

# Via the Seine

## Looking out for the common good | *A message from Michael Borgfjord, Superintendent*

It's been an especially difficult few months, with the third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic hitting Manitoba, several of our schools going into full remote learning, and our provincial government announcing the proposed legislation on how education will be delivered in Manitoba. We encourage all families in the Seine River School Division to become familiar with Bill 64 – The Education Modernization Act, and what it would mean for education in our province and our schools. Along with our Board of Trustees, I am very concerned about what will become of the high quality of education and promising results we have worked so hard to achieve in our Division. For public information about Bill 64, including sample letters for writing to your MLA, contact information, details from our SRSD Town Hall in April and more, please visit our website at [srsd.ca/Community/bill64info](https://srsd.ca/Community/bill64info).

At the same time, I am so proud of our students and staff for the commitment they have continued to show

through all of the challenges of this year. Our teachers and support staff who are now working with students remotely are rising to the challenge in incredible ways, as are our students. In this issue, we share how our students are showing kindness and appreciation, how staff are helping support our students and each other when it comes to mental health, and how one student is sharing her artistic side in a big way.

Even through tough times, our students shine in inspiring ways – looking out for the common good, giving back and building a strong community. We just received the news that Seine River School Division ranked first in the province for fundraising among all Manitoba divisions for the annual Terry Fox School Run this year – helping Canadian cancer researchers. Our students and staff can be very proud of this contribution, and as we work through the last few weeks of the school year and this third wave of the pandemic, my admiration for our amazing school communities only grows. 🍌

## Gratitude, in writing

It was a win-win situation at Richer School when students set out to show appreciation for teachers and staff.

Principal Karen Thiessen met with the students in each K-8 class to help them create a surprise: a group poem about their teacher.

"It's been a really hard year, and tough for teachers. So I wanted to take some time to just encourage teachers and help the students show them some kindness going into the last stretch of the year," Thiessen says.

Normally the school has an appreciation assembly each year with student performances, but pandemic restrictions prevented that this year. So Thiessen decided to

turn the situation into a learning opportunity, embracing the school's writing goal of enhancing language to improve writing skills. Students shared what they appreciated about their teachers, and Thiessen helped them write class poems, taking learning intentions and success criteria into account for each grade level, such as using patterns or imagery. She then chose one student from each class to read the surprise poems out loud at a virtual assembly.

"The teachers were very surprised, grateful and moved to see how their



▲ Teachers and staff at Richer School were greeted by a large appreciation poster made by students in early May.

students expressed the things they valued in their teachers. The students were also really proud of the poems they wrote, and it showed their appreciation in a way that was also celebrating their learning."

The students also made a huge poster thanking teachers and staff, which was hung outside the school doors for teachers and staff to see when they entered the school. 🍌

## Caught in the act of kindness

A snow day on the annual Day of Pink in April didn't keep students across the Division from celebrating kindness and taking a stand against bullying.

At École St. Adolphe School (ESAS) and École Ile des Chênes School (EIDC), where Kelly Burtnyk is the school counselor on alternating days, the K-8 students went

all-in to perform acts of kindness towards their fellow students as well as staff, for a week that expanded into two because staff and students were enjoying it so much. Students caught by a staff member performing a random act of kindness would get a 'Pinky Prize' ballot to win prizes that encouraged safe activities they could do with a friend.

Inspired by the wave of kindness, ESAS students decorated the sidewalk front of their school, using chalk some of them won for their own acts of kindness.



"We were very clear that not everything you do is going to be noticed, but your act of kindness still made someone feel good today," Burtnyk says.

The theme at EIDC was *Throw Kindness like Confetti*. Act of kindness students were caught performing were written on a round piece of paper, then added to a hallway bulletin board. Sprinkled with kindness "confetti," the kindness board became a focal point in the school, a fun photo booth background and a symbol of connection even when a pandemic is keeping students apart.

"All those sportsmanship lessons that kids normally get from their teams and activities after school, they're learning here instead. So the school is taking on a much bigger role for that social, emotional, and outside learning piece," Burtnyk says. "There's a lot more that they have to learn, deal with and work at, so it's nice to recognize them for that." ●

## A picture of community

A blank wall inside Collège St. Norbert Collegiate (CSNC) has become a massive canvas for one creative student.

