



# MASS Journal

Spring 2026

The official magazine of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents



## Strengthening Communities through Inclusive Leadership, *Part Two*

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**On the cover:** On this issue's cover of the *MASS Journal* we celebrate Truth and Reconciliation with a photo from Lord Selkirk School Division. It shows a beautiful orange umbrella piece of art that represents reconciliation and togetherness. Flip to page 12 to learn more!



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**O**n behalf of the Manitoba government, I am pleased to extend greetings to the members of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) in this Spring 2026 edition of the *MASS Journal*.

This issue's theme, 'Strengthening Communities through Inclusive Leadership: Part Two,' recognizes that strong schools and strong communities are built together. Inclusive leadership shows up in the every day; in how we listen, how we partner, and how we design conditions for learning so that every student is able to participate fully and experience success.

Creating these conditions depends on strong, system-wide leadership rooted in the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion, as well as dedication to Truth and Reconciliation. By placing learners at the centre of every decision, you demonstrate an ongoing commitment to identify and removing systemic, cultural, and practical barriers that may limit student engagement and achievement. Your leadership commitment further highlights the importance of valuing Indigenous perspectives and ways of knowing, ensuring they are meaningfully and sustainably woven throughout our schools.

Throughout Manitoba, I see education leaders strengthening their school communities by listening deeply to diverse voices, working alongside Elders, families, and community partners, and fostering conditions where staff can learn and lead together. Whether the work is advancing belonging, supporting internationally educated educators, or revitalizing language and culture, these efforts reflect leadership that is purposeful, inclusive, and responsive to the unique strengths and needs of each school community.

As the school year comes to a close over the coming months, I extend my congratulations and appreciation to all MASS members, educators, and staff for a successful and engaging year. Thank you for your continued dedication to public education and for the thoughtful leadership you bring to this complex and important work. I look forward to continuing our shared efforts to strengthen inclusive, learner-focused schools and school divisions where every student is seen, heard, and valued.

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

**A**u nom du gouvernement du Manitoba, je suis ravie d'adresser mes salutations aux membres de la Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) dans cette édition du printemps 2026 du *MASS Journal*.

Le thème de la présente édition, Renforcer les communautés par le leadership inclusif : Partie 2, reconnaît que pour bâtir des écoles et des communautés fortes, il faut les bâtir ensemble. Le leadership inclusif est omniprésent dans notre quotidien. Il est imbriqué dans nos façons d'écouter, de s'associer aux autres et de concevoir les conditions de l'apprentissage en vue de permettre à chaque élève d'y participer pleinement et de réussir.

La création de ces conditions dépend d'un leadership solide à l'échelle du système, ancré dans les principes de l'équité, de la diversité et de l'inclusion, ainsi que d'un dévouement à la vérité et à la réconciliation. En mettant les élèves au cœur de chaque décision, vous faites preuve d'un engagement soutenu à la reconnaissance et à la suppression des obstacles systémiques, culturels et pratiques qui restreignent la participation et la réussite des élèves. De plus, votre engagement à titre de leaders met en lumière l'importance de la valorisation des perspectives et des savoirs autochtones et de veiller à les intégrer dans les pratiques de nos écoles de façon significative et durable.

Partout au Manitoba, j'observe des dirigeants scolaires renforcer leur communauté scolaire en écoutant attentivement les voix issues de la diversité, en travaillant aux côtés des aînés, des familles et des partenaires communautaires, et en favorisant la création de milieux où les membres du personnel peuvent apprendre et diriger ensemble. Qu'il s'agisse de favoriser un sentiment d'appartenance, d'appuyer les enseignants formés à l'étranger ou de revitaliser les langues et les cultures, ces efforts témoignent d'un leadership réfléchi, inclusif et adapté aux forces et aux besoins particuliers de chaque communauté scolaire.

Comme l'année scolaire tire à sa fin au cours des prochains mois, je tiens à féliciter et à reconnaître tous les membres de la MASS, les enseignants et le personnel scolaire pour une année réussie et enrichissante. Je vous remercie de votre dévouement sans faille envers l'éducation publique et du leadership réfléchi dont vous faites preuve dans ce travail complexe important. Je suis impatiente de poursuivre nos efforts communs en vue de favoriser des écoles et des divisions scolaires inclusives et centrées sur l'élève où chaque élève est reconnu, écouté et valorisé.

**Madame Tracy Schmidt**  
La ministre de l'Éducation et de l'Apprentissage de la petite enfance



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

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



The Sam Waller Museum  
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**A**s we welcome Spring 2026, we are pleased to introduce this issue of the *MASS Journal*, which continues an important conversation for our profession and our province. This spring's theme, *Strengthening Communities Through Inclusive Leadership, Part Two*, builds on our previous issue and invites us to go deeper into how inclusive leadership is lived every day in Manitoba's public schools.

Across Manitoba, public schools are more than places of learning; they are vital community anchors where equity, belonging, and opportunity are nurtured. When inclusive leadership and practices are intentionally enacted, schools become spaces where each student is seen, valued, and supported to thrive. The stories shared in this issue reflect that commitment – highlighting programs, planning, partnerships, and professional learning that respond to diverse learner needs while strengthening the collective well-being of school communities.

We are especially mindful of the guidance found in Manitoba Education's Indigenous Education Policy Framework, *Mamàhtawisiwin: The Wonder We Are Born With*, which reminds us that inclusion is grounded in relationships, holistic views of learners, and the shared responsibility of community. Indigenous inclusive practices call us to honour identity, voice, and connection, to land, culture, and one another. These teachings align deeply with inclusive leadership research that emphasizes trust, relational leadership, collective responsibility, and shared efficacy as foundations for strong schools and systems. The articles in this issue show how inclusive leadership is not a single initiative, but a way of being: one that adapts, listens, and responds to changing community needs.

We are deeply grateful for the educators, school leaders, support staff, and community partners whose daily efforts bring these commitments to life. Their leadership reminds us that inclusion is not an add-on, but a lens through which decisions are made, relationships are built, and learning communities are sustained.

Along with co-president with Dan Ward, we invite all readers to consider how these stories might inspire continued growth in your own contexts. It is through this ongoing, shared work that Manitoba's public schools continue to be places where every learner and every family can belong and succeed.

**Jenness Moffatt**

Co-President, Manitoba Association of School Superintendents

**E**n ce début de printemps 2026, nous avons le plaisir de vous présenter le nouveau numéro du *MASS Journal*, qui poursuit un débat crucial pour notre profession et notre province. Le thème de ce printemps, *Renforcer les communautés grâce*

*à un leadership inclusif (deuxième partie)*, s'inscrit dans la continuité de notre précédent numéro et nous invite à approfondir la manière dont le leadership inclusif se concrétise au quotidien dans les écoles publiques du Manitoba.

