projecteleven.ca](http://www.projecteleven.ca)) to name a few. Although these tools are helpful, embedding a focus on student well-being/well-becoming across the entirety of a school system requires not just focusing on one program or tool, but rather on growing a common mindset and culture throughout the system.



*The RTI Model.*



In addition to work being done in classrooms directly with students and teachers, we have also focused professional development efforts to provide staff with further support. In the summer of 2017, we offered a two-day certification training in Mental Health First Aid ([www.mentalhealthfirstaid.ca](http://www.mentalhealthfirstaid.ca)), which received a positive response and will be repeated in the summer of 2018. The goal is to strengthen staff comfort level for having productive conversations with students, without the staff members feeling they need to be certified guidance counselors. Our teachers are the ones who interact most with our students and who know them best within the schools, so when a change in student behaviour is noticed it is often these initial discussions which begin the pathway to appropriate referrals and supports.

When a classroom teacher feels a student requires additional support with his/her mental health and well-being, (Tier II or III on the RTI model), this often involves a referral to the school guidance counselor and/or school psychologist. These are staff members who have specialized training and like many school divisions, we have continued to see an increased need for these supports.

Up until two years ago, school guidance counselors within TMSD served a dual role, one in providing personal counseling to students but also in overseeing career guidance efforts within schools. Given the increased demands of the guidance counselors' time, there simply wasn't enough time in the day to do both roles as effectively as possible. Beginning in the fall of 2016, we allocated additional time to schools to enable guidance counselors to focus solely on personal counseling with students. Career guidance programming is now managed separately.

TMSD has also included a certified social worker on staff since the fall of 2017. This position is supported using the Learning to Age 18 funding, as well as divisional support.

Our intent is to expand the scope of the position beyond simply monitoring student attendance, to assisting with the "why" when students are struggling to attend school regularly. Building trust and relationships with struggling

students and their families enables the division social worker to provide support, either directly or through referrals as needed. The division social worker also works with students and families when addictions are a factor and provides programming and information to students and parents within the school division. So far, we have found the addition of a social worker to be very beneficial.

In April 2014, a support document for TMSD staff was developed to support Safe and Caring Schools within the division. The document very much aligned with the RTI model, suggesting supports that can occur at several levels from school-wide programming to intensive individualized intervention. Though this document was developed several years ago, it is still very relevant when considering school-wide efforts to promote student well-being/well-becoming.

As part of it, all staff are required to complete the Respect in Schools online program ([www.respectinschool.com](http://www.respectinschool.com)). The overall intent is to instill in all staff that promoting a sense of student belonging and well-being requires a whole-school effort.

A lot of understanding has been gained over the last 15 to 20 years in terms of the importance of students' sense of belonging, as well as the development and growth of student resilience. Our efforts to support this development must be multi-faceted and include supports and interventions at multiple levels, including whole school/division, targeted smaller group interventions and intensive individualized interventions where required.

There must also be continuous emphasis on the need for student well-being to be part of what we all do within an

education system, whether it be the guidance counselor, the chemistry teacher, or those filling any role within our schools. We must provide staff with the support and tools necessary to promote student growth and academic achievement, but also to contribute to developing resilient young people who can lead productive and balanced lives.

As was stated at the outset, we know there is a direct correlation between student well-being and student achievement. In a paper distinguishing expert teachers from experienced teachers (Hattie), Hattie first illustrates that when considering all factors and influences which contribute to student achievement, 50 per cent of this influence comes from what the students themselves bring to the table. The second most influential factor in determining student achievement (30 per cent) is teacher effectiveness.

In discussing this further, Hattie notes, "The manner used by the teacher to treat the students, respect them as learners and people and demonstrate care and commitment for them are attributes of expert teachers. By having such respect, they can recognize possible barriers to learning and can seek ways to overcome these barriers," (p. 8).

The role of educators and education in general, has certainly evolved over the past several decades, and with ongoing efforts we can continue to strengthen our ability as public educators to ensure all students are on a trajectory for success. ■

*Tim De Ruyck is the Superintendent/CEO, Turtle Mountain School Division.*

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# Healthy Minds:

## Mindfulness in Winnipeg School Division



“I am reminded that often times, the best way to get ahead is just to slow down...”

— WSD Classroom Teacher (Grade 3-5)

*Students at Stanley Knowles School in Winnipeg, Manitoba, practice mindfulness. In the back is teacher Mme. Jessica Harrison (left) and guidance counsellor Joanne Rusen (right).*

**By Jón Olafson and Julie Millar, Winnipeg School Division**

**H**ealthy Minds, Winnipeg School Division's (WSD) comprehensive mental health literacy strategy, had its humble beginnings with the Preventing and Responding to Anxiety in Children and Youth project (PRACY) in 2013. We were aware of all the supportive divisional initiatives happening under the umbrella of social emotional learning and mental health supports. However, the Healthy Minds strategy brought a distinct and specific focus to this priority. PRACY was the result of student responses in the *Tell Them From Me* survey that year.