When Grade 11 student Sarah Mensies – who had been wanting to paint something big in the school – met Grade 9 Student Support Teacher Kayleigh Sieffert, who longed for some artwork to adorn the walls of the student space outside her office – the idea for a huge mural of the CSNC building from the perspective of a new student was born.

"We really wanted to bring a sense of community into the room," Sieffert explains. "It's great for students like Sarah to have the opportunity to pursue their creative side, showcase their talents and represent themselves through their art – and also to play a part in developing our school culture and feel like valued members of the school community."

Sarah wasn't quite finished the mural when the school moved to remote learning in early May, but has been enjoying the creative process.

"I enjoy giving myself a challenge and seeing it come to fruition. I love that art brings people happiness,"



Grade 11 student Sarah Mensies works on her mural of the CSNC building.

says Sarah, who says she is constantly inspired to work on artistic projects and will likely pursue a profession involving art in her future.

"Having other students in the building see Sarah's talent and dedication may encourage them to also explore their own creative sides," Sieffert adds. "I always want to encourage students to pursue their strengths and ambitions." ●

## Stress relief through sports

The opportunity to hit the basketball court or the baseball diamond again hasn't just been putting smiles on students' faces – it also helps to improve their mental health and well-being.

Staff at École Lorette Immersion (ELI) have seen the Grade 7 and 8 students struggle without the social interactions and team building that come with joining group activities and team sports. In April, the K-8 school started organized outdoor lunch-hour basketball and baseball, and about two-thirds of the Grade 7 and 8 students have been participating, with safety in mind – wearing masks and staying socially distanced as much as possible.



▶ Grade 7 student Ronan G. gets ready for the pitch during lunch-hour baseball at ELI.

"It has been a very strange and difficult year. Many students look forward to these grades since we offer school sports teams, and they were disappointed when the pandemic didn't allow them," says Grade 7/8 teacher Dylan Tretiak.

"We see a positive impact on the students' mental health, engagement and overall mood. The physical and mental benefits of sports are critical at this age, providing some sense of normalcy, a place to learn or improve their skills and an escape to just have fun."

While the school is now in temporary remote learning, staff and students alike hope the sports can resume when they return.

"These sports are helping me forget the hard things that we've gone through and are bringing back the fun element of team interaction, connecting with a group and being more active," says Grade 8 student London C. ◉

## Mental health matters

Going to school during a pandemic has been tough on the mental health of students in all grades. More than ever, our team of six Divisional School Social Workers have been working together with school guidance counsellors in our elementary schools and student service teachers in high schools to deliver mental health programming for students, to help them cope.

With changes and challenges including social distancing, cancelled sports and activities, and bouts of remote learning, many students have been struggling, says Lise Turenne, the Divisional School Social Worker for Collège Lorette Collegiate and École Lorette Immersion.

"This is a particularly difficult school year, and it's important to normalize how students might be feeling," she explains. "The unpredictability has been really hard on them. There's a lot more anxiety and stress in general, and the things students usually have to look forward to that help offset the stress are not there."

Mental health has long been a priority to our board of trustees and senior administration, who are very supportive of mental health initiatives and programming, Turenne explains. The social workers have been running mental health programs in various schools, as well as meeting one-on-one with students – and staff, who are also under extreme stress: staff professional development days addressing things like COVID fatigue have been common, with the social workers providing information and a safe space for staff to share their feelings.

With Mental Health Awareness Week in early May, the social workers delivered additional programming and encouraged skill-building conversations, says Cheryl-Lynn Brown, social worker for Ste. Anne Collegiate and Ste. Anne Elementary School.

"It's important to recognize that sometimes you just don't feel OK, and here are some options for what you can do and when to reach out for help," Brown explains. ◉

### Learning to cope

Building coping skills in students has become crucial this year. Our Divisional School Social Workers are all trained facilitators in Dialectical Behavioural Therapy (DBT), a skills-based group program being run in schools in partnership with Southern Health. Group sessions target how to handle and regulate uncomfortable emotions, communication skills and conflict resolution. Being part of a DBT group earns high school students a half credit, and the program is now being delivered to Grade 7 and 8 students, both in person and online.

The facilitators survey the students about their mood and anxiety levels before and after the program, and many are seeing improvement.

"We're giving them some really concrete skills, as well as a sense that their feelings are validated and that they're not the only ones feeling this way. That can be empowering," says Rebecca Abraham, Divisional School Social Worker for Collège St. Norbert Collegiate and École St Norbert Immersion.