

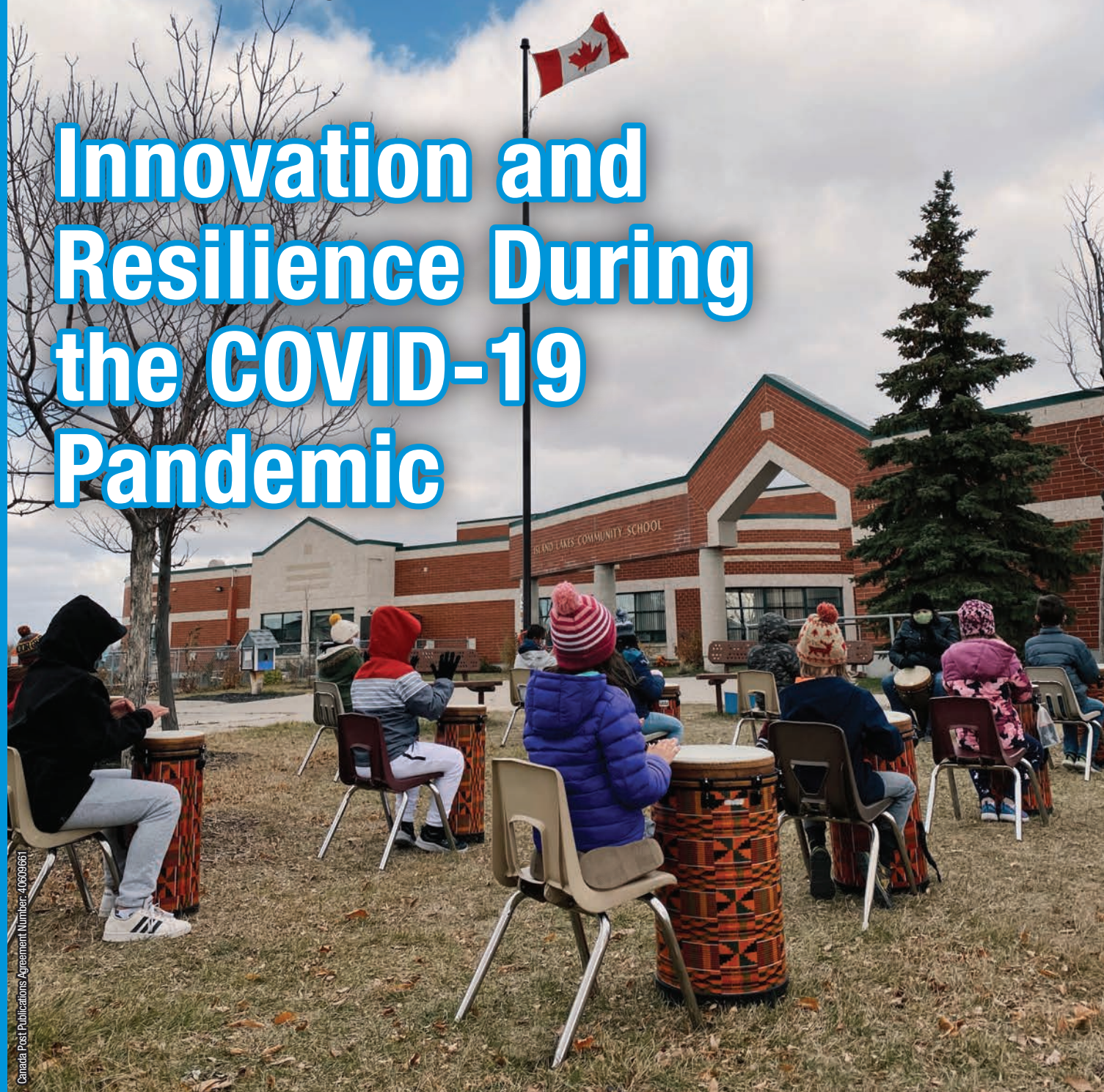


MASS Journal

Fall 2020

The official magazine of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents

Innovation and Resilience During the COVID-19 Pandemic



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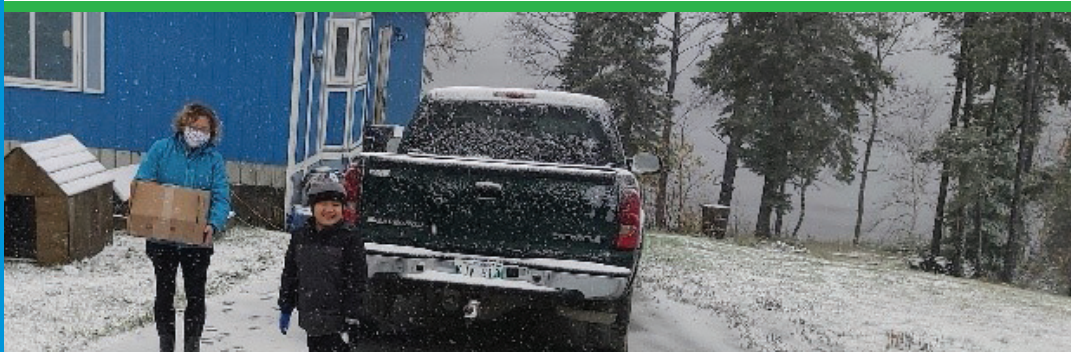
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Up Front

- 4 A Message from the Manitoba Minister of Education / Un message de le ministre de l'Éducation**
- 5 A Message from the President of MASS / Un message de la présidente de la MASS**
- 6 MASS 2020-2021 Executive**
- 7 MASS 2020-2021 Priorities**

THEME: INNOVATION AND RESILIENCE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Features

- 8 Finding Our Way**
By Reg Klassen, Frontier School Division
- 10 Beyond the Mask: Learning During COVID-19**
By Matt Henderson, Seven Oaks School Division
- 13 Everything Old is New Again: Reviving Technologies and Maintaining Relationships for a COVID-19 Future**
By Ted Fransen, Pembina Trails School Division
- 15 A Collaborative Move to an Online World**
By Christian Michalik, Brandon Boone, Jeff Anderson, Darcy Cormack, Taylor Fenn, and Clarke Hagan, Louis Riel School Division
- 18 Speech and Language Services: Positive Outcomes Despite COVID-19**
By Corrie Wiesner, Turtle Mountain School Division
- 20 Appui des partenaires pendant la pandémie**
Par René Déquier, Division scolaire franco-manitobaine
- 22 The Power of Organizational Culture at a Distance**
By Karen Boyd, and Cheryl Hooper, River East Transcona School Division

26 Index to Advertisers

On the cover: Ms. Heidi Serger leads an outdoor Grades 3/4 music class at Island Lakes Community School, which is located in the Louis Riel School Division. Like all schools in Manitoba, students and teachers are taking their learning outside as much as possible this school year. Learn more about Louis Riel School Division's journey starting on page 15.



As Minister of Education,
I applaud MASS
members for their ability
to maintain focus on
innovation, resiliency,
and the well-being of
students as we face
unprecedented challenges.



À titre de ministre de
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résilience et le bien-être des
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Innovation, Resiliency, and the Well-being of Students

On behalf of the Government of Manitoba, I am pleased to bring greetings to the members of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS). As Minister of Education, I applaud MASS members for their ability to maintain focus on innovation, resiliency, and the well-being of students as we face unprecedented challenges. These efforts will allow for all educators to focus on what is in front of us and strengthen our mutual efforts to provide high quality education to Manitobans, despite this pandemic.

We know that strong leadership is needed now more than ever. Good leaders cannot hide from issues or make excuses; they need to focus on the facts and confront challenges head on. Through creative innovation, our government will work with you and your respective teams to be able to offer successful plans and ideas to teachers, students, and parents. Our goal has been, and remains, working in collaboration to be empowered to deliver education in the best manner possible, and to be leaders on this front so students can be successful.

We are optimistic and resilient as we continue to lead and support teachers, administrators, and other school personnel who, when working together, successfully create our schools' cultures. It is my hope that this attitude becomes infectious and together we can help students grow their skills and foster a love for learning, all while remaining safe in their learning environments.

In closing, I want to thank MASS for its support and cooperation in this area and for its continued contributions to helping Manitoba lead the country in delivering high quality, safe learning for all students.

Kelvin Goertzen
Minister of Education

L'innovation, la résilience et le bien-être des élèves

Au nom du gouvernement du Manitoba, je suis heureux de présenter mes salutations aux membres de la Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS). À titre de ministre de l'Éducation, je félicite les membres de la MASS pour leur capacité à continuer à mettre l'accent sur l'innovation, la résilience et le bien-être des élèves alors que nous faisons face à des défis sans précédent. Ces efforts soutenus permettront à tous les éducateurs de se concentrer sur les choses qui se trouvent devant nous et d'intensifier nos efforts mutuels pour offrir une éducation de grande qualité aux Manitobains malgré cette pandémie.

