

Winter 2015-2016

# Leaders & Learners

The official magazine of the Canadian  
Association of School System Administrators

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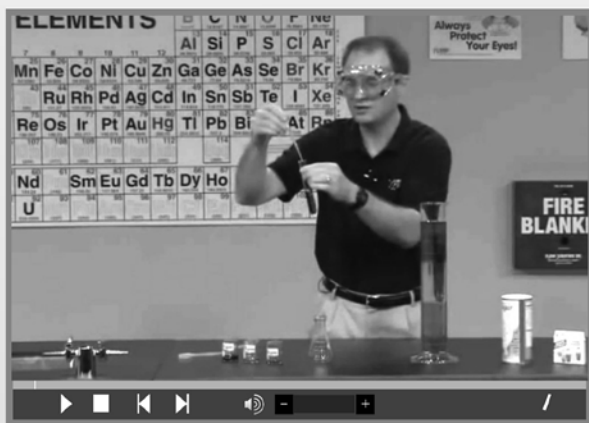
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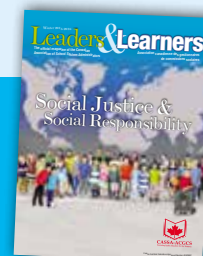
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**Students from K-12 are not just passively learning information but are increasingly using their new knowledge to take action in the hopes of improving a situation or solving a real-world problem.**

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**Cindy Finn**  
CASSA/ACGCS President

All learning begins with good questions. What is the goal of public education? What are we, as system leaders, seeking to accomplish in our schools and places of learning? Is it to teach students literacy and numeracy skills? Is it to impart content knowledge in the classroom or develop competencies to help learners navigate the academic and social world? Is it to assist students in developing their identity to become productive and contributing citizens? Does the learning extend beyond the classroom?

In our current educational context, few would take issue with answering the above questions in the affirmative. We take it as a given that we are not just trying to engage students to enhance their academic learning but that we have a broader moral purpose to shape and mold the citizens of tomorrow. Educators not only teach students about the world around them but help them assume their place in this world, the implications of which go far beyond scores on a test or results in a report card.

In Michael Fullan and Joanne Quinn's new book (2016), *Coherence: The Right Drivers for Schools, Districts, and Systems*,

there is a call to develop learning goals that reflect deep learning, which means using new knowledge to solve real-life problems. The authors specify six competencies, the overall purpose of which is not only the "well-being of the whole student but also the well-being of the group and society as a whole" (p. 85). These deep learning competencies, referred to as the 6C's, are those skills that many have argued are necessary for success in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: Communication, Critical Thinking, Collaboration, Creativity, Character and Citizenship.

There is much evidence that this path to deep learning is beginning to take hold in Canadian schools. Students from K-12 are not just passively learning information but are increasingly using their new knowledge to take action in the hopes of improving a situation or solving a real-world problem. In this way, students and teachers share a common journey to become social agents of change and in so doing, enhance their own learning.

The articles in this issue of *Leaders & Learners* shine a light on some of the exciting things happening in school districts around the country. By focusing on the theme of social responsibility and social justice, we showcase the ways in which students are seeking to better understand the world around them with the specific

intention of taking meaningful action to benefit society. Although the topics are varied, ranging from projects that address poverty and homelessness to initiatives that promote mental health and wellness, it is clear that Canadian schools are taking to heart this mission of developing the whole learner to better serve their community, whether it be at a local, regional, national or international level. Thank you to our contributors for sharing the ways in which school-based social action can lead to meaningful change.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said that "the function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character that is the goal of true education." As system leaders, there is much we can do to assist our schools in working towards this noble goal. We are in a fortunate position to encourage our teachers and principals, and help shape the direction that such social justice projects take. Although the work begins in the classroom, the impact is felt far beyond the walls of the school.

May this issue of *Leaders & Learners* serve to inspire those working under your leadership to continue to develop these deeper learning competencies that ultimately shape the minds and hearts of the learners who will become our leaders of tomorrow. Bonne lecture!





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CASSA enjoyed another very successful national conference in Montreal this past July. Our keynote speakers, Natalie Panek, John Malloy and Hall Davidson, were extremely well received. Delegates also enjoyed the variety of STEAM-related workshops delivered by classroom teachers, principals and school system leaders across Canada. Lastly, a HUGE THANK YOU to our sponsors and exhibitors who help make our conference such a success!