Les écoles publiques de la province sont bien plus que de simples lieux d'apprentissage. Ce sont des piliers essentiels de la communauté qui favorisent l'équité, le sentiment d'appartenance et l'accès à des possibilités. En exerçant un leadership inclusif et en adoptant des pratiques inclusives de façon délibérée, les écoles deviennent des espaces où chaque élève est pris en compte, valorisé et soutenu en vue de s'épanouir. Les témoignages présentés dans ce numéro reflètent cet engagement. Ils mettent en avant des programmes, des outils de planification, des partenariats et des formations professionnelles qui répondent aux besoins diversifiés des apprenants tout en améliorant le bien-être collectif des communautés scolaires.

Nous accordons une attention particulière aux orientations énoncées dans le cadre politique en matière d'éducation autochtone du ministère de l'Éducation du Manitoba intitulé *Mamàhtawisiwin: Les merveilles de notre héritage*, qui nous rappelle que l'inclusion repose sur les relations, les perspectives globales des apprenants et la responsabilité partagée de la communauté. Les pratiques inclusives autochtones nous invitent à honorer l'identité, la voix et les liens qui nous unissent à la terre, à la culture et les uns aux autres. Ces enseignements concordent étroitement avec les recherches sur le leadership inclusif, qui mettent l'accent sur la confiance, le leadership relationnel, la responsabilité collective et l'efficacité partagée comme fondements pour bâtir des écoles et des systèmes solides. Les articles présentés dans ce numéro montrent que le leadership inclusif n'est pas une initiative ponctuelle, mais plutôt une manière d'être, fondée sur l'adaptation, l'écoute et la capacité de répondre aux besoins changeants de la communauté.

Nous sommes profondément reconnaissants envers les éducateurs, les dirigeants scolaires, le personnel de soutien et les partenaires communautaires qui déploient des efforts au quotidien pour concrétiser ces engagements. Leur leadership nous rappelle que l'inclusion n'est pas complémentaire, mais plutôt une perspective à travers laquelle les décisions sont prises, les relations se construisent et les communautés d'apprentissage se maintiennent.

Aux côtés de notre coprésident Dan Ward, nous invitons tous les lecteurs à réfléchir à la manière dont ces récits pourraient favoriser une croissance soutenue dans divers contextes. C'est grâce à ce travail continu et collectif que les écoles publiques du Manitoba demeurent des lieux où chaque élève et chaque famille peut trouver sa place et réussir.

**Jenness Moffatt**

Coprésidente de la Manitoba Association of School Superintendents

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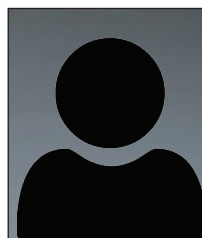


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Executive Assistant

## MISSION

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

## VISION

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



### LEARNING

Ensure professional learning:

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



### CONNECTING

Ensure our approaches to networking and connection:

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



### ADVOCATING

Ensure a strategic approach to advocacy that:

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

## HIGH LEVERAGE STRATEGIES

1

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

2

Build our capacity through increasing human and financial resources.

3

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

4

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

5

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

# Teaching Truth and Reconciliation at Lord Selkirk School Division



*The Walk for Chaney. Photos courtesy of Lord Selkirk School Division.*

**By Paul Adair, Staff Writer**

Lord Selkirk School Division in Selkirk, Manitoba, serves a large number of Indigenous learners – both from Selkirk and from northern communities in the province – as well as many newcomer families from around the world. This diversity shapes how the division approaches the concepts of Truth and Reconciliation, especially in the lead up to the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation (also known as Orange Shirt Day).

“For us, reconciliation is not a single day on the calendar,” says Vice Principal, Kat Marsch at École Selkirk Junior High. “Truth and Reconciliation is an ongoing commitment that is woven into the fabric of our school year, and we make sure to have continuous conversations through schoolwide initiatives, classroom learning, and community partnerships. Our students know that this work is meaningful because they see that it’s happening all the time.”

That said, the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation remains an important moment for deeper reflection across Lord Selkirk School Division.



*The Colour Orange Umbrella Art.*

## Supporting staff around reconciliation

Prior to its 2025 National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, École Selkirk Junior High held thoughtful classroom discussions and lessons that helped students come to a greater understanding about the significance of the day and the history behind it.

Lord Selkirk School Division has also been provided with on-going

targeted funding to support the work around Truth and Reconciliation, including setting up an Indigenous Knowledge Keepers program and various Indigenous Academic Achievement initiatives. Through one of these initiatives, École Selkirk Junior High staff participated in a professional learning day hosted at the Selkirk Friendship Centre. Here, teachers took part in drum and

“Truth and Reconciliation is an ongoing commitment that is woven into the fabric of our school year, and we make sure to have continuous conversations through schoolwide initiatives, classroom learning, and community partnerships.”

– KAT MARSCH, ÉCOLE SELKIRK JUNIOR HIGH

medicine teachings and conducted meaningful conversations with Elders and Knowledge Keepers in a safe and welcoming environment.

“Our staff really enjoyed their day with the Elders to discuss the theme of Truth and Reconciliation,” says Marsch. “They left feeling more confident, more connected, and more prepared to bring these teachings into their classrooms.”

In 2025, teachers across Lord Selkirk School Division completed province-mandated treaty training, which was extremely well received by those in attendance. During these training sessions, teachers had the opportunity to explore treaty kits provided to all schools in the division by Treaty Relations of Manitoba, which helped them see firsthand how the materials could be used meaningfully in the classroom.

Marsch facilitated the treaty training for École Selkirk Junior High, and staff members approached her afterward to say there was so much about Indigenous trauma they did not know. These kinds of admissions then became a springboard to other meaningful conversations, which helped people feel more confident about reaching out to colleagues or Knowledge Keepers for guidance.

“Most of our teachers approach this work with a mix of excitement and apprehension,” says Marsch. “Educators are lifelong learners and they understand that this work matters. So, even when it might feel a little outside their scope, they embrace it because they know it’s meaningful.”

Lord Selkirk School Division’s Cultural Proficiency Lead Coordinator, Jacqueline Bercier, is another invaluable resource for school staff. She works with students, teachers, and administration to ensure Indigenous education is aligned on topics like Truth and Reconciliation.

“My work looks different depending on the school level, but I help to ensure that the information being presented to students, staff, and administration is authentic and that it’s appropriate,” says Bercier.

### A lesson for all ages

Truth and reconciliation can be a heavy subject to discuss with younger students, and one of the biggest hurdles for educators is the fear of getting something wrong, especially for teachers who are not Indigenous and might be unsure about how to bring Indigenous content into the classroom. But Bercier stresses that lessons around



*Holiday Alley Drum Teachings Workshop.*



*Learning activities during a professional development day.*

Truth and Reconciliation do not need to follow a single format, and can be art-based, story-based, land-based, or involve bringing in an Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or Residential School Survivor to share their experiences.