Nous savons qu'un leadership solide est plus que jamais nécessaire. De bons leaders ne peuvent se dérober aux problèmes ou trouver des excuses; ils doivent se concentrer sur les faits et doivent aborder les enjeux de front. Grâce à l'innovation créative, notre gouvernement travaillera avec vous et vos équipes respectives pour offrir des plans et des idées efficaces aux enseignants, aux élèves et aux parents. Notre objectif demeure de travailler en collaboration afin de pouvoir offrir l'enseignement de la meilleure façon possible et d'être des leaders sur ce plan pour que les élèves puissent réussir.

Nous devons faire preuve d'optimisme et de résilience alors que nous continuons à guider et à appuyer les enseignants, les administrateurs et les autres membres du personnel scolaire qui, en travaillant ensemble, créent notre culture scolaire. J'ai bon espoir que cette attitude deviendra contagieuse et qu'ensemble nous pourrions aider les élèves à développer leurs habiletés et leur goût d'apprendre, tout en restant en sécurité dans leur milieu d'apprentissage.

Pour terminer, j'aimerais remercier la MASS de son appui et de sa collaboration dans ce domaine et de sa contribution soutenue à aider le Manitoba à être dans le peloton de tête au pays à offrir une éducation de haute qualité et sécuritaire pour tous les élèves.

Kelvin Goertzen
Le ministre de l'Éducation

The Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) has taken a significant role in collaborating with the province, providing leadership and direction among stakeholder associations, largely shaping our response in education here in Manitoba.



Le rôle crucial de la Manitoba Association of School Superintendents

Il est peu probable que l'un de nous oublie ce jour de mars où tout a semblé basculer en un instant. Malgré les nouvelles de l'étranger et l'évidence d'une grave pandémie se dirigeant inexorablement vers nous, ici au Manitoba, nous espérions que la situation était exagérée. Avec le recul, c'était un peu comme regarder dans une boule à neige dont le verre est déformé, au fil des journées que nous

passions à planifier et à nous préparer, mais toujours avec l'espoir de ne pas avoir à prendre des mesures.

La Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) a joué un rôle de premier plan en collaborant avec la Province, en dirigeant et en orientant les associations d'intervenants ainsi qu'en contribuant largement à définir nos interventions en éducation au Manitoba. En plus de tenir des réunions hebdomadaires avec les membres de la MASS, nous avons également poursuivi des discussions chaque semaine avec le ministère de l'Éducation au cours desquelles nous avons formulé des commentaires sur les nombreuses idées et suggestions à mettre en œuvre dans nos écoles.

Il ne fait aucun doute que les directeurs généraux des écoles ont alimenté en données le système de prestation des services au chapitre du respect des lignes directrices de Santé publique Manitoba et des protocoles du ministère de l'Éducation. Les membres de la MASS ont exprimé leur avis sur diverses idées pour faire face à la COVID-19 dans nos écoles. Notre participation a permis à Santé publique Manitoba et au ministère de l'Éducation de mieux comprendre les activités quotidiennes des divisions scolaires. Qu'il s'agisse de la gestion des présences, des besoins en transport ou d'une foule d'autres questions, les membres de la MASS ont fourni des connaissances pratiques qui ont rendu possible l'application du document Accueillir à nouveau nos élèves — Retrouver des écoles sécuritaires.

Retrouver des écoles sécuritaires signifiait être prêts à intervenir si des employés ou des élèves étaient diagnostiqués positifs à la COVID-19. Les membres de la MASS ont collaboré pendant nos réunions hebdomadaires, partagé des renseignements et tiré parti de l'expérience de chacun. Au cours des prochains mois où il nous faudra encore composer avec la COVID-19, nous tirerons d'autres leçons et préciserons nos interventions. Ce que nous savons toutefois, c'est que grâce à la communication et au soutien mutuel, nous sommes tous plus forts.

The Critical Role of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents

It is unlikely any of us will ever forget that day in March when, in what seemed like an instant, everything changed. Despite news coming from overseas and evidence of a serious pandemic moving inexorably toward us here in Manitoba, we hoped it was an exaggeration. Looking back on that time is like looking into a snow globe of warped glass, as we moved through our days, planning and preparing, but always hoping we wouldn't have to act.

The Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) has taken a significant role in collaborating with the province, providing leadership and direction among stakeholder associations, largely shaping our response in education here in Manitoba. In addition to weekly meetings with the MASS membership, we have also engaged weekly with Manitoba Education, providing input on the many ideas and suggestions to be implemented in our schools.

Without question, school superintendents have provided the delivery system to fulfill Manitoba Public Health guidelines and Manitoba Education protocols. MASS members have given feedback on a variety of ideas to address COVID-19 in our schools. Through our membership, Public Health and Manitoba Education better understood the day-to-day operations of school divisions. Whether addressing attendance management, transportation needs or a myriad of other issues, MASS members provided hands-on knowledge that made "Welcoming our students back: Restoring safe schools" possible.

Restoring safe schools has meant being ready to respond to positive cases of COVID-19 among our staff and students. MASS members have collaborated during our weekly meetings, sharing information and learning from each other's experience. As we move forward through the coming months of continued COVID in our lives, we will learn more lessons and refine our responses. What we know, however, is that through communication and support for each other, we are all stronger.

Pauline Clarke

President of MASS

Chief Superintendent/CEO, Winnipeg School Division

Pauline Clarke

Présidente de MASS

Directrice en chef et PDG, Division scolaire de Winnipeg

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Superintendent
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Superintendent/CEO
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Division



René Déquier, At-Large
Assistant Superintendent
Division scolaire franco-
manitobaine (DSFM)

STAFF:



Barb Isaak
Executive Director



Karen Wohlgemuth
Executive Assistant

Mission:

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

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

We model learning that is:

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

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

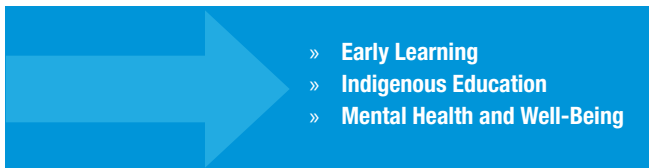
- Creating and fostering safe, supportive, inclusive, and challenging environments;
- Ensuring essential learning for each and every child; and
- Preparing others to go beyond our own learning.

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

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

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

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

- 
- » Early Learning
 - » Indigenous Education
 - » Mental Health and Well-Being



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

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

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

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

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

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

Finding Our Way



A Black River Anishinabe School student with his Grandfather, preparing to share food with Elders harvested from a moose hunt.



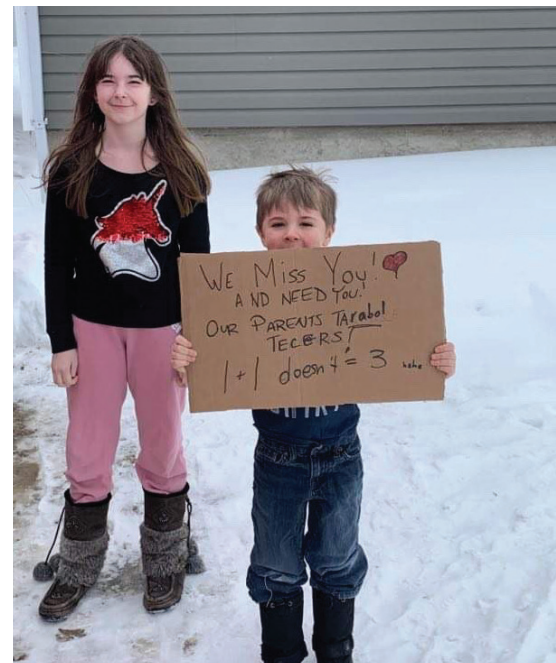
Stevenson Island School delivering the annual Thanksgiving Day feast to residents.

By Reg Klassen, Frontier School Division

The pandemic is here, and it has forced us to change how we live our lives. In doing our part to help flatten the curve last spring, Frontier School Division cancelled classes, and thus began our “new normal” of living away from each other. Technology became our most often used connector, but it was not, and still is not, the same as meeting face-to-face. Those simple moments that we took for granted, like shaking hands, hugging a grandchild, spending time with friends, gathering as a family, and all of our many human connections, are the moments that we have come to long for as we adjust to living during a pandemic.

As a grandfather, I am fortunate that our grandchildren live in the same city as we do. Even so, trying to connect last spring was challenging as we had to visit through windows or walk to the park apart from each other rather than carrying my grandchildren on my shoulders or holding their hands. A lasting harsh memory is when one of my grandsons came running excitedly towards me to eagerly share what he was doing but, with a word from his mom, stopped short when reminded to practice physical distancing. At two and half years of age, he knew what he had to do, but didn't really understand why.

I am not the only one who has experienced these pandemic realities. Everywhere across Manitoba, similar experiences were lived by many. Our students, especially those in early years,



Gillam School students letting teachers know they are missed.

must have wondered why they could not go to school and see their friends. I'm sure that in many cases, the explanation may have confused them and left them scared for the future.

But in the face of these sudden changes, educators made the pivot and carried on with distance learning, quickly discovering how to teach from afar. Out of that crisis came numerous

stories of heroic teachers who went above and beyond to ensure that their students received the best education despite the circumstance. In Frontier School Division, one of our principals delivered home learning packages to her students weekly by snowmobile, hovercraft, or boat, the mode of transportation dependent on the state of the ice on the lake.