### EXL Award as Canada's Superintendent of the Year

Congratulations to John Crocco, Director of Education for the Niagara Catholic District School Board. He is the EXL Award recipient for 2015! John will have the chance to take part in the AASA Superintendent of the Year ceremony in Phoenix in February 2016! Hopefully we will have a strong contingent of John's friends and colleagues at this event, as he is honoured by our AASA partners!

### CASSA Honours Robert T. Mills

After an outstanding career in school board leadership in Quebec, and in recognition of his many years of dedication to our national organization, CASSA bestowed an Honourary Life Membership to Bob Mills. We must express our deepest gratitude for

all Bob has done to ensure that CASSA is a strong organization and we wish him a wonderful retirement with wife, Lisa.

### Changes on the CASSA Board

The new school year brought changes to the CASSA Board of Directors. CASSA welcomes two new Directors-At-Large: Penny Prysnuik from Yukon and Shelly Pepler from Nunavut. We also welcome back, albeit in a new role, Reg Klassen as a Director-At-Large. The new CASS member is John Waterhouse. The new ADGESBQ member is Howard Miller. The newest OCSOA representative is Loretta Notten. Loretta joins the board to replace Simone Oliver, who was elected as the CASSA Eastern rep to AASA. We welcome our newest members and trust they will find the opportunity to gain a national perspective a valuable professional commitment.

### CASSA 2016

This issue of *Leaders & Learners* "kicks off" CASSA's focus on practices across the country supporting the themes of social justice and social responsibility. This issue presents the outstanding efforts of schools and systems that strive to ensure that our graduates have a well developed sense of social justice and are prepared to take socially responsible actions in their lives.

The CASSA Board of Directors is focusing on student mental health and



**Ken Bain**

CASSA/ACGCS Executive Director

well-being and there will be more to share with you in future issues of both our newsletters and journals...all leading up to this year's national conference. It is being held in Winnipeg, Manitoba, from July 7 to 9, 2016, at The Fort Garry Hotel. This venue is steps away from the National Museum of Human Rights, which we plan to use for our conference. I'm excited to announce our theme: **Hearts and Minds – Creating a Culture of Caring.**

**Please continue to check out the CASSA website ([www.cassa-acgcs.ca](http://www.cassa-acgcs.ca)) or the conference website (<http://conference.cassa-acgcs.ca/index.html>) for updates on this event. I look forward to seeing you all in Winnipeg in July!**

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# Rotary Club:

## A Way of Developing Social Responsibility Through Service Learning



*Left to Right: A wall before, during and after students painted a mural at an orphanage in Ecuador.*

By Ray Suchow

**T**he challenge of creating long term social responsibility projects—particularly ones that can be sustained from year to year so their inherent value can grow—are complicated by many resource factors, such as staffing, teaching assignments, bussing and budgets. Such yearly changes are a reality in many schools, and yet despite them, staff and students often perform yeoman work in finding and completing a wide range of worthy service activities. However, when the right combination of these factors align, a range of truly uplifting and worthy long term projects can be created and sustained, thus providing maximum benefit for all involved; especially for those to whom the labours are devoted.

At Christ the King Jr./Sr. High School, in Leduc, Alberta, we are extremely grateful to have a colleague who has mastered many of these factors. In doing so, she has helped develop a strong range of ongoing socially responsible activities that benefit many in our school, our community and abroad. More importantly, however, is the fact that her students have taken ownership

of their activities in such a way that her role has changed from leader to facilitator, and the positive results that are generated by the increasingly student-led group continue to gain momentum each year.

As a result, over the past four years Ms. Jean Porter and her volunteer students, operating as the Christ The King School Rotary Interact Club (and chartered as a youth branch of Rotary International), have completed a dizzying array of in-school, in-community and out-of-country service projects that embody the highest ideals that developing social responsibility through service learning can provide. In this article, the range of those activities, and the strategies used to create such incredible good from year to year, will be presented and explored.

From the beginning of September to the end of June, a week rarely goes by without the members of the Rotary Club being present in our school's daily announcements or in our common area as they undertake their latest initiative. In fact, due to their continual effort and positive presence, it would now be hard to imagine our school without them. Several of the activities that Ms. Porter and her students have been involved in are shown on Table 1 (page 12).

As is evident from the data presented in this table, several of the initiatives are annual (and thus ongoing) in nature, since the help they

provide is always in need. Happily, many have become a well-supported part of our school's culture. How the Rotary Club came to be, and how it continues to strongly operate from year to year (given student turnover, mostly through graduation), will now be explored.