About 20 per cent of students from Grade 4 to 12 reported intense feelings of fear, anxiety and worry; and about 20 per cent of students in Grade 7 to 12 reported prolonged periods of feeling sad, discouraged and inadequate. These statistics were noted as being above the Canadian norm and identified a need to teach coping skills and strategies to support all students.

The goal of the PRACY project was to promote mental wellness and positive mental health with students in Grades 4 and 7 by teaching social emotional learning to reduce risk factors contributing to anxiety and depression, and the stigma associated with mental illness. Strategies were facilitated through the interdisciplinary collaboration of teachers, guidance counsellors and clinicians.

In developing PRACY, the bulk of the current theoretical and empirical literature supported a social-emotional competence perspective in which children with positive social and emotional skills demonstrate resiliency when confronted with stressful situations (e.g., Durlak et al., 2011; Luthar & Brown, 2007).

Such competencies and protective factors include self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills and responsible decision making (Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning, 2013). A meta-analysis of over 200 school-based social and emotional learning (SEL) programs provided evidence that such initiatives have a positive and

direct impact on student social and emotional skills, well-being and academic success (Durlak et al., 2011). Through this research, we learned that mindfulness is a powerful tool for promoting mental health and wellness, not only for students, but staff and parents as well.

“After I started doing some mindfulness activities... I have noticed that students have been willing to try harder and to make mistakes, knowing that they are being supported by their teacher and classmates,” said a WSD Classroom Teacher (Grade 9-12).

Mindfulness is the psychological process of bringing one's attention to experiences occurring in the present moment, popularized in the Western world by Jon Kabat-Zinn. As students learn to recognize the signs of stress or anxiety, they can apply mindfulness techniques to help them adjust their responses. Through regulating their breath and becoming aware of their reactions, students can return to a focused state, ready to learn. Following PRACY, our divisional professional development plans extended beyond the pilot project and moved towards including all levels of school staff who were interested in embedding mindfulness as a regular part of the school learning day.

Currently WSD is implementing the evidence-based MindUP curriculum (from Kindergarten to Grade 8), a program developed by the Hawm Foundation. MindUP is grounded by four core pillars: neuroscience, positive psychology, mindful awareness and social emotional learning. MindUP has 15 lessons that teach activities around topics such as gratitude, mindfulness and perspective taking and provides an immersive discovery experience



along with daily core practices, such as the guided “Brain Break” breathing exercise.

Our junior high and high school staff are implementing Patricia Broderick’s *Learn to Breathe* curriculum (a mindfulness curriculum for adolescents) to embed mindfulness into the experience of our youth. This curriculum is intended to strengthen attention and emotion regulation, cultivate wholesome emotions like gratitude and compassion, expand the repertoire of stress management skills and help participants integrate mindfulness into daily life. Since the introduction of these two curriculums, mindfulness is happening division-wide as an individual student strategy, in small group interventions with counsellors and clinicians, at the classroom level and at a school-wide level during designated common mindful moments.

“We are taking time to self-reflect on what each student needs to be successful during learning time and students are taking ownership over creating a better learning environment for themselves,” said a WSD Classroom Teacher (nursery to Grade 2).

In our data collection around impact and observations in the classroom, we have heard several stories and experiences connected to success in the classroom environment. Teaching

staff have reported seeing benefits on student’s academic skills and behaviours, most notably in focus, engagement/participation and task and perseverance/stamina. In addition, we uncovered reports and observations around gains in attendance, literacy, numeracy and general academic performance.

We also learned from our feedback that the classrooms and programs who noted the most significant gains were more often the educators and staff who were implementing mindfulness-based exercises on a regular and more long-term basis. In addition, WSD staff reported seeing a wide variety of benefits for student’s social-emotional skills and behaviours, including:

- Reductions in anxiety, stress, emotional outbursts and/or aggression.
- Increases in feelings of calm, happiness, hopefulness and confidence.
- Improvements in self-awareness and self-control.
- Improvements in empathy, problem-solving and conflict-resolution skills.
- Improvements in communication/listening skills.
- Increased sense of community and friendships.

“If they have come in from a stressful morning at home or something has happened on the way to school, this gives an opportunity to self-manage their feelings and start fresh,” said a WSD Classroom Teacher (Grade 6 to 8).