To accommodate our students' learning from home, our school division delivered 1,100 laptops to homes. Our intent was to eliminate one more obstacle, thereby creating greater opportunity for students to successfully continue with their education.

In many of our communities, "Pandemic Teams" were created. Their mandate included implementing check stops, determining quarantine requirements, and securing the use of schools as isolation units should they become necessary. Frontier School Division collaborated with each community Pandemic Team, ensuring that our schools were sanitized and ready.

It is hard to fully comprehend the level of fear in the North, particularly in isolated and remote communities where there is little to no medical support, limited access to amenities and larger centres, and where crowded conditions significantly increase the potential spread of COVID-19. Pandemic Teams are tasked with keeping their community safe, and school staff are expected to adhere to all directives set out by the local team.

As we planned to return to school this fall, many of our communities were extremely hesitant to send their children to a place where so many people gathered. Fear of COVID-19 was high, especially since many schools had teachers and support staff that came from outside the community. In some of our communities, Pandemic Teams, along with Chief and Council, decided to delay the opening of school. It wasn't until parents toured their school and saw the safety measures put in place that they felt comfortable enough to send their children back. We held numerous community meetings where the safety measures designed to keep staff and students safe were shared.

During one meeting, one parent mustered the courage to say, "I am afraid that if my children come in contact with COVID-19, and I have to keep them home, they will come take them away." At that moment I was glad I was wearing a mask, because the shock on my face would have been obvious. I assured her that would not be the case. I have reflected on that comment many times since. It has provided me with deeper insight as to how the legacy of residential schools continues to have such impact, and how, more recently, the removal of children from Indigenous families by authorities has perpetuated this legacy. The return to school this fall, in our division, has been layered with complexities to which we have been acutely sensitive.

We bus over 90 per cent of our students on a daily basis. This has created more challenges, as many buses must make double runs. Logistically, in many communities, it is impossible to transport all students to school in a timely manner while following appropriate bussing protocols. In response, many schools moved to students attending alternate days, allowing for only 50 per cent of the students in school at a time. This has solved bussing challenges, and it also provided space to allow for physical distancing in school. This, too,

has helped many parents feel more comfortable sending their children back to class.

As students have returned to school, more great stories about creative solutions have emerged. The Annual Thanksgiving Feast hosted by one school for their community, using the local harvest, was not possible this fall. Not to be derailed, individual meals were prepared and delivered to all the households. In another community, one young student harvested a moose with his grandfather and decided to share the meat with Elders. How many of the Seven Teachings were exemplified that day?

It has not been an easy journey helping communities find their way back into the classroom. With the rising number of COVID-19 cases in Manitoba at the time of writing, it would seem that we are headed again towards Pandemic Teams and/or Chief and Council closing down communities and schools in order to keep them safe and healthy. We continue to find our way. ■

Reg Klassen is the Chief Superintendent of the Frontier School Division, and is the immediate Past President of the Canadian Association of School System Administrators (CASSA).




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Sara Neufeld, from Governor Semple School, and her kindergarten learners engage in "remote learning" in June.

Beyond the Mask: Learning During COVID-19

By Matt Henderson, Seven Oaks School Division

As a history teacher, I can't help sifting through archives and primary sources – imagining the curriculum dripping off the pages of yellowed documents from the past and thinking about how I can design powerful experiences for learners so that they can actually *do* history. The December 2nd, 1918 edition of the *Winnipeg Tribune* provides us with just such an opportunity.

In an article entitled, *The Kiddies Troop Back to School After 7 Weeks Jus' Playin'*, the *Tribune* reports that 25,000 learners in Manitoba are headed back into school after a seven week hiatus due to the global pandemic. The reporter is able to speak with a seven-year-old learner who is skipping past, excited to get back to school. The



The Winnipeg Tribune, December 1918, shared an article called, The Kiddies Troop Back to School After 7 Weeks Jus' Playin'.

interview ends abruptly as the child sees friends and takes off. School is back. Friends are back. Learning is back.

The article also highlights the important role of educators and how in 1918 Manitoba's teachers were instrumental in curbing a pandemic. It is the same today. Our educators are doing phenomenal work with their learners and families to welcome them back and to provide them with the education they need and deserve.

More than a century later, it is impossible not to draw parallels between the collective human experience in 1918 and the present. While there is much trepidation amongst parents, educators, and staff, the unmistakable joy of children being back in school presents itself with vigour and exhilaration.

As we watch a possible J-curve begin to take shape and we enter into our

second wave, there is still one constant that emerges from the many lessons afforded by COVID-19: children want to learn. Children are inherently curious and social, and they perpetually surface significant questions about the universe. And as adults, our job is to keep up and to gently nudge them further into the unknown with support.

With any crisis, we can often focus on the barriers, challenges, and fear which can obscure our goal. Fear can lead us as educators to ignore the curious nature of our learners and offer experiences that don't support engagement and well-being. As a wise colleague of mine argues, fear can impoverish learning. Don't get me wrong, as a parent, I am immensely concerned about the health and well-being of not only my children, but all children in the system.

What the pandemic has shown us is that throughout the education system, educators, leaders, and learners have spun miracles in terms of adjusting, adapting, and even thriving. School divisions, schools, educators, families, and learners have brilliantly navigated the perils and opportunities presented by a disease that does not discriminate, is uncontrollable, and preys on those who dare, even for a moment, to reminisce of unbridled freedom.

COVID-19 has also made teaching and learning highly visible, two concepts that are not always synonymous with each other. In March of this year, when classes were suspended, many educators were able to seamlessly support their learners: relationships were sound, the educators knew the curriculum and could see it dripping from the environment, there was a culture of deep learning and rigour, the learners were engaged in their work, not ours, and formative assessment enveloped the design and implementation of experiences.

These learning communities came in all shapes and sizes. Some were what we might deem traditional environments, some inquiry, and most of all, a combination of both. Learning communities where children were engaged in powerful learning experiences varied in pedagogy, method, and rhythm. But what was constant was what Jal Mehta and Sarah Fine refer to as *deeper learning*. "Classrooms that are intellectually lively places, where students make sense of complex questions

and where there is spontaneous energy rather than force compliance," (Mehta, J., & Fine, S., 2019).

Because we are human, we often become buried in the details. We can get bogged down in discussions related to technology, or we can walk off the precarious cliff of booklets, online learning, and ensuring students are "doing work." We can often make assumptions about the effectiveness of digital platforms as a substitute for human connection. There was once a movement to move post-secondary learning strictly online, and this crashed

with the false promise of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), which are free online courses available for anyone to enroll. No wonder, given that humans crave relationship and communion when solving significant questions about the human experience.

So, we cannot err on the side of not causing learning. This will compound our collective struggle.

Given that many of our Senior Years learners are attending in-person school two or three times per week and many more learners are accessing various degrees



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of remote learning, how do we refocus our energy to ensure that we are designing truly educative experiences for all? Given that at times whole classes or schools might have to isolate for 14 days, how do we cultivate learning environments where well-being comes from cognitive engagement. And how do we do this when the adults in the real or virtual room are feeling the same fears as the children in front of them?

As educational philosopher Maxine Greene argues, "I rather doubt that individuals who are cowed or flattened out or depressed or afraid can learn, since

learning inevitably involves a free decision to enter into a form of life, to proceed in a certain way, to do something that is right," (Greene, M., 2018). In a similar vein, if educators are fearful, how can we effectively teach in a manner that causes learning? That is right?

According to John Dewey, we have *an* experience, "when the material experienced runs its course to fulfillment," (Dewey, J., 1934). For Dewey, fulfillment and the experiential result from strategically designed experiences which draw upon what the learner

knows, the outside world as curated by the educator (the curriculum), and the opportunity of the learner to adequately reconstruct what they have learned in meaningful ways and in communion with other learners – which then fold into future educative experiences.

Our task as educators and system leaders, *especially* during a pandemic, is to push our teaching to fulfillment. The test for this is simple: who is doing the thinking? The teacher or the learner? Is the child doing their work or our work? And will the experience I have designed lead to more and more educative experiences?

We have seen this level of fulfillment in the kindergarten teacher who visits the front yards of her learners. We witness transdisciplinary learning carry on through school suspension by the Middle Years educator who provides powerful reading and writing workshop lessons predicated on choice and voice. And we can observe the Met School advisor who, due to the strength of relationships and experiential design, is able to continue offering an environment founded on inquiry, curiosity, and rigour; all despite the disruptions associated with COVID.

These are difficult times. Beyond the pandemic, our learners face a climate of calamity, the rise of authoritarianism, and the massive accumulation of wealth in the few. As educators and system leaders, we have two choices. The first is to succumb to the fear. The second is to do everything in our power to engage our learners in deep and meaningful experiences predicated on challenge, hope, curiosity, and at their essence, fulfillment. This is the purpose of public education. ■

Matt Henderson is an assistant Superintendent in the Seven Oaks School Division.