Grade 6 classes at École Selkirk Junior High this year learned the story of Chanie Wenjack, a 12-year-old Anishinaabe boy who died in 1966 after escaping the Cecilia Jeffrey Residential School. After exploring his story in Social Studies, students organized a Walk for Wenjack past the Wenjack mural in Selkirk and brought their learnings into the community to raise awareness.

Older students also engaged in lessons in advance of National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, but with teachers integrating deeper Indigenous issues into their Social Studies curriculum. For example, Grade 11 students in Selkirk learned about Indigenous history from an Indigenous perspective through an interactive experiential activity, including the impacts of colonialism and residential schools on

First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities – all with the goal of helping them understand how these harms accumulated over generations.

“Conversations about Truth and Reconciliation look different in kindergarten than they do in middle school or high school – as they should,” says Bercier. “Younger students tend to focus on identity, belonging, and kindness, while older students can explore more complex histories and impacts. Each age group requires a different approach, but the core message remains the same: We cannot change the past, but we can choose to do better now and into the future.”

### Preparation is key

At the beginning of September, Lord Selkirk School Division reminds its teachers that Truth and Reconciliation must be a central focus; not just for one day, but throughout the month, the year, and beyond. As part of this, the division strives to get resources into teachers’ hands as early as possible.

“When teachers have what they need right away, they feel more prepared and

more confident starting those conversations with students – especially for new staff or teachers who are just joining our division,” says Bercier. “The goal is to make sure everyone can have the tools, guidance, and confidence they need to engage meaningfully in Truth and Reconciliation work from the very beginning of the school year, while opening the door for deeper conversations and ongoing support.”

Marsch agrees, “Schools are not islands. We’re part of a community and I think the more that we reach out to the resources and relationships we have, and find ways to meaningfully work together, then the better off we’ll all be.” ■

*This article was written in collaboration with staff and Knowledge Keepers at the École Selkirk Junior High and Lord Selkirk School Division, including Jerret Long, Superintendent/CEO; Daryl Loepky, Principal of École Selkirk Junior High; Kat Marsch, Vice Principal of École Selkirk Junior High; and Jacquie Bercier, Cultural Proficiency Lead Teacher.*



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# Building Community: Professional Learning and Meaningful Listening with Internationally Educated Teachers in RETSD

By Cara Colorado and Charlette Cunanan, River East Transcona School Division



*Internationally Educated Teachers (IET) collaborating together while learning about the Framework for Learning and the Global Competencies. Photos courtesy of Charlette Cunanan.*



*Internationally Educated Teachers working with River East Transcona School Division on the DesignThinking Framework.*

**O**n a very cold Monday in January, a gathering of more than 45 internationally educated teachers (IETs), was filled with warmth and light. This group of educators has been meeting monthly in River East Transcona School Division (RETSD) – learning more about responsive pedagogies, commitments to Reconciliation, inclusion, social-emotional learning supports for students, while also sharing and reflecting on how our system can better learn from our internationally educated colleagues.

The impact of these meetings has already been far reaching in both expected and unexpected ways. Originally, we set out to be responsive to our teaching population. What we have found is that the learning sessions have increased shared understanding, supported a culture of care, and supported wonderful learning reciprocally.

As the second largest school division in Manitoba, RETSD has had the great fortune, over the last number of years, of welcoming thousands of newcomer families into our community. Along with this, we

have had the wonderful opportunity to welcome increasing numbers of IETs to our teaching force. Thus, with the knowledge that there is ample research demonstrating longstanding “systemic discrimination that bars immigrant teachers from their profession” in education,<sup>1</sup> and insofar as it has long been understood that it is in the best interests of students to have a teaching force that better reflects the student population,<sup>2</sup> we knew there was need for robust support systems and pathways for professional growth that celebrate and sustain Internationally Educated Teachers.<sup>3</sup>



*Leanne Smith, consultant for Indigenous Education, sharing teachings on the Medicine Wheel and the division's Commitments to Reconciliation.*

We, the writers, acknowledge that we have never had to transport our professional expertise from one cultural context to one in another country. Thus, we identified a growing need to support certification, learning pathways, mentorship, and community-building for IETs. Using an inquiry stance, we wondered how we could invest time, resources, and supports to welcome this community of teachers into the RETSD community, to build a sense of belonging, and to offer our support to them.

### **The Learning Series**

The Learning Series is comprised of nine sessions designed to engage teachers in exploring pedagogical topics through a Manitoba lens. Participants earn a micro-credential as an artifact of their time and learning. The series emphasizes reciprocal learning, fostering an environment where participants can share knowledge and insights collaboratively. To support these discussions, several consultants and divisional support teachers were invited to co-facilitate the sessions. To ensure accessibility, the sessions were scheduled after school hours, running from 4:00 pm to 5:30 pm. When we first put the call out to all teachers in the school division (including substitute teachers, term teachers, permanent teachers, and certified teachers currently working as Educational Assistants),

we wondered how much interest there would be. More than 40 educators signed up within the first week and we eventually had to move the cap to accommodate more IETs in the series.

A focus for the series was on supporting IETs to grow their understanding and comfort in utilizing: Manitoba curriculum, the Framework for Learning, and teaching in support of the Global Competencies; inclusion strategies and student specific planning; education for reconciliation; and more. One participant shared, “These sessions have been very important and helpful in understanding how the education system works in Canada. Since it is quite different from my home country, the information shared has helped me better understand expectations, classroom practices, and school culture here.”

Another shared, “Learning from the stories and experiences of others supports the idea that we as teachers are not alone in our journey of leading the students. We can support our students better as a team together.” We were fortunate to see several “aha!” moments, and nods of affirmation as real-time strategies were outlined for teachers to extend their practice.

### **What we learned**

While we are grateful that IETs themselves report that the sessions are supporting their knowledge, skills, and

abilities in supporting students in Canadian classrooms, some of the biggest takeaways have been what we, as a system, have learned from the series. However, the sessions also allowed us to have candid, open, and justice-oriented conversations about barriers in place that limit opportunities and equity in education for teachers trained internationally.

Several teachers shared that they were disappointed not to have been able to do a practicum in Canada, to inform their practice. This led to us evolving our systems to support mentorship for IETs working as Itinerant Substitute Teachers in schools. Other teachers shared that they were nervous to use their international references in the interview phase but that their only local references were outside of the education sector. This allowed us to very quickly clarify messaging regarding inclusive (and potentially international) reference checks for IETs. It also allowed us to set up processes to have observations set up to support with local references as part of the hiring process.