From its beginning four years ago, the desire to help others through service has always been student-led and that important vitality has never been lost. From the first student-initiated meeting with administration to enquire about the possibility of completing an international service trip, to the continuing string of exceptional Rotary Club Presidents (usually a Grade 11 or Grade 12 student), the students continue to be "...the motivation... they want to do these projects and once they see the success of one, it feeds their desire to do more, as it does with me," says Porter. Furthermore, as they work through each project, efforts are made to get to know each other (the group ranges from Grade 7 to Grade 12), to make things fun, and to harness each student's unique gifts. As Porter confirms, "...we ask what they are interested in supporting, and (then) get the interested person researching and taking the lead on it."

Thus, while this student camaraderie and shared focus on serving others has certainly helped to build and strengthen the Rotary Club's core values, their two-year long fundraising commitment towards their

**TABLE 1**

School-based Initiatives	Community-based Initiatives	International Initiatives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Operated Concession at 2011 Christmas Craft Sale to support 2012 international trip.</li> <li>Organized Large Garage Sale to support 2014 international trip.</li> <li>Developed ongoing bottle recycling program to support each international trip.</li> <li>Organize bake sales to support monthly service projects and each international trip.</li> <li>Organize and support THINKfast (a 25 hour famine for Development and Peace).</li> <li>Support students without lunches by cooking extra pancakes, freezing them, and then giving them from the Home-Ec. classroom at lunch as needed.</li> <li>Regularly make change for students at lunch so they relieve pressure on busy office secretaries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organize Christmas and Valentine's trips to "adopt" seniors without local family at Extencicare (Leduc).</li> <li>Fundraise for, and volunteer at, Puppy Adoption Days for Canine Rescue Society (Edmonton).</li> <li>Fundraise for breast cancer research, the Thaddeus Lake Music Foundation for Disadvantaged Children (Leduc), and the Stollery Children's Hospital (Edmonton).</li> <li>Fundraise and organize clothing drives for the Marian Centre (Edmonton) and the Youth Empowerment &amp; Support Services (Edmonton).</li> <li>Volunteer at the Leduc Relay for Life (to support cancer research).</li> <li>Volunteer for local highway cleanup each Spring.</li> <li>Organize bottle drive to support each international trip.</li> <li>Serve Spring &amp; Fall dinners to CWL St. Michael's Parish to strengthen ties to local church.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Raised funds for and participated in Costa Rica Service Trip 2012 &amp; Ecuador Service Trip 2014. On each trip, the students fixed up part of an orphanage by cleaning, organizing, and painting, followed by the creation of a bright mural to make the place friendlier and more welcoming for the orphans. Also, clothing, toys, toiletries, medical supplies, and school supplies were brought along and delivered.</li> <li>Assisted the Boys &amp; Girls Club of Leduc in collecting parkas for those in need in Peru.</li> <li>Helped finance the building of a schoolhouse in Kenya and the building of a well for a school in Uganda.</li> <li>Support "Because I am a Girl," which provides education for girls and women in developing nations.</li> </ul>

bi-yearly service trip to Central America has also played an important role as a long-term motivator.

"To go on the trip cannot be their only focus. They have to join the club and participate in our regular projects as it builds the team," emphasizes Porter. In addition, and perhaps most importantly, this long-term fundraising focus also allows club members "...who could never afford a trip like this to be able to afford it."

The cohesive nature of this group and its effectiveness are not lost on those whom they serve. "Jean and her Rotary Club are an inspiration," indicates Principal Monique Tellier-Phillips. "They work together in service of others in a variety of ways and are dedicated to their service. It is wonderful to see the friendships that are formed as this young group of leaders work on projects that are beneficial to all concerned."

In conclusion, if one wished to create a positive, enthusiastic, tight-knit, hard-working service-oriented group of students who selflessly give to others both in the school and in the community, so that they may have a once-in-a-lifetime trip to travel and give further of themselves to those even more in need, then the formula may indeed have been discovered: take a teacher with passion, combine with selfless student leaders and members who are encouraged to pursue their service project ideas, add in all of those who are truly in need of their efforts, vigorously pursue weekly and monthly goals both in-school and in the community, and set the long-term focus as a trip that combines the highest levels of giving from the humblest part of themselves.

