

# Via the Seine | Special Report

## Stories of hope and success

*A message from Superintendent Michael Borgfjord*

Welcome to our first Special Via the Seine Report. Since schools closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic two months ago, we know our students, their families and our staff have worked hard as they adapt to the new realities of at-home learning. In that time there have been many success stories – uplifting stories of people learning more about themselves and our world than they likely ever thought possible. These next few pages showcase just a few of the thoughtful acts of kindness

and commitment I’ve witnessed over the last few weeks. We hope you find them inspiring as well.

We will be sending you this special electronic edition of Via the Seine regularly now until late June. We hope they give you a glimpse into the many ways our staff, your children and our communities are working together for a common goal: supporting our students’ learning, mental health and well-being.

Thank you to all of our students, families and staff for your understanding, dedication, and cooperation as we navigate these strange waters. We recognize the unique challenges and difficulties families may be facing, and want to remind you to please continue to connect with your child’s teacher or school administrator if you need any assistance at all with technology, learning from home or general support. We are here for you. 🟡

## A wheely great surprise

School staff in Lorette teamed up to bring smiles to surprised students’ faces on two beautiful spring days.

On April 24, École Lorette Immersion physical education teacher Ida Yachison and Vice Principal Christian Leclerc, with a teacher from Division scolaire franco-manitobaine, cycled around town to greet students with a cheer, a wave and even some dancing.

Later, ELI staff decorated their cars and bikes and paraded through Lorette on May 6, to the delight of students and their families. 🟡



🟡 They’re on a roll! ELI physical education teacher Ida Yachison and vice principal Christian Leclerc greeted students around Lorette.

## For the love of reading



🟡 Reading Recovery teacher Donna Leveille reads a story to ARB students over live video.

Where the readers go, the books will follow.

To ensure students are still reading, Arbogate School staff have sent hundreds of books home with families. And that’s not all – literacy learning is continuing remotely through virtual one-on-one reading and writing support, including the Reading Recovery and Guided Reading programs.

Students are exploring online libraries, watching their teachers read over recorded or live streaming video and writing stories about what they’ve been up to at home.

“Students’ and teachers’ faces light up when they see each other online for their daily reading and writing sessions,” says Reading Recovery teacher Donna Leveille. “They are sharing online white boards to practice new words, and having conversations to enrich their oral language.” 🟡

## Artists “in residence” get inspired



Grade 7 LBC student Praise O. designed these lovely spring flowers as part of an at-home learning art tie-in.

It’s not all letters and numbers – students learning at home need a chance to be creative, too. Our Divisional Art Consultant, Gabrielle Doll, and Divisional Drama Teacher, Megan Young, have both developed hands-on lesson videos using art and drama to help kids explore science and social studies topics.

Doll and Young tie the videos in with the current topics and learning goals for students from Kindergarten on up. They both set up makeshift home studios and learned to use equipment, video editing and special effects. Young even created a puppet theatre and a “green screen” wall using plastic tablecloths.

Their customized lessons help explore the five senses, colour, animals and their habitats, and plants and living things – using basic at-home supplies such as pencils, crayons, recyclable items, leaves and grass, stuffed toys and LEGO bricks. Recently, Early and Middle Years students produced their own commercials for Earth Day.

“It’s exciting to see how my students are engaged in creating their versions of these beautiful art ideas,” says Oluyemisi Nuga, a Grade 7/8 teacher at La Barrière Crossings School. “They have really been inspired to be creative even in this challenging time. I am so proud of their work.”

Lessons have also been adapted for print instructions, for students without online access. 🟡

## Let’s get moving

How do you keep students motivated and engaged in their own learning – while also staying active? The Physical Education teacher at Richer School found a way to do just that.

Using the Microsoft Teams online platform, teacher Graham Bodnar asks students to send him videos of themselves performing daily warm-up exercises. He then edits the videos into what he calls “Wildcat Workouts” – named for the school mascot.

Bodnar posts the workout video online each day, so students can follow along with the exercises being done by their own schoolmates. The students can then post comments to self-assess and rate the videos based on how challenging they found them.

“This has all proven to be a very successful tool in engaging students in their own learning,” says School Principal Karen Thiessen. 🟡

Students submit videos of themselves doing exercises such as this plank performed by Chelsea R., Grade 7 at RCH.