Perhaps the most significant learning was in how quickly community, trust, and collaboration were built. The human component, of greeting people, problem solving hiring dilemmas and pedagogical challenges, of hearing what their work looked like in real time, and of encouraging them in their work in the school division built personal connections and understanding where previously, there were statistics and third-hand knowledge. It led to the sharing of personal stories of both celebration and struggle, and the ability for us to meet people where they were to support their professional journey forward. The personal component was paramount. As one teacher shared, “These sessions are really helpful to nourish the teaching learning where I learn how I can teach more effectively to make connections with students to make them feel valued.” The hope has been that we can support those connections professionally, as well.

### **What's next**

One of the most significant takeaways for us, as a system, was that there is need for a comprehensive analysis and scan of

current hiring practices in education to determine where conscious or unconscious bias may be impacting recruiting, hiring, and retention practices in general, and with IETs in particular. We have a working group of principals, vice-principals, and consultants leading a research study on this now, conducting interviews to determine the lived experiences that go along with our recruiting, hiring, and mentoring systems. We have learned that this personal connection to diverse lived experiences has immense value to driving collective commitments to Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion.

School and system leaders in RETSD have embraced the following throughline question to guide our leadership in the 2025-2026 school year: What conditions, systems, and structures nurture teams for excellence and equity in student learning?<sup>4</sup> This inquiry question guides our work here as we continue to build purposeful systems and structures related to equity and excellence, that ground what we will continue to build. In terms of the series, it will continue again next year, as will the micro-credential, as we

work to both meet the learning needs of the IET community.

Our hope is to expand this particular support and build additional mentorship supports into schools to support the unique needs of Internationally Educated Teachers, and to continue to prioritize our own learning resulting from shared community and conversation. We are hopeful about what we might be able to grow together. Our ability to listen has

been as important as our ability to offer professional learning, in a shared goal to support excellence and equity for our students and our staff. ■

*Cara Colorado is the Assistant Superintendent – Human Resources for River East Transcona School Division, and Charlette Cunanan is a Human Ecology Teacher at River East Transcona School Division.*

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# Piikishkweetaak aan Michif! / Let's Speak Michif!

By Paul Adair, Staff Writer

**T**he Michif language originated in the 1800s through the union of Ininew (Cree), Anishinaabe, and French cultures, and is today the distinct, official, and endangered language of the Red River Métis Nation.

The importance of Michif cannot be overstated, and the language is an integral part of Red River Métis identity and history. However, the number of fluent Michif speakers has declined significantly over the recent years and there are currently fewer than 100 fluent Michif speakers in Western Canada. This is an alarming decline during a time that is seeing a growing number of Manitobans who identify as Indigenous. In the St. James-Assiniboia School Division alone, the proportion of students who self-declare as Indigenous is nearly 25 per cent, with approximately half identifying as Red River Métis.

The good news is that St. James-Assiniboia School Division's new Indigenous language program, *Piikishkweetaak aan Michif! / Let's Speak Michif!*, is looking to breathe new life into the language that helped shape the province of Manitoba.

## Living history in the classroom

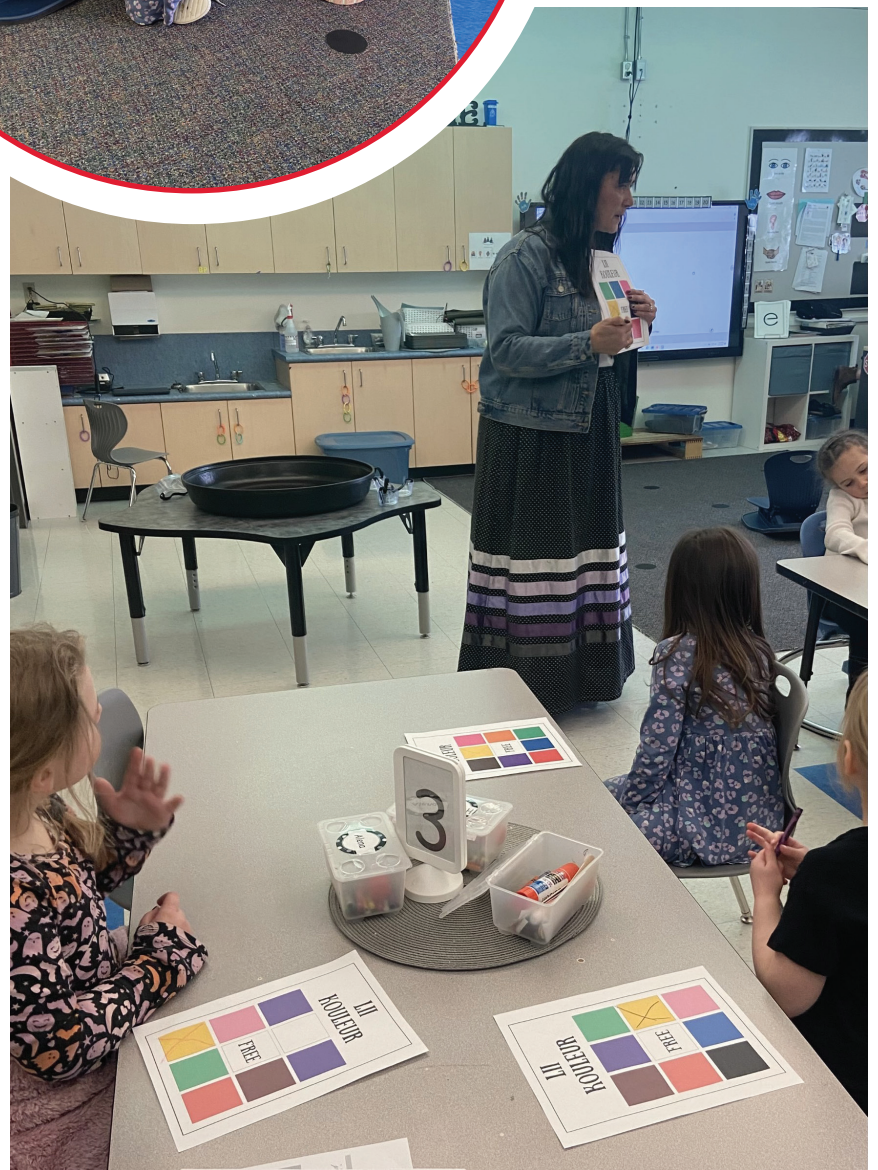
St. James-Assiniboia has been working for years to bring more Indigenous languages into its classrooms but, until recently, those efforts were mostly informal and included minor opportunities to expose students to the languages spoken across Treaty 1. However, with so many Indigenous languages being represented in the region, finding a meaningful and authentic way to honour each individually has been a daunting challenge.

This changed after the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF) – the national government of the Red River Métis – issued another call for grant applications aimed at supporting the revitalization of the Michif language, funding that has



◀ Students with Cora-Leigh Fast using actions to help teach basic greeting vocabulary. Photos courtesy of St. James-Assiniboia School Division.