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Everything Old is New Again:

Reviving Technologies and Maintaining Relationships for a COVID-19 Future

By Ted Fransen, Pembina Trails School Division

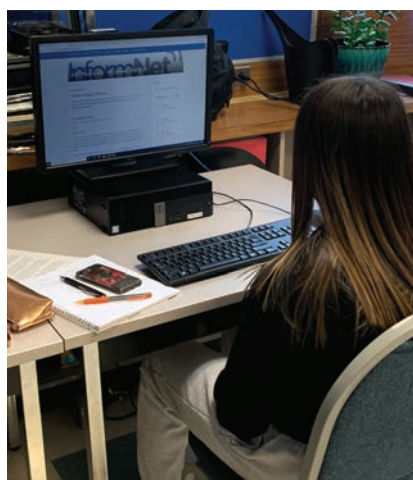
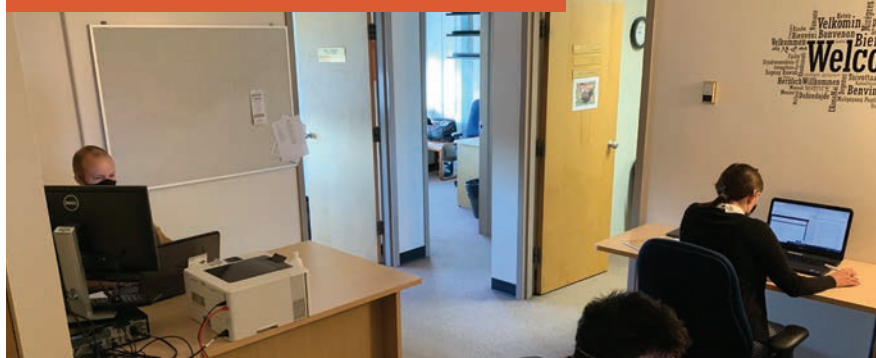
During the early days of COVID-19, I had imagined that technology would take us to new heights and new places in education. The last few months, however, have reinforced – in ways I hadn’t expected – the incredible importance of face-to-face interactions. After months of video calls and virtual interactions, it is clearer than ever that people want to be in the same room with others; a real room not a zoom room!

In thinking about the innovations that I have seen throughout Pembina Trails School Division during the coronavirus pandemic, I am reminded of Alexander Fleming’s discovery of penicillin, which happened by accident in 1928. It wasn’t until 1943 or 1944 that penicillin saw mass application. The efforts to produce it had not been very successful until, by the middle to end of World War II, the military began to realize that more people were dying from infection than from bullets.

At Pembina Trails School Division, we had our own penicillin moment as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. In 1997, three visionary educational leaders, Jean Beaumont, Ron Weston, and Ron Buzahora, created *InformNet*, a virtual high school that introduced high school students to eLearning. It has served thousands of high school students throughout the Pembina Trails and St. James-Assiniboia school divisions.

InformNet has also become the largest summer school program in Manitoba. Yet, despite its reach, there was little uptake at the broader provincial level. In some respects, *InformNet* was ahead of its time. It sat in its Petri dish, so

Teachers used InformNet to help students complete their courses when schools closed in March 2020.



A student working on the InformNet platform.

to speak, without much development or wider application. Then the world changed.

On Friday, March 13th, Manitoba’s Minister of Education announced that in-school classes would be suspended indefinitely because of COVID-19. The following day, Mike Wake, Tom Tarrant and I, met with Dana Rudy, then in the role of Assistant Deputy Minister at Manitoba Education. We agreed to ramp up *InformNet* for the entire province, as a temporary measure to respond to the anticipated needs in remote learning. Within a few weeks, we had worked with the province to

implement *InformNet* as the sole provider of online summer school. The Government of Manitoba, as part of its COVID-recovery plan, offered to fully fund any high school student who enrolled in summer school courses, in 2020, on *InformNet*.

The response from students was immediate and gratifying. Just under 1,400 students enrolled in this program. The more typical summer school enrolment pattern was about 300 students. For 23 years, we had a system for online teaching and learning, but we stuck to the status quo thinking that what we had in the traditional classroom was working just fine. Then suddenly the classroom stopped working and now our online program has taken off. It took a war – with COVID.

Innovation stems from partnerships and relationships

Another innovation that has come to the forefront because of COVID-19 is Pembina Trails Early College (PTEC).

PTEC is three-way partnership between business, education (Pembina Trails School Division and MITT – Manitoba Institute of Trades and Technology), and the provincial government. The four- to five-year program starts in Grade 9 and is targeted to students with an interest in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) subjects and in pursuing careers in information technology.

PTEC students complete the regular high school curriculum at the University of Manitoba's SmartPark campus while also being immersed in technology courses such as software development, cyber security, and coding. By the time they graduate, they have earned both a high school diploma and a post-secondary certificate plus they get a head start in an exciting career in IT or advanced placement for further post-secondary study at the Manitoba Institute for Trades and Technology.

PTEC was running when COVID-19 closed the schools, but the students involved – all of whom are matched with business mentors – didn't miss a beat.

When the students moved to home-based learning, they still had the solid foundation of relationships with their mentors and with their instructors on campus. The existing partnership that combines academics with real-world career paths – a sometimes uneasy one between business and education – has been shown to be powerful and perfectly applied in a COVID-19 virtual learning world. The curriculum can be delivered as easily virtually as in person ... *once the relationships have been established.*

In my view, relationships are the most important consideration. Technology is just a vehicle through which good teaching can take place. Certainly, some programs – like *InformNet* and PTEC – have a leg up because the technological foundation is well integrated. And certainly some educators found it easier than others, based on previous experience or inclination, to make the switch to virtual or blended learning models.

The bottom line is good teaching is going to happen no matter what the platform, as long as there are strong connections – technological AND personal. ■

Ted Fransen is the Superintendent/CEO of Pembina Trails School Division. He is in his 39th year of education, 33 of which have been as a school and/or divisional leader. Ted is a past-president of MASS (2007-2008) and currently represents MASS on the Immigration Partnership Winnipeg Council.

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After World War II, Australia was the first country to make the drug for penicillin available to the public, on March 15, 1945. *Penicillin*. Wikipedia.org.

Jean Beaumont, Ron Weston, and Ron Buzahora, created *InformNet*, (offered by both the Pembina Trails and St. James-Assiniboia School Divisions) to provide students with daily instruction, assignments, and evaluation through regular email and web-based interaction from a certified high school teacher.

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A Collaborative Move to an Online World



Ms. Heidi Serger leads a thunderous bongo drum beat during an outdoor Grades 3/4 music class at Island Lakes Community School.

By Christian Michalik, Brandon Boone, Jeff Anderson, Darcy Cormack, Taylor Fenn, and Clarke Hagan, Louis Riel School Division

When the Louis Riel School Division (LRSD) started its remote learning journey in March 2020, the transition to online instruction and interaction between students, teachers, and families required a collaborative and supportive approach.

Creating an equitable learning environment was a top priority. In early April, staff checked in with families across the division to find out what LRSD could do to help them with the switch to remote learning. Access to internet and access to laptops and tablets were two needs that were identified.

School staff followed up with 159 families who initially indicated they needed support accessing the internet.

“It is possible to prepare for the future without knowing what it will be. The primary way to prepare for the unknown is to attend to the quality of our relationships, to how well we trust and know each other.”

~ MARGARET WHEATLEY

With many families making alternate arrangements during the interim, 17 families from 13 different schools were confirmed as requiring divisional assistance for internet access. Each of the 17

families were connected to the internet, with the division assuming the costs.

“Teaching has always been an incredibly complex and demanding profession, but during remote learning,

reaching students and supporting their needs has been even more challenging,” says Warren Hart, Itinerant Instructional Support Teacher.

Principals and vice-principals liaised with divisional staff to deploy more than 1,600 school devices for students to continue learning at home. This included an extensive configuration and sanitation process.

Through Microsoft Teams and other software programs, educators used video to engage learners in whole group, small group, and one-to-one meetings. The live, face-to-face interaction and chat space provided the ability for teachers to collect evidence in a multitude of ways.

Families that required more traditional paper and pencil tasks were also accommodated through drop-off and pick-up systems. “It’s all about providing opportunities for students to show what they know in a way that empowers their voice,” explains Thaddeus Bourassa, Itinerant Instructional Support Teacher. “We know that no two brains are alike and therefore deserve personalized pathways of learning. The ability for students to demonstrate what they know in a meaningful and remote context was clearly supported.”

The LRSD Learning Team, comprised of 15 Itinerant teachers, provided academic, social-emotional, and behavioural support to school teams who were planning for their students to transition to remote learning. The team developed educational continuance documents for teachers and identified strategies to address students’ recovery learning needs for the return to school in the fall of 2020. Both Hart and Bourassa are on the divisional Learning Team and are EdTech Mentors, a group of LRSD educators who guide staff in integrating technology into both their lesson design and everyday teaching.

With many LRSD staff working from home during the indefinite suspension of classes, the EdTech Mentorship Program and the expertise of the mentors was more important than ever.