The result? A group of students who continue to demonstrate that developing social responsibility through social service can indeed be alive and vibrantly enjoyable within a school, to the grateful appreciation of the many they serve. As well, it can also be said that as these remarkable students experience the personal growth and awareness wrought by the gift of building hope and futures for others, they are likewise forging the foundations of a life of responsible service for themselves; thus realizing all of the ideals that giving of oneself for the greater good can provide. ○

*Ray Suchow, MRE, B.Ed., is involved with CTS Computer Studies/Religion/Humanities at Christ The King Jr./Sr. High School in Leduc, Alberta.*



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# Developing Social and Cultural Responsibility in an Aboriginal School

By Kate Powell

Over the years Deninu School, a small school serving the Chipewyan community of Fort Resolution in the Northwest Territories, had tried a number of approaches to improving behavior and develop social responsibility amongst our students. Strategies included the well known Effective Behavioral Supports (EBS), updated and now referred to as the Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PPIS) approach, which involves staff creating expectations for students, identifying what those expectations look like in different contexts in consult with students, and then systematically teaching students accordingly. Previously, teachers had developed classroom management plans and class rules, but in a small K-12 community school it is important that there is consistency across the grades and that a whole school approach is taken.

Still, something that cropped up time after time was student objection to some of the rules. Over time, the rules appeared to become stale and newer students (and staff) didn't see them as being important and couldn't understand the reasons for those rules. Parents also felt that some rules were unreasonable. The community of Fort Resolution had a residential school in the past and it is through this lens that many in the community respond to issues within the school. There was definite "push back" when rules were being imposed.

Therefore, a different approach needed to be tried. Coinciding with the *Safe and Caring Schools* initiative of the Government of the Northwest Territories, Deninu School established a Safe and Caring Student Committee. This committee is comprised of two students from each class, elected by their peers (12 students in total). With the support and guidance of the principal and Program Support Teacher, the committee agreed to a vision and purpose. The students were tasked with creating a code of conduct for the school, which would include rules.

Each member of the committee had input into the rules and all the ideas were compiled. Once they were all together, we looked at how they could be grouped to make fewer

rules. This categorizing activity revealed to us that the groups created matched with the Dene Laws that have been handed down from the Elders. These then became our school rules.

The committee then decided on what was acceptable and unacceptable behavior, and made a list of these. The draft of our school code of conduct was shared with each class by their student representatives who are responsible for

## Deninu School Safe and Caring Student's Committee Code of Conduct

We hereby agree to follow these guidelines:

### The Dene Laws

Share what you have

Help each other

Love each other as much as possible

Be respectful of elders and everything around you

Sleep at night and work during the day

Be polite and don't argue with anyone

Young girls and boys should behave respectfully

Pass on the teachings

Be happy at all times

Acceptable Behaviour	Unacceptable Behaviour
Have mutual respect	Yelling
Speak with a calm tone	Swearing
Respect personal space	Fighting/harmful physical contact
If you have a problem talk about it directly to the person involved	Shoving and pushing
Offer handshakes and hugs	Throwing objects
Spread the love	Judgmental comments
Pass objects nicely	Talking about others behind their backs
Respect others' boundaries	Graffiti
Sharing is caring	Stealing
Be respectful of everything	Breaking things on purpose
Return things you borrow or find	Disrespecting people and things
Fix things that are broken	Slamming doors and damaging the building
Own up if you break anything	Talking back to teachers
Wear indoor shoes	Running in school
Walk in school	Arguing
Listen to the teacher	Not listening to others
Do your work	Bullying
Stay calm	Getting mad
Pick up things you drop	Calling names
Include others (count them in)	Cyberbullying
Making others feel better	Taking pictures/videos in school
Respect the cell phone rule	Using social media in school

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_



communicating back to their class following each meeting. Everyone in the school signed the code of conduct.

A reward system was decided upon and created, which includes the use of tickets awarded by teachers (with reminders from the class representatives) for those students observed following the Dene Laws. This process gives students the chance to enter a draw for monthly prizes and a monthly lunch from the local diner.

In addition, the students decided they would like to set up a House League. These Houses were named after animals and were included in the Dene Law ticket system by having a monthly pizza party and board games for the winning House. The students also decided that they would like to have additional House challenges on Fridays. Ideas were provided such as: scavenger hunts, whole school hide and seek, Easter Egg hunts, and other team-based activities. These have proved to be extremely popular with both staff and students alike. The addition of the team incentive has really added to school spirit and to student motivation to demonstrate positive behaviours and earn Dene Law tickets.