## Keeping mental health in mind

This new reality of studying at home is tough on all students – and some struggle more than others. But students who need support with their emotional and mental well-being are being taken care of, too.

The East End Social Work team, which works with Collège Lorette Collegiate and Ste Anne Collegiate, has transformed its weekly in-school mental health group into an online interactive group using the Microsoft Teams online meeting tool. The group focuses on Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) – a skills-based learning approach to helping students who struggle to regulate their emotions, cope with stress and be mindful – delivered together with Southern Health Child and Adolescent Community Mental Health Workers.

“We’re seeing a lot of success with the group. Kids are chiming in weekly, completing their work and maintaining connections with their peers and trusted adults in their lives,” says divisional Social Worker Joanne Vielfaure-Romaniuk. “It has helped model calmness, reinforce relationships with our community partners and provide visible leadership to our students.”

The group has also sent home personal packages of materials to the students to help them use some of the strategies. If families feel their child needs support from the social work team, they should get in touch with the teacher, principal or guidance counselors / student support teachers. 🟡

## Getting families connected - quickly

When the news hit that schools in Manitoba would close due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Seine River School Division had mere days to prepare for the shift to at-home learning. Getting staff and students connected was crucial, and the five staff in the Information Technology (IT) department, along with Technology Education Consultant Jonathan Waite, all hit the ground running.



▲ Jonathan Waite, Technology Education Consultant (centre, wearing glasses) with SRSD's Information Technology team, from left: Vincent Tang, Chad Richardson, Matt McMahon, Michelle Roukema and Stephanie Callewaert.

Rolling out online learning resources in just a week was no easy task. The IT team worked feverishly to launch Microsoft Office 365 and the FlipGrid video learning platform. Waite spent hours creating video guides to help both staff and families access and get acquainted with the new technology. (You can find the student videos at [www.srsd.ca/IC/technology](http://www.srsd.ca/IC/technology).)

"Eighteen months of planning, testing and implementation for Office 365, which we were preparing to launch in September, was done in about 18 hours," Waite says. "The IT team did absolutely amazing work, bending over backwards and working

long hours to make sure this could be implemented and done well, while also addressing issues teachers and parents had with connecting or getting logged in."

Waite has also been hosting live online "Tech Talks" to allow teachers and staff to allow ask questions and get troubleshooting tips, archiving the videos so staff can revisit them for advice or instruction.

Schools also had to ensure students without Internet or equipment at home could get the materials they needed, and swiftly implemented procedures for assignment pick-up and drop-off. In April, the IT department worked to expand each school's Wi-Fi radius to the school parking lots, so families could drive up, connect and download information and assignments. In towns without nearby schools, the Division partnered with the community: the Marchand and Woodridge community centres both opened their Wi-Fi networks to students, and the Division set up new Wi-Fi spots at the Ross Community Centre and the general store in Ste. Genevieve.

The Division also received a welcome gift in April: 45 laptops donated by former SRSD Trustee Jennifer Stefansson's computer donation program, supported by Richardson International and New Flyer Industries. The IT team worked to quickly format the new laptops for students in what Waite calls "a Herculean effort", then distributed them to families in need.

"Our mantra has been to eliminate the obstacles and get as much done as we can without it being a burden for students, families and staff," Waite explains, adding that the Division continues to explore ways to ensure students can be connected. "We all respect and salute the staff, students, and parents for taking on this monumental task in such a short amount of time, to get in and get used to the system so they could begin learning." 🟡

## Virtual town hall

Come one, come all – virtually, that is.

École St. Norbert Immersion's school administration, together with the Parent Advisory Council, held a virtual "Town Hall" meeting in mid-April for parents and students to share how they were managing, and to identify some of the struggles and solutions for at-home learning. About 30 people attended.

"This was an excellent opportunity for parents and students to have a voice into how teachers can better

provide remote learning for families," says Principal François Rémillard. "Dialogue and discussion are key to responsiveness in this extreme situation."

The ideas were then shared with other teachers and staff. For example, parents requested weekly lessons and assignments be sent on Fridays to allow them to plan on weekends for the week ahead, teachers are now interacting with students more online in real time to help them practice their oral French communication, and essential outcomes are being shared with parents to keep them informed and help them better support teachers. 🟡