▼ Cora-Leigh Fast and her group game where students were reviewing colours.



historically gone to community groups, not school divisions.

“Curious about the possibility, I reached out to the MMF to ask whether an educational institution might be considered for the grant,” says April Waters, Administrator of Indigenous Education and Community Support at St. James-Assiniboia. “One of their objectives is to grow the endangered Michif language, so they were intrigued by our proposal and encouraged St. James-Assiniboia to apply.”

Now that the program is up and running for the 2025-2026 school year, the MMF continues to actively support *Piikishkweetaak aan Michif!* / Let’s Speak Michif! by providing supports when needed.

“The MMF has been really great, and they seem genuinely excited to see this happening in a classroom,” says Waters. “We couldn’t have asked for better partners to bring Michif to the classroom.”

### Finding the right person

The most significant challenge to the creation of the *Piikishkweetaak aan Michif!* / Let’s Speak Michif! was finding a teacher qualified to do the job. After all, Michif speakers are few and far between, and certified teachers who speak the language are even rarer.

“Finding anyone – much less a teacher – who is fluent in Michif is almost like discovering a unicorn,” Waters explains. “We are so lucky to have found a Michif Language Program Teacher like Cora-Leigh, someone who openly acknowledges she is still growing her fluency but is deeply committed to learning while she brings the Michif language to our students.”

### Experiencing Michif

In the delivery of the program, Cora-Leigh Fast works exclusively with kindergarten students, rotating through 24 classrooms in 15 schools across St. James-Assiniboia. This residency model gives each class a full week of immersive learning – long enough to build relationships, learn foundational words, and experience the joy of the Michif language through songs, stories, and play.

“I have to give credit to Elder and Language Holder Verna DeMontigny and

“We are so lucky to have found a Michif Language Program Teacher like Cora-Leigh, someone who openly acknowledges she is still growing her fluency but is deeply committed to learning while she brings the Michif language to our students.”

– APRIL WATERS, ST. JAMES-ASSINIBOIA SCHOOL DIVISION



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her son Steven DeMontigny,” says Fast. “Much of what I share comes from their generosity, and their songs and teachings guide my practice.”

Fast explains that Indigenous languages, including Michif, are land-based and connected to the land. When she speaks Michif in class and the children recognize the words, it means a lot considering it was something she was never able to experience in school herself, despite coming from a proud Red River Métis family.

“The Michif language and the history of the Red River Métis people are deeply

woven into the story of Manitoba and Canada,” says Fast. “I tell the children that one of the most amazing things about Michif is that it began right here, in the very place we live today. This is where our First Nations Kookums and our French and Scottish grandfathers built relationships, families, and community, and the Michif language grew from those connections.”

When the residency week wraps up, Fast leaves behind interactive resources, such as Smart Board activities and simple Michif flashcards/visual cues, so that

teachers can continue the learning after she moves to the next school and continue her teachings.

She says, “The goal of this program isn’t to create fluent speakers – Michif takes many years to learn – but even a few words matter. When a child sees me in the grocery store, calls me ‘Auntie Cora’ or greets me in Michif, I get emotional, and I know the language is being carried forward – even in small ways.”

### The future of the program

St. James-Assiniboia is now in discussions with the MMF about expanding the *Piikishkweetaak aan Michif! / Let’s Speak Michif!* program, with additional funding potentially to allow the division to hire a second teacher who could follow students into Grade 1, ensuring continuity and deeper learning.

“The question is, ‘What’s next? Once students leave kindergarten, how do we keep the momentum going?’” says Waters. “The MMF has encouraged us to apply for further funding, and we’re hopeful that it will come though. Finding another teacher like Cora-Leigh will be tough, but we’re crossing our fingers that we can find ourselves another unicorn.”

The response from those participating in the program has been overwhelmingly positive, with the only complaint being that they want even more time with Fast in the classroom. The program has also sparked a broader interest in a staff Michif cohort across St. James-Assiniboia, with teachers, social workers, educational assistants, a superintendent, and even a custodian, all committed to learning Michif.

Waters says, “There are many here who are interested in wanting to learn the language and come up with ideas about how we can integrate it – in meaningful ways – into our school system and, from my perspective, the more the merrier.” ■

*This article was written in collaboration with Jenness Moffatt, Superintendent/CEO of St. James-Assiniboia School Division; April Waters, the Administrator of Indigenous Education and Community Support for St. James-Assiniboia School Division; and Cora-Leigh Fast, Michif Language Program Teacher.*

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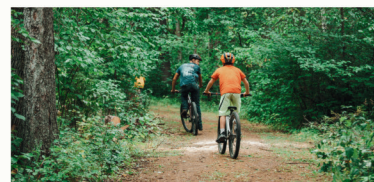
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# Inclusive Leadership in Rural School Divisions:

## Strengthening Community Belonging Through School-Based Partnerships

### By Stephen Jaddock, Western School Division



*Students from Maple Leaf Elementary School, lined up to learn about bus safety. Photos courtesy of Stephen Jaddock.*

**E**stablishing a positive foundation for students entering the K-12 education system is critically important for both schools and communities. For many families, the first interaction with the public school system occurs when their child begins Kindergarten. These early experiences shape perceptions of school, build trust between families and educators, and set the tone for future engagement. In Western School Division, this first connection typically begins during the annual Kindergarten Registration Evening held near the end of January.

At this event, principals from the division's three elementary schools meet with parents to discuss what the first year of school will look like for

their children. Kindergarten teachers provide short presentations outlining classroom learning environments and expectations. Representatives from the Division Office share information about divisional priorities and services such as student transportation and student services. Community organizations are also invited to set up information booths so families can learn about supports available within the broader community. These opportunities for conversation allow parents to ask questions, share concerns, and begin building relationships with school staff before their child formally enters the school system.

Shortly after the Kindergarten Registration Evening, the division's Student Services Administrator receives

a transition list from rehabilitation services at Boundary Trails Health Centre. This list identifies children who will be eligible to begin Kindergarten in the upcoming fall, and who as preschoolers, already receive therapy services such as occupational therapy, physical therapy, or speech and language therapy. The list provides contact information for families as well as a brief overview of the services each child is receiving.

Using this information, the Student Services Administrator contacts families to discuss their child's needs and begins planning for a successful transition to school. With parental consent, members of the school's student support team may visit the child's daycare or preschool setting. These visits allow staff to observe the child in a familiar environment and begin developing relationships before the child enters school. Later in the spring, a formal transition meeting is organized that includes parents, therapists, school-based student support staff, and divisional student services leadership. These collaborative meetings ensure that all individuals involved in supporting the child can share information and develop strategies to help the child succeed as they begin Kindergarten.