Our vision is for current and future people learning and working within Winnipeg School Division to be engaged, confident, inspired and successful learners. We are focused on addressing barriers to learning and believe this goal can be accomplished by enhancing partnerships with healthcare and other organizations to address mental health concerns, provide mental health education to staff and students and to build on programming created to improve awareness and address mental health.

The infusion of mindfulness-based curriculums and programming into the daily classroom routine continues to enhance academics, fosters social emotional learning skills and teaches children and youth how to best cope with our ever-changing world. In Winnipeg School Division, we are learning to breathe. ■

*Jón Olafson is a Student Services Consultant, and Julie Millar is the Director of Student Services, within Winnipeg School Division.*



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# Our Mino Pimatisiwin:

## Living the Good Life



*Graduates being honoured at the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Graduation Pow Wow.*

*RIGHT: Lita Fontaine, Artist in Residence, with student Emma on Orange Shirt Day.*



*Divisional Elder in Residence, Mary Courchene, sharing words of wisdom.*

*Tipi set up is used for Pipe Ceremonies, Treaty Days and Tipi teachings.*

**By Sherri Denysuik, Seven Oaks School Division**

**W**hen walking in our hallways, you may hear the words “Mino Pimatisiwin.” You may also notice this phrase beautifully scribed as an artistic school belief. However, in the best-case scenario, you will feel the very essence of Mino Pimatisiwin, which is honoured and practiced daily in our school communities.

Living Mino Pimatisiwin refers to a way of being that has long since guided First Peoples in living the good life. This good life involves balance, wholeness and connectedness among peoples, the land and all living things. Striving for balance in our emotional, mental, physical and spiritual well-being, as reflected in medicine wheel teachings, is the way to Mino Pimatisiwin.

Today, we recognize that the First Peoples of Turtle Island had a way of living and established systems in place that although were unlike the ways of the settlers, they were very strong, vibrant and practical in shaping their way of life. Examples of

these systems are education, health, trade and commerce, and, most importantly, a belief system steeped in Indigenous ways of knowing and being known as Mino Pimatisiwin.

Over the years, Seven Oaks School Division has been active in both embracing diversity and in promoting the integration of Indigenous perspectives. Through persistent prioritizing of Indigenous education in the life and work of its schools, Seven Oaks works to validate Indigenous histories, world views, contributions and ways of being and learning that benefit both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in the building of community. It is fundamental to the vision and mission statement of Seven Oaks. This building of community, a place of belonging for all, where every child matters, parallels the notion of Mino Pimatisiwin where all ages and all peoples strive to live and learn together.

Looking at the divisional Indigenous initiatives in Seven Oaks over the years, Indigenous perspectives have begun to inform a way of promoting health and wellness for students. Living a good life, while challenging in this time of truth and

reconciliation, has become the overarching goal where students experience Mino Pimatisiwin through the safe and respectful exploration of their identities. The discovery of common ground is becoming the daily reality for our school communities.

Essential to this deepening of understanding and healthy relations is the increased presence and contribution of Indigenous staff throughout the division. Seven Oaks recognizes the vital importance of having Indigenous staff as leaders who promote and support new initiatives within classrooms, schools and divisional spaces, as well as in the community at large. Indigenous staff provide support and advocacy, and act as role models for Indigenous children and youth.

In 2004, Seven Oaks entered into a partnership with the University of Winnipeg for the Community Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (CATEP) where the purpose was, and remains today, to tap into the strengths of our Indigenous communities for the overall goal of increasing the number of Indigenous educators within Seven Oaks Division.

The most recent and exciting initiative was the opening of the Ojibwe Bilingual



Language Program, launched at Riverbend Community School in September 2016. The first year had a Kindergarten to Grade 3 focus with three classrooms. The second year expanded to include students in Grade 4 and four classrooms; the program will add Grade 5 at the beginning of the 2018-2019 school year. Each classroom community focuses on language learning and cultural teachings, fostering a strong sense of identity and grounding for students in Indigenous ways.

The balanced health of students is a priority, particularly considering systemic racism, experienced trauma and the challenges of a disrupted identity. The bilingual program has become a source of strength and courage for the teachers, staff and students, all of whom are supported by elders and immersed in Indigenous culture and traditions. Students can hear the fluency of the language from the elders and are becoming familiarized with the beauty of their culture. In turn, elders supporting the classrooms find hope for future generations in the revitalization and preservation of their Indigenous language. Teaching and learning in these classroom communities become the journey to Mino Pimatisiwin, the good life together.

Another recent initiative, linked to reconciliation and building awareness of treaties, is the practice of the daily recognition that schools are located on Treaty 1 Territory. Most Seven Oaks schools begin their day with announcements that include recognition of First Nations and Metis peoples and the land we all share. As well, all divisional events include a recognition of treaties, where voice is often given to our divisional elders to address students, staff and community participants in the range of larger divisional events.