Under the leadership of Greg Kiesman, LRSD Itinerant Coordinator

of Technology, and his Ed Tech mentorship team, they focused on the following four key software platforms: Microsoft Teams, Office 365, Class OneNote, and Flipgrid. These integral software programs, along with many other tools, allowed teachers to communicate and manage teaching and learning in an online environment.

Professional development never stopped

Even the professional development (PD) sessions for staff were broadcast and attended online via Microsoft Teams. Each session was an average of an hour in duration and created a mentorship connection with each attendee so that they could continue their learning long after the session was over. Microsoft Teams created the online PD tool that teachers used to stay in touch with their instructors and their teaching colleagues.

More than 400 devices were distributed to teachers and educational assistants, and 1,029 staff members took part in 119 professional development sessions led by EdTech Mentors about online education technology.

Microsoft Office 365 applications saw a substantial spike in usage, too. The LRSD Educators Team, a collaboration hub for teachers on Microsoft Teams, was also created and had more than 1,200 active users sharing successes, learning resources, and words of encouragement. Divisional email activity rose by more than 74 per cent, with approximately 6.4 million messages sent, received, and read. OneDrive, a Cloud storage application, had usage rise by 22 per cent and activity on Microsoft Forms rose by 196 per cent.

While reflecting on the move to remote learning, one LRSD teacher notes, “It has broken down barriers, created community, and given students the opportunity to truly explore their own creative interests in ways that amplify their voice in powerful and meaningful ways.”

LRSD TechTalks, a channel on Microsoft Streams, was also established as an option for staff and was used to upload all webinars, professional development sessions, and quick tips

to ensure best practices and updates were kept at the forefront. This space soon filled with more than 50 videos and became a popular channel where virtual on-demand professional development was available 24/7 for educators to access and re-visit. “We saw a huge increase in staff collaboration,” says Hart. “Through safe connections online, teachers naturally shared ideas, files and talked about what was working for them. Staff came together in purposeful ways to build meaningful learning experiences for all learners.”

Overcoming challenges

The move to this online world has not been without challenges, but LRSD’s students, staff, and community members have continually showed a commitment to learning and adapting to this new reality. “Although we don’t know what the future will look like, one thing that will not change will be the need for thoughtful plans of learning and to provide experiences where students find meaning in their work, feel a sense of belonging, have opportunities to thrive, stretch their brains, and feel a sense of mastery,” said Bourassa.

Prior to the start of the 2020-2021 school year, LRSD surveyed students in Grades 4 to 12 to gather feedback about their experience with remote learning in spring. More than 3,000 students replied to the survey and responses reflected a full range of experiences. Students articulated an appreciation for the connections to their teachers, with some asking for more frequent individual and whole class meetings. Students expressed a desire for clear expectations, timelines, and guidance to complete assigned work, some sharing that they were frustrated when they didn’t know how to complete a task and were unable to connect with the teacher in the moment. Students requested that teachers consider standardizing the platform from which they work to make it easier for students and families to become comfortable with the technical side of remote learning. We also received feedback that applauded the creativity of teachers in how they engaged with students.

The students’ feedback was foundational in the creation and launch of the

LRSD Learning from Home School (LFHS)/L'École Apprendre-chez-soi for students in Kindergarten to Grade 12 (English Program) and Grades 1 to 12 (French Immersion Program) in September 2020.

A dedicated team of teachers is currently serving more than 500 students who, due to medical considerations, are unable to return to in-classroom school this fall. Students registered in the LFHS are receiving a combination of online instruction with real-time live-streamed teaching and pre-recorded lessons from a designated teacher with support from an instructional intern. Students have remained registered at their home schools in addition to being registered with the LFHS and require parent involvement, assistance, and support in their learning journey.

Students are supported by specific teachers assigned to each grade level using Microsoft Teams Instruction and their everyday experience consists of whole class, small group, and individual lessons. Unlike emergency remote learning that took place in the spring of 2020, registration for the LFHS option requires students to meet the outcomes outlined at each grade level in the Manitoba curriculum. The LFHS team of teachers has embraced this opportunity and are working together to create a sense of belonging within their classroom communities, providing authentic and engaging learning experiences that inspire students with voice and choice. ■

Christian Michalik is the Superintendent of the Louis Riel School Division (LRSD), which was established in 2002 after the official amalgamation of the St. Boniface and St. Vital School Divisions. The division is home to 40 schools, 2,123 staff, and proudly serves the growing community of more than 15,720 students and their families/guardians in the south-east quadrant of Winnipeg. The LRSD vision is for all members of the community to excel as caring, confident, and capable resilient life-long learners who contribute to a democratic and sustainable world.



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Speech and Language Services: Positive Outcomes Despite COVID-19

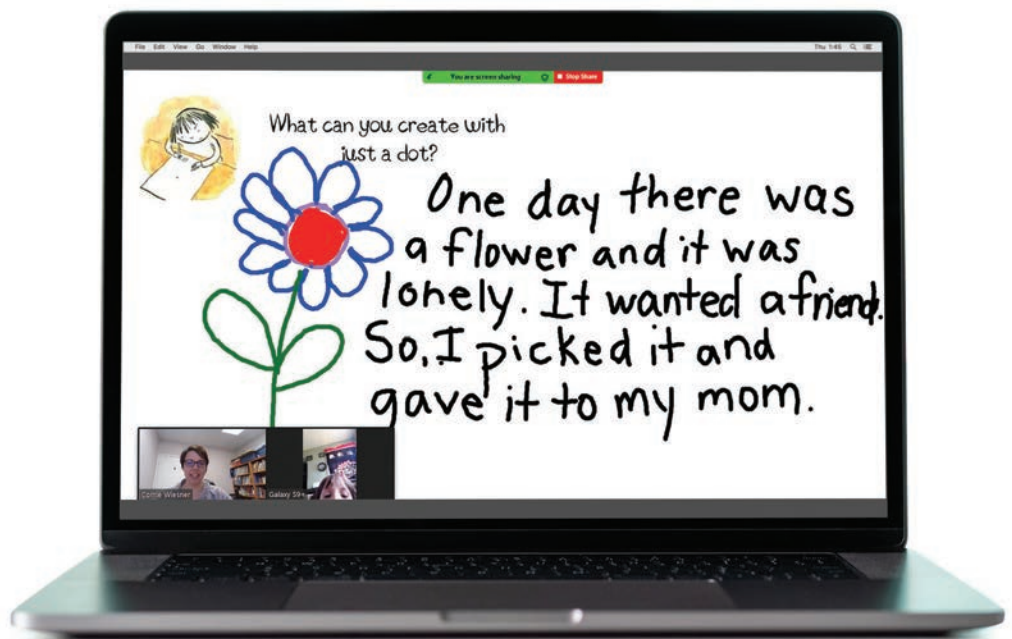
By Corrie Wiesner, Turtle Mountain School Division

The arrival of COVID-19 has meant changes in almost every area of life, and provision of speech and language services within the Manitoba school system certainly has not been exempt. As schools moved to a remote learning model this past spring, so too did clinical services. Like other disciplines within education, Speech-Language Pathologists (S-LPs) became creative and innovative in providing services to students and their families. In Turtle Mountain School Division, this meant developing a service delivery plan, which led to a process of implementation, and resulted in several positive outcomes.

Tim De Ruyck, Superintendent/CEO of Turtle Mountain School Division, explains, "Like all aspects of education and student services programming, in March 2020 our S-LPs had to quickly work collaboratively to establish a service delivery model which would continue to promote the success of all students. Knowing we have a variety of needs and circumstances amongst our parent/student community, the provision of choice and options was key to maintaining engagement with our students and their families."

The plan

When it was first announced that schools in Manitoba were moving to a remote learning model, it seemed as if clinical services came to a sudden grinding halt. Its place in the shift from in-class learning to remote learning seemed somewhat nebulous. Yet, the services provided through speech and language therapy are a lifeline to many of our students and families; we play a key role in helping students achieve their best in academic and social settings. Our quick, short-term "fix" for service provision was a home program package sent to every student on caseload. However, with the extension of the remote learning time frame, it was soon evident that we needed a more long-term plan for providing quality services.



The S-LP "world" is made up of professionals who seem to be naturally innovative and collaborative, probably necessitated by the nature of what we do. Coming up with a plan for remote services took shape through many virtual meetings with fellow speech-language pathologists, online professional development, and the research of already existing remote therapy methods. Thankfully, teletherapy (also known as telepractice) is not new to speech-language therapy and many SLPs have paved the way in delivering services using a variety of techniques.

It also became apparent, during the early stages of remote learning, that some of our families were excelling and some were finding it challenging. In an effort to best support all of our families, a letter was sent to each one outlining several different programming options, with the hopes that each family would choose an option that would best support and work for them. Thus began the process of providing remote therapy.

The process

As parents began responding with their choice of programming, a means

to record their choices was needed. A Google form was created that was shared with our coordinator. This kept track of who received services, what type of services were provided, frequency, and also allowed us to reach out to families that may not have responded.