Following Spring Break, all registered Kindergarten students participate in a short Kindergarten pre-assessment meeting. During this 15-minute session, the child and their parent or guardian meet with a classroom teacher or resource teacher to participate in hands-on activities. These activities provide educators

with a general understanding of each child's early literacy and numeracy development while also helping children become more comfortable interacting with school staff. The information gathered helps schools create balanced classroom groupings for the upcoming school year.

At the conclusion of the pre-school assessment meeting, each child receives a "Welcome to Kindergarten" bag containing materials designed to support learning at home. The bags typically include a children's book, a magazine, a whiteboard and marker, play doh, crayons, scissors and a collection of activity ideas. These resources encourage families to support the development of literacy, numeracy, gross and fine motor, and social-emotional skills through play-based learning. By engaging families in early learning activities, schools strengthen the partnership between home and school while promoting early skill development.

Another important component of the Welcome to Kindergarten program is a series of eight monthly newsletters sent to parents. These newsletters provide ideas for play-based learning and demonstrate how families can use the materials from the welcome bags to support learning at home. The newsletters reinforce the idea that early learning is most effective when schools and families work together.

In June, each school hosts a Welcome to Kindergarten family event. While the format varies between schools, the purpose remains consistent: helping families feel comfortable and connected to their child's new learning environment. Families are invited to explore different areas of their school, participate in learning activities, and meet members of the school team. This may include Kindergarten teachers, administrators, resource and guidance staff, and specialty teachers such as physical education and music instructors. These events help children become familiar with the school setting while allowing families to better understand the environment in which their children will learn.

The final stage of the transition process occurs at the beginning of the school year through a staggered



*Students from École Morden Middle School participating in the Terry Fox Run.*

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entry schedule. Kindergarten classes are divided into two groups, with each group attending on alternating days during the first two days of school. On the third day, all students attend together. This approach allows teachers to spend more individualized time with each child during the first days of school while helping students gradually become comfortable in their new environment.

Across the division's five schools and Adult Learning Centre, educators work intentionally to create welcoming

environments and ongoing meaningful opportunities for engagement.

Examples include literacy initiatives such as "Cuddle Up and Read" during I Love to Read Month, parent advisory council meetings focused on topics selected by families, and student-involved conferences that encourage students to participate in discussions about their learning and goals. Schools also offer parent volunteer opportunities and host cultural celebrations such as Folklorama Day, which highlights the diverse backgrounds represented within the school community.

Inclusive extracurricular opportunities are also emphasized. Students with exceptional learning needs participate in programs such as Special Olympics and collaborative field trips that encourage peer partnerships and strengthen social connections.

The division's Adult Learning Centre further supports community engagement by offering on-site childcare through the Child Development Centre, enabling parents to attend classes and complete coursework. In addition, the Board of Trustees hosts an annual Student Leadership Forum where students provide feedback on divisional priorities and budget planning.

Together, these initiatives reflect Western School Division's commitment to inclusive leadership. By fostering early connections with families, collaborating with community partners, and creating opportunities for meaningful participation, the division continues to strengthen community belonging and confidence in public education. It is my role as Superintendent of Schools/CEO to support and grow these partnerships as the education of the children in our charge cannot occur without everyone in our community lending a hand. ■

*Stephen Jaddock is the Superintendent of Schools/CEO at Western School Division. Thanks as well to input from Western School Division leaders.*

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# Strategy with Purpose: MASS Redefines Advocacy for Manitoba Public Schools

By Paul Adair, Staff Writer

**T**he Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) is navigating one of its most significant periods of change in decades.

What began as a routine review of its strategic plan has evolved into an opportunity to meaningfully shape the association's future direction – one defined by a clearer sense of purpose and a renewed commitment to advocacy that reflects MASS's unique role within Manitoba's public education system.

"This has been an interesting journey," says MASS Executive Director, Barb Isaak. "We're not finished, but well on our way. It's really important to us as an organization to be able to solidify our place in the provincial landscape as advocates for public education."

## Plans interrupted and opportunities for renewal

Since its founding in 1956, and incorporation in 1986, MASS has been a steady presence in Manitoba's public education system. Over those years, its strategic planning has followed a three-year cycle, with updates introduced incrementally as needed. However, when the pandemic hit in 2020, that review cycle was disrupted as more immediate priorities took precedence and strategic planning to a back seat to more pressing concerns.

But, as the saying goes, '*Time waits for no one*,' and – by 2023 – Manitoba's education environment had shifted considerably. Post-pandemic retirements among MASS members have increased and new leaders have stepped to fill those roles. The association estimates that nearly 70 per cent of its current membership has joined within the last four years.

This demographic shift has led to a realization for MASS: the organization is evolving, and its strategic plan must evolve with it to better reflect its people, its responsibilities, and its aspirations. This insight became the catalyst for a full strategic plan renewal that launched in early 2024.

## A new focus for MASS

As MASS revisited its mission and future priorities, the association identified three central pillars: Learning, Connecting, and Advocating. Among these themes, advocacy quickly emerged as the natural starting point for deeper strategic discussion.

"Once we sat down and started digging into the old strategic plan, we really wanted to reconsider what it means for MASS to be an advocate for public education, as well as to showcase what we can do as an organization that no one else can," says Isaak. "This has laid the foundation for a new, more aspirational strategic direction for us going forward."

As the representative organization for Manitoba's superintendents and assistant superintendents, MASS recognizes that

it sits at the intersection of education policy, practice, and community impact. This unique position allows MASS to understand the challenges facing public education today, as well as gives it the authority to speak about those challenges with clarity.

With this in mind, MASS is committed to developing measures, gathering data, documenting progress, and embedding what Isaak describes as an 'advocacy lens' into its communications. This approach helps to ensure that everything the organization shares with partners reflects its role as a thoughtful, factual, and principled voice for public education.

This new lens was evident following Manitoba's provincial education funding announcement on February 9, 2026, which included a 3.5 per cent increase for the 2026-2027 school year. "Historically, MASS has not issued public statements on funding but, this time, we prepared a completely factual statement and then distributed it to our members and education partners," says Isaak. "Our statement wasn't meant to generate headlines, and we didn't send it out to the media. It was just grounded in facts, aligned with our mission, and respectful of our relationships. This is a deliberate step we're taking now that we wouldn't have considered before."

## An inclusive process

Strategic planning in education can often be an isolated process that is often handled by a small group or limited to senior leadership. MASS intentionally

chose to take a different approach where members were engaged in early, frequent, and meaningful consultation. Updates were shared regularly, committees were invited to align their Terms of Reference with the emerging plan, and members were encouraged to contribute throughout the process.

This commitment to consultation has been met with overwhelmingly positive feedback, and members report they feel heard, value the transparency, and appreciate the opportunity to participate.