Linked to this recognition of Treaty 1 Territory is a focus on understanding treaty relations through the celebration of Treaty Days. The focus during Treaty Days is building better relations through reciprocity, respect and a mutual responsibility to build a stronger sense of community among Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants. All students, staff and community members who participate gain a broader understanding of the treaties and how they impact the lives of Canadians. Strengthening this understanding and building positive relationships furthers the realization of Mino Pimatisiwin.

The division has also seen growth in senior years' students who pursue a yearly credit in Indigenous cultural learning. In this course, participants have an opportunity to deepen their sense of identity by experiencing teachings by elders, learning about Indigenous histories, world views, contemporary issues, cultural traditions and land-based learning. Students learn experientially by utilizing sharing circles, smudging, visiting historical and cultural sites, participating in ceremonies and learning land-based teachings. This deepening sense of a positive identity grounded in Indigenous ways deepens the students' knowledge and appreciation, leading to the feeling of living the good life and of finding balance and calm during the sometimes demanding and challenging years of high school.

Among many other school-wide and classroom initiatives, June 2018 will mark the 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Seven Oaks Traditional Graduation Pow Wow. The graduation pow wow had a modest beginning many years ago that has now grown from a few hundred participants to well over 1,500 people. This large community event includes Seven Oaks students, staff and families, as well as the Indigenous pow wow community of dancers, drummers, singers and veterans. The Graduation Pow Wow celebrates and honours students graduating from our high schools, Adult Learning Centre and the students of CATEP.

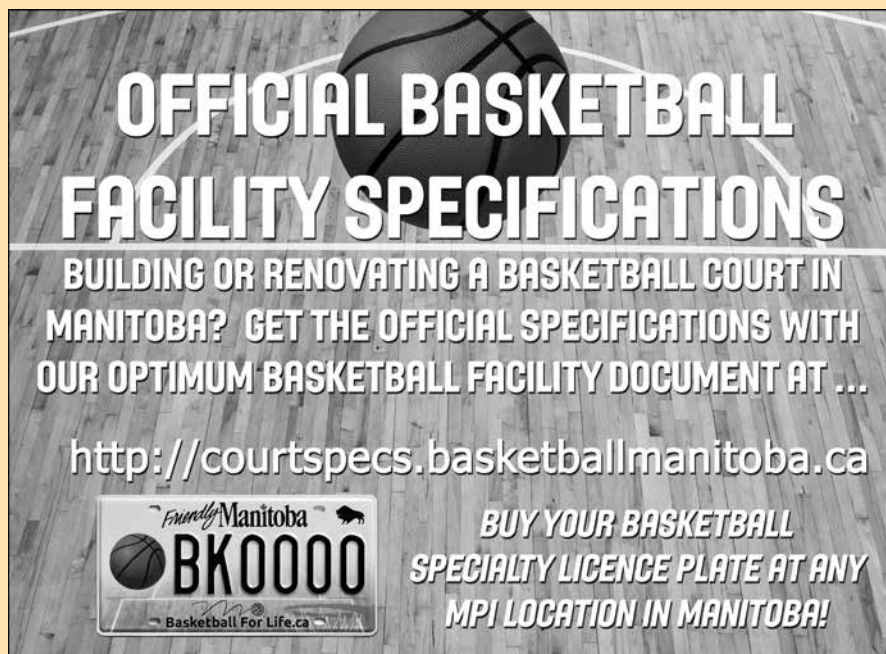
In addition to celebrating our graduates, the pow wow also celebrates the participation

of more than 400 student dancers in our pow wow clubs from our Kindergarten to Grade 8 schools. The pow wow also features our students who are fiddlers, jiggers and drummers from throughout the division. The growing level of participation by younger students provides a vision of where these younger students are headed. They too will one day be honoured as they progress towards graduation, continuing to dance, sing and play their way to Mino Pimatisiwin, living the good life. The celebratory Traditional Graduation Pow Wow is the earmark of what our Seven Oaks Family of Schools is all about—reconciliation in action.

Seven Oaks School Division is doing the work and will continue to do the work that values, informs and infuses Indigenous pedagogies into our schools as a path towards reconciliation. By doing so, we are not only recognizing Indigenous peoples of this country but we are also authenticating and validating their presence for non-Indigenous and Indigenous students alike.

Amidst the often-tumultuous times for Indigenous children, youth and Canadians as a whole, the good work continues as we offer hope for health, wellness and a strong sense of identity being guided by our visions, understandings and hopes for Mino Pimatisiwin. ■

*Sherri Denysuk is the Indigenous Education Lead for the Seven Oaks School Division. These teachings are shared by Seven Oaks Divisional Elder in Residence, Mary Courchene.*



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