One of the options families could choose from was "home programming." Families who selected this option were provided with various speech-language activities to be completed at home, such as paper/pencil worksheets, games, crafts, etc. These families were also contacted by phone so that the home program, goals, methods, and strategies could be explained and questions answered. A follow-up call was made approximately one month later, which allowed for additional questions to be answered and further home programming to be provided if needed.

Another programming option was "online resources." There are some fantastic online resources for speech-language therapy that, until now, were not a part of our clinician "toolbox." We were able to provide online links to videos that clearly explain specific speech sound production

in a family friendly way as well as links to various online “hubs” where S-LPs (and other educators) place interactive games and activities that target various goals. Some of these resources even record student progress and share it with the S-LP. This was a fantastic way to provide ongoing programming in a remote learning situation.

A third option parents and caregivers could choose was “virtual sessions.” In order to implement this option, considerations regarding platform, confidentiality, session structure (using real-life items and online resources), etc. had to be made. Once these issues were figured out, virtual sessions proved to be a very positive method of providing services. Sessions involved parent participation, the use of online games and activities via screen share, as well as interactive games played with all participants (i.e., pulling various items out of a hat and asking the student to find something similar in their home, etc.).

Positive outcomes

One of the most positive results of providing speech-language services during the pandemic was the innovation in

service delivery. S-LPs evaluate strengths and needs and then creatively tailor therapy for individual students, and we now have several more “tools” in our therapy “toolbox.” We’ve learned how to use various platforms for virtual sessions, how to screen share, and we have acquired more online resources that help engage families remotely. This experience has truly changed the way therapy can be provided and many of these acquired skills will continue to be implemented.

“All in this together” certainly applies to another positive outcome of remote service delivery; collaboration with other professionals and families. It was imperative that we make the most of our contact time with students and as such, teaming across disciplines became even more important. Conversations via phone (and not during a quick recess break) allowed us to share student goals, brainstorm ideas, and troubleshoot how to best move individual students forward.

Perhaps the most important positive outcome was the increase in parent/caregiver engagement. Home programs, online resources, and virtual sessions were all implemented with their participation.

Parents and caregivers were made more aware of their child’s speech and language goals and they were given hands-on strategies that they were able to implement on a daily basis. As a result, for those families who actively participated in remote therapy, significant progress was made.

It has been said that challenging times produce growth. This has certainly been the case in providing speech-language therapy during the COVID-19 pandemic. The growth and innovation during this time will have a long-lasting positive impact on the students and families with whom we work.

“There will be many takeaways once the pandemic is finally behind us,” adds De Ruyck. “Ironically, in some circumstances the innovation required throughout the pandemic has increased engagement with the students and families who require specialized services, and the programming adjustments which have been made will certainly be strongly considered as we move forward.” ■

Corrie Wiesner is a Speech-Language Pathologist in Turtle Mountain School Division.




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Appui des partenaires pendant la pandémie

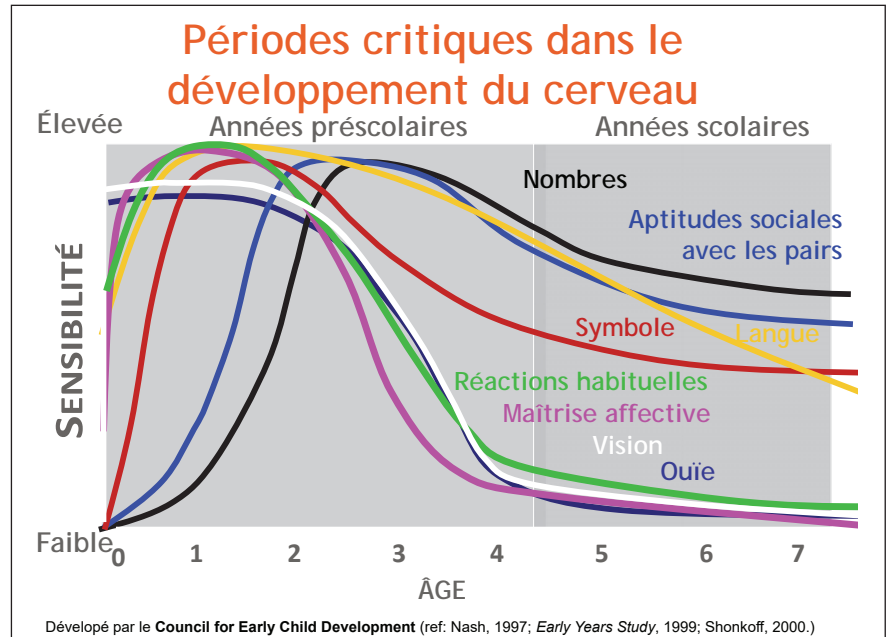
Par René Déquier, Division scolaire franco-manitobaine

Les écoles ont appris que les classes auraient lieu à distance l'après-midi du 13 mars. Le nombre d'élèves présents à l'école la semaine suivante, dernière semaine en présentiel, est devenu de plus en plus petit. L'enseignement à distance, appelé aussi enseignement d'urgence, a commencé le 20 mars pour une période prévue de deux semaines qui s'est étendue jusqu'au 15 juin.

Lorsque les paramètres du nouveau monde deviennent plus clairs, on réinvente le système d'éducation pour tenter, dans la mesure du possible, de respecter le mandat qui nous est donné. L'exercice nous oblige à revoir nos priorités et à voir les forces et les faiblesses du système au complet.

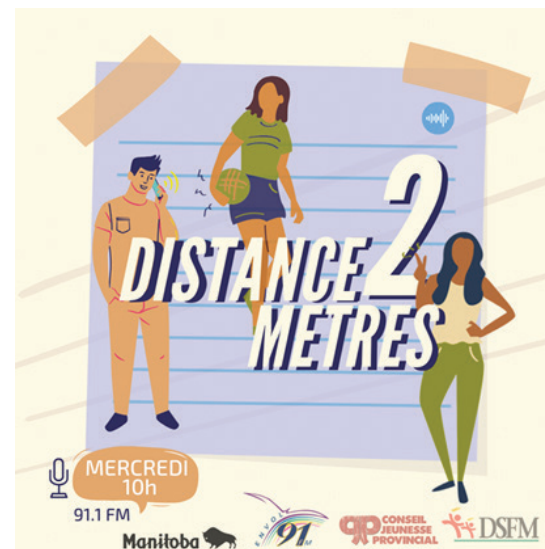
À la Division scolaire franco-manitobaine (DSFM), nous avons le mandat d'assurer l'épanouissement de chaque apprenante et apprenant dans une perspective d'inclusion et de respect au profit de la communauté franco-manitobaine d'aujourd'hui et de demain. Dans ce mandat, le développement langagier dans un contexte minoritaire est une priorité continue. Le nouveau contexte d'éducation à distance où les enfants ne peuvent fréquenter physiquement les écoles, milieux francophones sûrs, réduit les occasions des futurs citoyens de développer la langue française. La priorité du développement langagier devient donc encore plus importante.

La situation du confinement pose un autre défi avec le temps. Le bien-être, qui était un élément important du plan stratégique avant la pandémie, devient encore plus important dans ce nouvel environnement qui nous force à changer notre fonctionnement quotidien, qui menace les emplois, qui limite nos mouvements et nos interactions humaines et qui laisse entrevoir un avenir incertain pendant de plus en plus longtemps.



Afin de mieux affronter ces défis, la DSFM a pu collaborer avec ses partenaires afin de profiter à toute la communauté. La communauté francophone est petite en nombre, mais les liens y sont nombreux et solides.

Un partenariat très stratégique est celui connu sous le nom de La Coalition de la petite enfance francophone du Manitoba (La Coalition). Ce partenariat comprend la Fédération des parents de la francophonie du Manitoba (FPFM), la Société de la francophonie du Manitoba (SFM) et la DSFM. Le comité directeur a le mandat d'offrir une gamme complète et cohérente de programmes et de services en français visant à répondre aux besoins des enfants francophones du Manitoba de 0 à 6 ans et leur famille dans toutes les dimensions de leur développement. Ce partenariat est très stratégique, car il intervient au moment le plus important du développement de l'enfant en appuyant le parent dans son rôle. De nombreuses recherches ont démontré que le développement du cerveau de



l'enfant avant l'âge scolaire est le plus important de toute sa vie. Le graphique ci-dessous de Clyde Hertzman l'illustre clairement.

Plusieurs chercheurs indiquent aussi les effets négatifs du stress vécu par la mère pendant la période prénatale. Le stress pendant cette période peut influencer le développement génétique des enfants et leur santé mentale pour

une période de plus de vingt ans. La tempête de verglas au Québec en 1998 nous a malheureusement donné des exemples.