To support its work, MASS has partnered with Usha James of the Critical Thinking Consortium (TC<sup>2</sup>), a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting critical, creative, and collaborative thinking. James and her team have contributed valuable perspectives, helping MASS refine its data collection, challenge assumptions, and deepen its overall analysis.

MASS aims to produce a summary of its progress on the strategic plan by the end of the 2025-2026 school year and, by 2027, the organization will release a comprehensive report detailing its work across all three pillars.


“Once we sat down and started digging into the old strategic plan, we really wanted to reconsider what it means for MASS to be an advocate for public education, as well as to showcase what we can do as an organization that no one else can.”

– **BARB ISAAK, MASS**

“Today, we are better positioned to make thoughtful decisions about where to engage, how to communicate, and how to represent its members as an organization,” says Isaak. “Through this process, MASS is building a foundation

for confident and purposeful advocacy for the future.” ■

*This article was written in collaboration with MASS Executive Director Barb Isaak.*



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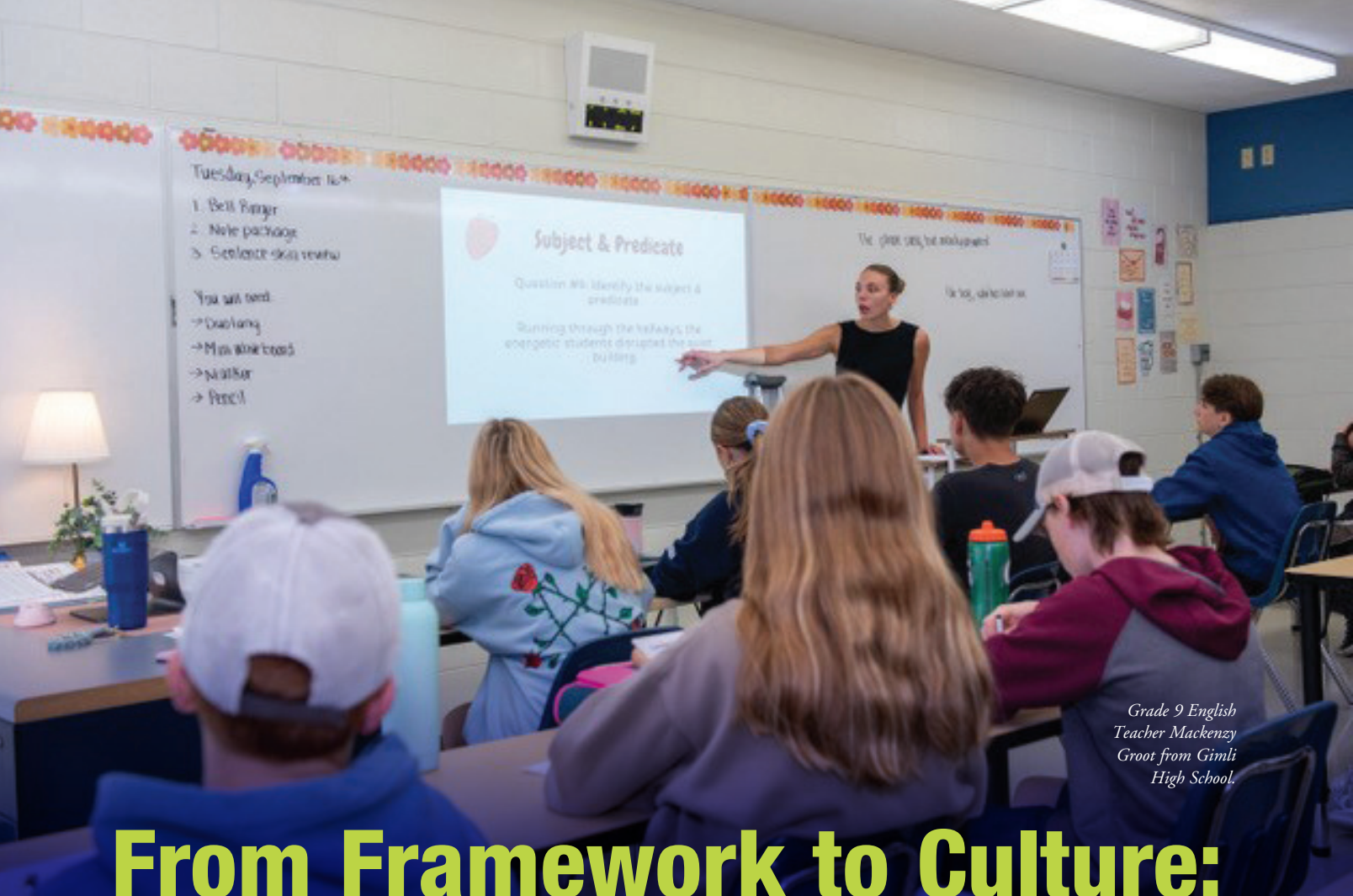
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# From Framework to Culture: Building a Division Wide Teaching Practice Through Shared Leadership

By Jessica Worden and Scott Hill, Evergreen School Division

**W**hen Winnipeg School Division Superintendent Matt Henderson referenced *Success for All Learners* during a recent provincial call, several senior leaders across Manitoba cheered... or at least submitted a ‘thumbs up’ Zoom emoji. The document remains an important touchstone in the guidance offered by Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning (MEECL), helping us understand not only what students learn, but how they learn it.

In Evergreen, our memory of *Success for All Learners*, has been a catalyst for improving teaching and learning.

Over the past two years, we have been enhancing *My Evergreen Classroom* (MEC), Evergreen’s instructional guidance system, with particular attention to our recently established Evergreen 8: a set of high leverage, inclusive teaching practices that increasingly define the feel and flow of learning in our classrooms. RETSD Superintendent Sandra Herbst played a critical role in helping Evergreen develop an earlier version

of our framework, with a commitment to shared leadership at the heart of the process (*see article in the Fall 2019 issue of the MASS Journal*). Through deep engagement with students, teachers, and leaders, we began to clarify what teaching and learning in Evergreen should look like when we are at our best.

What has shifted more recently is both the work itself and the way it is led. The introduction of the Evergreen 8 has brought practical, granular clarity to daily instruction – specific, observable moves that teachers can plan for, model, and coach (e.g., Turn and Talk followed by Warm Call, concise “What to Do” directions, visible checks for understanding). These strategies refine our aspirations into replicable routines and practices that invite every student into the learning.

At the same time, a model of lateral leadership – as Steven Katz highlighted at the 2025 MASS Summer Institute – is taking root across Evergreen. Rather than relying on positional authority, teachers are collaborating across classrooms,

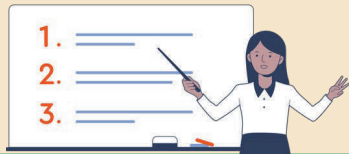


# My Evergreen Classroom

## EIGHT EVERGREEN PRACTICES TO IMPROVE STUDENT OUTCOMES

### What to Do Cycle

#### What to Do



Give *specific, observable, and actionable* directions, so students know exactly what success looks like.