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- www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-developmental-origins-of-health-and-disease/article/childhood-body-mass-index-at-55-years-mediates-the-effect-of-prenatal-maternal-stress-on-daughters-age-at-menarche-project-ice-storm/4C267699EADC-009865344E4E59C832F1

Vu le développement important pendant la petite enfance, la DSFM croit que l'appui de cet organisme augmente les compétences langagières de ses futurs élèves. Le plus important des projets de la Coalition est l'offre des Centres de la petite enfance et de la famille (CPEF). Ces centres offrent aux parents des occasions de développer les compétences des jeunes enfants en présence d'autres enfants. Ils offrent aussi un appui aux parents qui cherchent des services de petite enfance en français. Avant la pandémie, près de 600 familles étaient inscrites à ces services, qui sont le plus souvent offerts dans les écoles de la DSFM. Ce sont donc près de 50 % des familles qui bénéficiaient de cet appui.

Lors de la pandémie, l'accès aux écoles étant interdit aux employés et aux familles, les coordonnatrices se sont tournées vers leurs réseaux des médias sociaux pour offrir des activités aux familles en confinement. L'offre régulière d'activités réduit l'impression d'isolement des enfants et de leurs parents. Les réseaux sont suivis par des familles francophones d'un bout à l'autre de la province tout en attirant des visionnements de provinces voisines. Les parents sont très reconnaissants du service et le démontrent en répondant aux médias sociaux. Nous croyons que ces activités auront non seulement appuyé le développement des enfants, mais aussi réduit le stress des parents et potentiellement réduit les effets négatifs de ce stress.

Afin de répondre aux élèves plus âgés, la DSFM se fie au partenariat avec

le Conseil jeunesse provincial (CJP) et Envol 91. La pandémie réduit les occasions des élèves de communiquer en français, les confinant à des foyers où la dynamique langagière n'est pas en français dans plus de la moitié des cas. De plus, certains de ces élèves vivent mal cette situation de confinement qui ne leur permet pas d'interagir avec leurs pairs. Avec l'appui de la DSFM et du CJP, Envol 91 produit une émission de radio où les élèves en confinement peuvent partager leurs défis, les solutions qu'ils découvrent et la croissance qu'ils y font. L'émission, nommée *Distance 2 mètres*, est diffusée sur les ondes d'Envol 91 et est ensuite disponible en baladodiffusion sur son site Web. Les trois partenaires sont gagnants. Le CJP peut continuer à accompagner les élèves sur des sujets qui les interpellent comme l'insécurité linguistique. Envol 91 peut produire du matériel qui est pertinent pour la communauté. La DSFM offre des occasions de dialogue authentique à ses élèves, tout en les accompagnant dans leur sentiment de bien-être. Elle avance aussi dans son mandat de transformer ses établissements en *Écoles communautaires et citoyennes*.

En cette période de pandémie, nous devons nous rappeler l'adage africain : « ça prend tout un village pour élever un enfant ». La communauté manitobaine

est riche en ressources et en occasions d'apprentissage pour les enfants en apprentissage de la langue française, qu'il s'agisse de leur langue maternelle ou de leur langue seconde. En apprenant des expériences du passé, les partenariats que nous développons offrent un soutien pendant la pandémie et bénéficieront à nos enfants et à nos communautés longtemps après la fin de la crise. ■

René Déquier est directeur général adjoint à la Division scolaire francomanitobaine depuis l'automne 2010. Il a été enseignant et directeur d'école et il est responsable des services éducatifs et supervise une dizaine d'écoles.

To read this article in English, email ssavory@matrixgroupinc.net.

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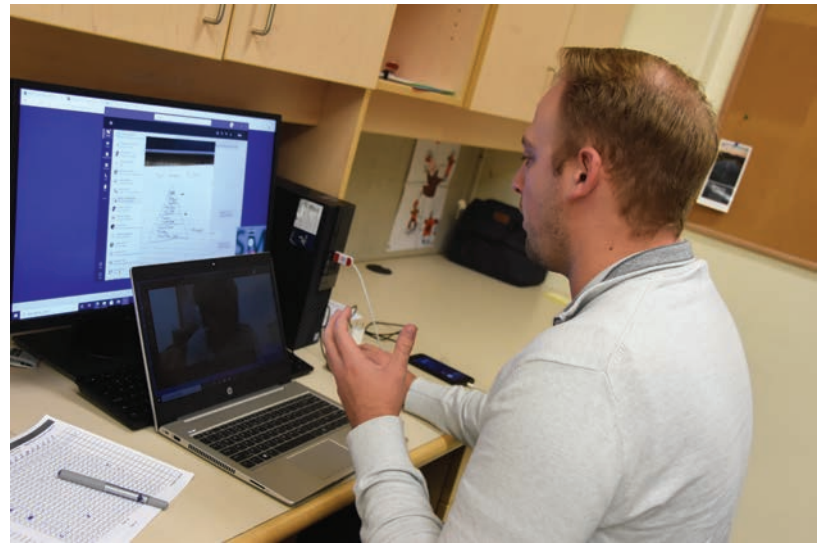
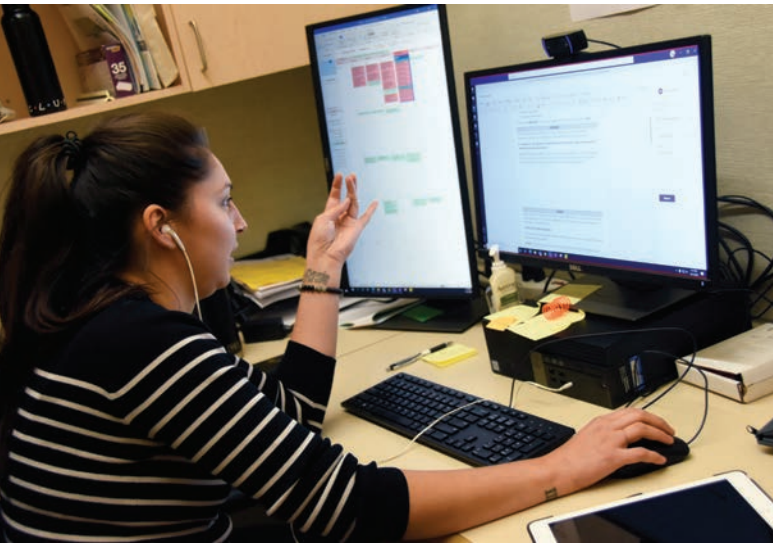
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The Power of Organizational Culture at a Distance

By Karen Boyd and Cheryl Hooper, River East Transcona School Division



Teachers in River East Transcona School Division teaching students remotely this past spring.

In March 2020, the arrival of COVID-19 threw all of us into pandemic teaching and learning. Across the province, distance learning happened from late March to late June; in the River East Transcona School Division (RETSD), this meant that 17,000 students and staff from 42 schools disbursed to their own spaces to continue their education journeys.

When students and teachers are within our buildings there is an RETSD culture regardless of the factors that make all those spaces unique, like class size, grade level, and geographic location. There is common language around the divisional priorities of literacy, numeracy, and safe schools, and professional learning supports similar initiatives across all schools, technology is centrally managed, and staffing is based on consistent formulas.

We know that a lot of great teaching and learning happened during the suspension of classes, but we wondered; did distance learning represent and continue to reflect the RETSD culture?

Organizational culture is defined as

“The underlying beliefs, assumptions, values, and ways of interacting that contribute to the unique social and psychological environment of an organization.” The RETSD culture is defined by a formal purpose; mission, beliefs and vision statements; operational structures, like our educational priorities of literacy, numeracy, and safe schools; centrally managed technology; and common cross-divisional initiatives.

These structures assist in operationalizing our beliefs through full inclusion for all students, broad-based understandings of literacy and numeracy, pedagogical stances of play-based and inquiry-based learning, STEAM programming, and assessment principles. Throughout distance learning, we collected data to see if those beliefs continued to be operationalized through the same lenses, but from a distance.

We used online tools to gather evidence. We looked at what teachers posted and shared on Yammer (a Microsoft tool like Twitter, but internal to RETSD), and we used Yammer to distribute survey questions to teachers. In addition,

notes from teacher discussion groups were gathered electronically, and divisional consultants provided input. As we considered the data, several themes and observations emerged.

RETSD’s literacy priority is focused on a broad understanding of literacy that includes multiple modes. The nature of distance learning highlighted the understanding of digital literacy within this priority, both for teachers and students. Several teachers commented about how they used new technology tools while teaching remotely, which increased their comfort with these tools. These teachers planned to bring some of these tools into in-class learning as students returned to schools. As with all literacies, a teacher’s level of digital literacy is a necessary precursor to student digital literacy.

Teachers saw the benefits of increased student comfort and ability with Microsoft Teams during distance learning. They also commented about the need for parents to know and gain comfort with these tools, especially for younger students.

Teachers also noted the importance of student access to libraries, in some capacity, and the need to reimagine student access to resources for both in-class and distance learning. This includes access to digital resources. As a division, a lack of equity regarding internet and devices became evident when distance learning started. We worked to provide internet access and mobile devices to students in need to enable them to participate in distance learning.


The switch to distance learning caused a shift in our literacy work. Previously, we had sought to make connections between traditional literacies and texts to digital literacy. Distance

learning meant that teachers had to seek to make connections the other way. Teachers said distance learning reinforced the importance of embedding literacy into teaching practice and the importance of literacy across the curriculum and making cross-curricular connections. There were examples of teachers reading aloud and creating special themed lessons to engage students (for example, a spy-related theme).

The pedagogical shift that we had started during in-class learning was hastened in numeracy as well. Our Technology-Enabled Learning Plan for numeracy has focused on math conversations, small group work, and

problem-solving. Several years into the work, teachers continue to increase their comfort and frequency of use for the teaching practices. Teachers found distance learning reinforced the importance of these math teaching practices, especially open and inquiry practices, and the importance of teacher conversations and professional development about those teaching practices. Distance learning also emphasized the need to let go of linear and repetitive math instruction and worksheets, and to include more real-world scenarios to teach numeracy.

Teachers suggested a reimagining of how students can use manipulatives virtually, and reimagining numeracy



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assessment practices and how students can show their process and demonstrate their learning and understanding. For example, Grade 1 students created their own virtual pet shops to work on and demonstrate numeracy skills.

Our Safe and Caring Schools priority needed to be reimagined without a school building. Teachers recognized that it is important for their students to “see” them, and used video calls on Microsoft Teams to stay connected and visible to their students during distance learning. Video was used for academics as well as to maintain connection and belongingness among students, such as in the divisional Indigenous drumming circle. Other ways teachers and schools maintained connections with students included: video content or messages from staff to students, check-ins with individual students/families, driving/biking/walking parades through the school neighbourhood, and online spirit week activities.

The pandemic and the suspension of classes illustrated how important relationships are to teaching and learning. Teachers found distance learning a good reminder not to take relationships for granted and emphasized the importance of establishing and maintaining them with students, families, and colleagues. The importance of social-emotional learning and mental health supports for students was even more apparent during distance learning. Incorporating well-being and supporting connections and inclusion is necessary for both staff and students.

One of our middle schools created a new community art initiative where students created art pieces and left them around the community to brighten someone’s day. School-designed labels were attached to all art pieces and a hashtag was used so students could tag pictures of their art when posting to social media.

Teachers in RETSD already assess students in a variety of ways including

for, as, and of learning. Distance learning enhanced opportunities for teachers to encourage students to use variety, choice, and creativity in how they completed and submitted assignments, and reinforced the importance of this variety.

The importance of multiple entry and exit points, increased emphasis on the learning rather than the grade, and the importance of effective and ongoing feedback from teachers to students as part of the learning experience were demonstrated during distance learning. Teachers also suggested reimagining assignments and assessments that are cross-curricular and encouraged staff collaboration.

Did distance learning represent and continue to reflect the RETSD culture? In a word: YES. In fact, we feel it concentrated our focus on our priorities and made our culture more visible. Distance learning reminded and re-emphasized the importance of the

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RETSD teaching beliefs and expanded teachers' thinking about digital tools, teaching practices, connections, and assessment. We had already started work toward these goals before the suspension of classes, but distance learning forced us to reimagine how to reach those goals and accelerated our progress toward them.

As we move forward with the return to classroom learning and recovery learning, teachers want to continue and enhance technology integration, continue and enhance community and relationship building with students

and families, incorporate more student choice into teaching and learning, and to increase opportunities for play-based learning from Kindergarten through Grade 12.

As a division, we are somewhat centrally driven and cautious, but the distance learning experience has taught us that we are also risk takers and innovators, and that this can propel us forward toward our goals. ■

Karen Boyd is the Assistant Superintendent of Educational Programming in the River East

Transcona School Division. Cheryl Hooper is the Research Officer for the River East Transcona School Division.

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Camp Manitou	17
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CancerCare Manitoba Foundation	19
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Craig & Ross	25
COMPUTERS	
Computers for Schools	25
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Stitt Feld Handy Group	17
DIRECTIONAL SIGNAGE, STICKERS AND BARRIERS	
Elite	9
EDUCATION PUBLISHING	
Solution Tree	IBC
EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS	
Manitoba Institute of Trades & Technology	23
EMERGENCY SERVICES AND INSURANCE RESTORATION	
Winnipeg Building & Decorating	25
FACE MASKS AND SHIELDS	
Elite	9
FACE MASKS AND CUSTOM INDUSTRIAL SEWING	
Deasil Custom Sewing	24
FIRST NATIONS EDUCATION	
Keewatin Tribal Council	25
FUN AND GAMES	
Lasertopia	24
FUNDRAISING	
Cancer Care Manitoba Foundation	19
GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP	
Manitoba Council for International Cooperation	14

GLOVES FOR PERSONAL PROTECTION	
Elite	9
GYMNASIUM EQUIPMENT	
Royal Stewart Ltd.	12
HAND SANITIZERS AND SANITIZING STATIONS	
Elite	9
JANITORIAL SUPPLIES	
Miracle Sanitation Supply Co. Inc.	IFC
LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM	
D2L Desire to Learn	IBC
LICE REMOVAL	
Lousy Lice	24
MUSEUMS	
Canadian Fossil Discovery Centre	24
PROTECTIVE PANELS / DESK GUARDS	
Elite	9
MPD Glass & Vinyl Graphics	25
ROOF SERVICE AND MAINTENANCE	
MJ Roofing	26
ROOFING CONTRACTORS	
Roofing Contractors Association of Manitoba	14
SANITIZING AND DISINFECTING PRODUCTS	
Elite	9
Miracle Sanitation Supply Co. Inc.	IFC
SCHOOL AND OFFICE SUPPLIES	
Christie's Office Products	11
SPORTS	
Special Olympics Manitoba	12
VIRTUAL LEARNING	
Manitoba Council for International Cooperation	14
VISION CARE	
Grand Development Vision Institute	26
WELLNESS - SOCIAL/WORKPLACE	
Canadian Red Cross Society	21

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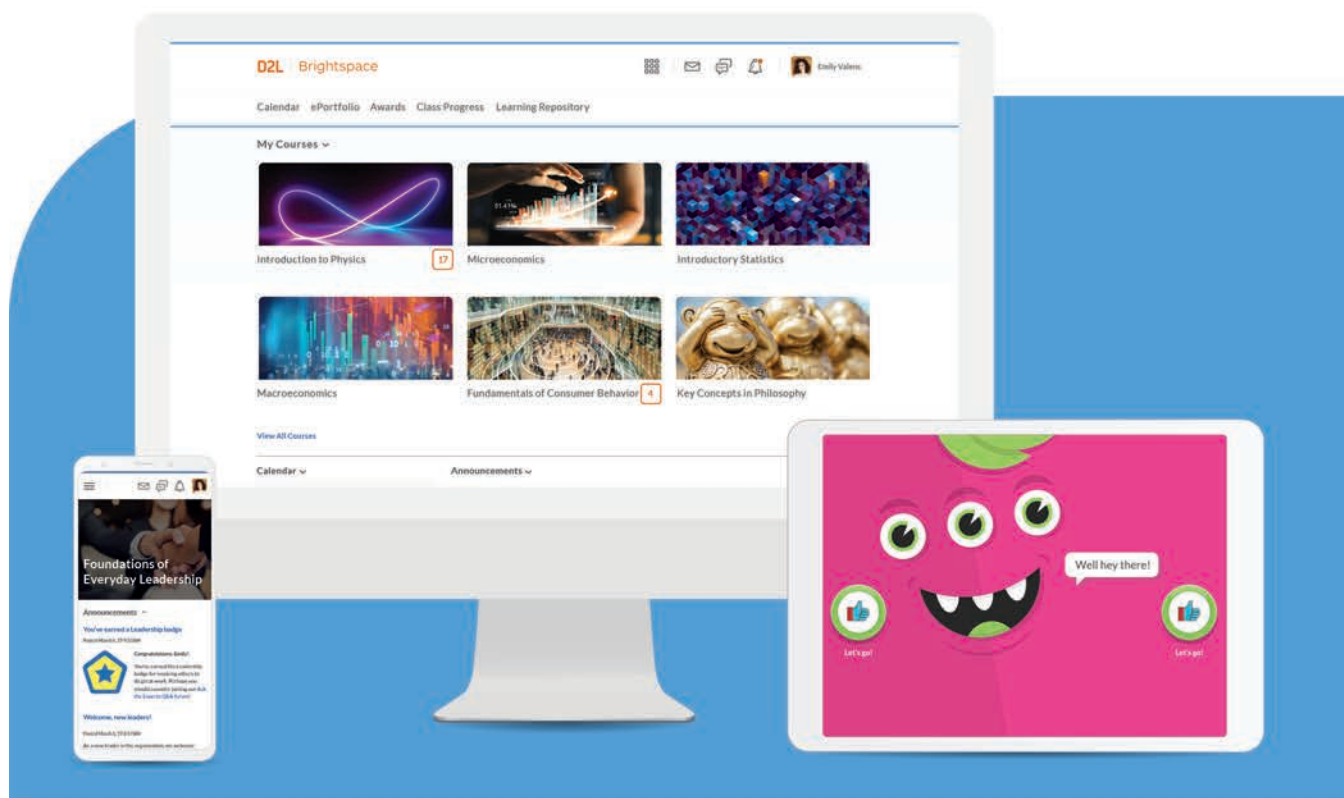


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