### No Volunteers

#### Cold Call



Call on students *regardless* of whether or not they volunteer, keeping everyone engaged and to check for understanding.

### Radar and Be Seen Looking



Use scanning, eye contact, and presence to monitor behaviour and keep students focused without interrupting learning.

### Turn and Talk



Give students a chance to quickly discuss a question or idea with a partner – boosting participation and oral rehearsal.

### Narrate the Positive (Make Expectations Visible)



Describe, model, or post what success looks like – then practice it together to create habits of excellence.

### Choral Response



Use call-and-response routines for facts or phrased responses, reinforcing group participation, engagement and retention of material.

### Least Invasive Intervention



Use a scaled response of subtle strategies to redirect behaviour without disrupting the flow of the lesson.

### Show Me Boards



Students share answers on whiteboards – providing instant insight into class understanding.

**Learning Today to Improve Tomorrow.**

Illustrations by: Stelab

*The Eight Evergreen Practices to Improve Student Outcomes, part of the My Evergreen Classroom booklet. Graphic courtesy of Scott Hill.*

opening their practice, and engaging in nonevaluative peer coaching as they adopt and refine the Evergreen 8. This teacher-to-teacher leadership is accelerating consistency, building shared ownership across the division.

### Translating provincial frameworks into local practices

Our evolved version of *My Evergreen Classroom* emerged through our work with MEECL during the Framework for Learning sessions and with support from Dr. Zach Groshell,

author of *Just Tell Them*; Tom Sherrington, coauthor of the *Teaching WalkThrus* series; and Doug Lemov, author of *Teach Like a Champion*. We aligned Rosenshine's Principles of Instruction with Manitoba's Global Competencies and asked: *If we want our classrooms to be inclusive, highly participatory, and reflective of the global competencies, what high impact practices must our students experience every day?*

MEC and the Evergreen 8 tie everything together and have quickly become a shared language for teaching and learning across the division, much like *Success for All Learners* did for Manitoba teachers in the 1990s. They also communicate our shared values.

Turn and Talk, for example, ensures every student's voice is heard and valued. Diverse learners process their thinking, quiet students contribute confidently, and students feel a sense of belonging. Cold Call (or Warm Call, when paired with a Turn and Talk) communicates equity: students understand that their ideas matter and that active participation is part of the learning culture.

As teachers build fluency with these practices – supported by coaching from leaders and peers – they move from strategies, to habits, to culture.

### Lateral leadership in the Leadership Development Program

What is transforming *My Evergreen Classroom* from a document into a culture is the people leading the work.

Three years ago, Evergreen had no Leadership Development Program. In year one, 18 of our 120 teachers joined.

This year, 25 per cent of our teaching staff signed up to participate, signalling trust and confidence in our instructional leadership plan.

With tools and professional support from the Steplab platform, teachers are learning:

- How to introduce and refine the Evergreen 8 in their own classrooms, and
- How to coach colleagues through nonevaluative feedback.

Our hope is for teachers to see themselves as instructional leaders through classroom embedded professional learning. We do not rely on what our colleague Dr. Zach Groshell calls an “agnostic approach to teaching practice.” We have a clear, coherent ‘house style’ grounded in research about how to best serve all students – academically, socially, and emotionally.

Because cohort members represent every school and grade band, the culture is beginning to spread horizontally – teacher to teacher, classroom to classroom.

### A culture built on shared practices

Our work with the Evergreen 8 has created a shared language that allows us to talk about our practice in a new way and to feel as though we are “rowing the boat together.”

These early efforts are creating noticeable change in Evergreen. New teachers are beginning their careers with confidence. Veteran teachers are energized by a renewed emphasis on teaching practice. School leaders use the Evergreen 8 as a common lens for walkthroughs, strengthening their ability to lead instructional improvement and deepening their relationships with one another. Most importantly, students experience predictable routines, clear instruction, and regular opportunities to think and participate. Classrooms feel aligned, inclusive, and safe.


This culture is growing because teachers are leading it together. Peer coaching is relational, not evaluative; classrooms are open; improvement is collective. This consistency ensures students know what learning should feel like from room to room – making equity visible and actionable.

*My Evergreen Classroom* is our way of ensuring that every student in every one of our schools experiences high quality, inclusive instruction every day.

We have enjoyed sharing this work with colleagues across Manitoba who have visited our division to see our house style of teaching in action. *My Evergreen Classroom* is publicly available here: <https://media.esd.ca/media/Default/medialib/esd-evergreenclassroom-booklet-jun2025-p6.74c08c4091.pdf>. ■

*Jessica Worden is the Director of Programs and Student Services in Evergreen School Division, where she supports literacy, inclusion, student achievement, and instructional leadership.*

*Scott Hill is Superintendent/CEO of Evergreen School Division. He holds a strong belief in democratic renewal as the primary purpose of schooling & education. He is passionate about ensuring that students develop the necessary habits, knowledge, will, and skill to make the world a better place.*



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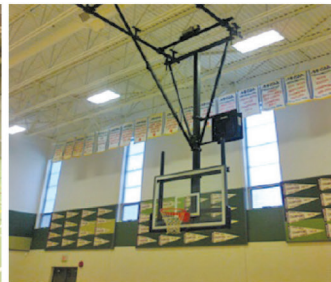
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*Justin Lawson, Consultant - Career & Community  
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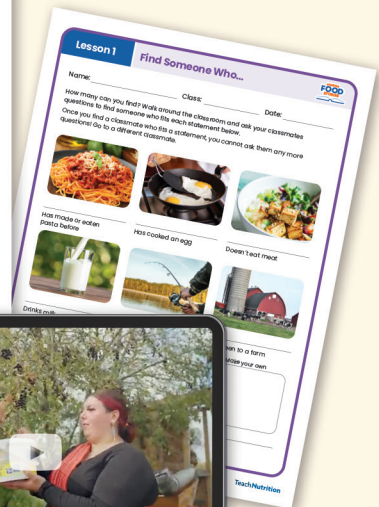
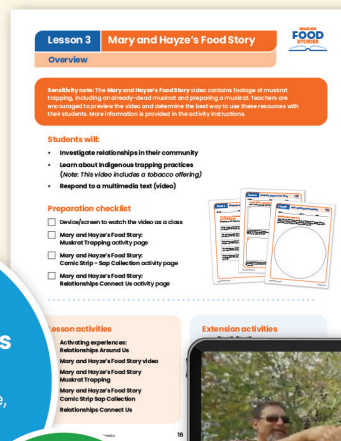
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