Deciding upon consequences was more challenging. Some of the ideas that the committee came up with were too severe and therefore not acceptable. It was important to maintain student voice in these consequences while still ensuring that they were fair and not too extreme. We negotiated these consequences to form a list of "possible consequences," having discussed that different situations may mean that different consequences are applied. Students left this committee meeting with more of an understanding that being fair is not necessarily treating everyone the same.

The committee then moved on to brainstorming ideas for how students can ensure that they follow the rules, and how they can avoid being persuaded into breaking rules and behaving inappropriately. They also gave ideas for how students could help their friends to avoid behaving in an unacceptable manner, thereby helping them to evade any related consequences.

Our next area to work on is to decide upon methods for reporting bullying, for raising awareness of bullying and finding positive ways to deal with it. This will be the main area of work for this school year. Resources will be brought to the group to help them to come up with a system that will work for our school. The plan is to create an awareness and information campaign that will be used in the community, reassuring parents that the school is working hard to combat bullying. In sharing this information, these

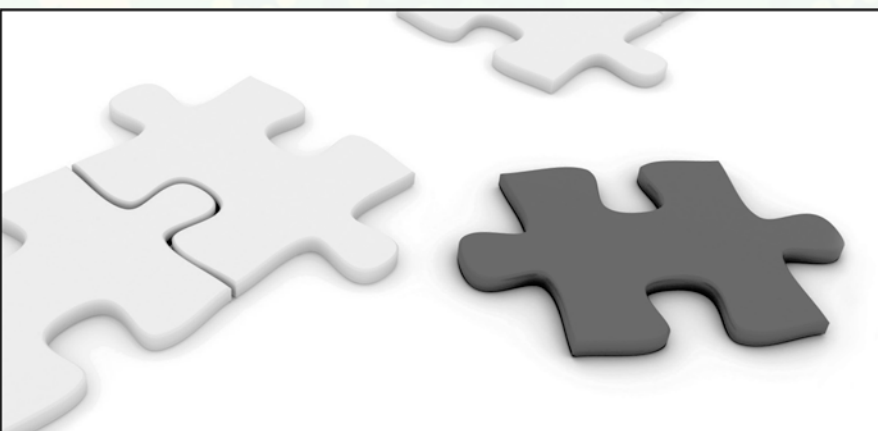
students will also be building their own knowledge and understanding of the issues.

This Safe and Caring Student Committee structure and decision-making process established the student leadership and laid the groundwork for our new school year. These student developed and owned documents are now included in the staff handbook and they provide staff, students and parents with the standard guidelines for student behavior, consequences, incentives and strategies to share with students.

Instead of taking the approach of top-down decision making, this important section of the school rules comes very much from the students

themselves and provides them with an authentic voice in their school environment. Nowhere is this more important than in an Aboriginal community dealing with inter-generational trauma echoing from the residential school system. The Dene Laws draw forward the teachings from the past while the student voices represent the present and the future. ○

*Kate Powell is principal of Deninu School in Fort Resolution, NWT. Originally from England, she has worked at Deninu School for six years. She is a past winner of the Premier's Award for Excellence and the Ministerial Literacy Award.*




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# Teens Making Great “CHOICES”

By Cathy Mantel and Mary Thornton



1 - The members of CHOICES who were interviewed for this article.

2 - CHOICES members who presented at the For Youth By Youth Conference.

3 - Members of CHOICES perform slam poetry at school assembly.

Students at Notre Dame High School (NDHS) in Ottawa, Ontario, are making a difference by raising awareness amongst their peers on issues related to dating violence and substance abuse. Their student-led initiative, called CHOICES, is successfully reaching out to their peers in ways that other adult-driven initiatives could never achieve.

Formed in 2007, the CHOICES Committee is a co-ed group comprised, on average, of 20 students. With the support of staff facilitators, the committee members started to spread their knowledge and insight to their fellow students by preparing and delivering assemblies, workshops, classroom presentations and other school-based activities. With time, the group became more firmly established and began to share their insights with greater confidence in the wider community.



In 2011, they were one of eight local high school groups that delivered a workshop at the Ottawa "For Youth By Youth (FYBY)" conference and received rave reviews. They also hit the road and presented to groups of students at other Ottawa high schools, successfully engaging their peers in dynamic discussions. The CHOICES Committee has participated annually in the local "In Love and In Danger (ILID)" conferences, where students from across Ottawa come together to address dating violence.

In the spring of 2014, CHOICES was invited to collaborate on an initiative with ILID and Crime Prevention Ottawa. A video was created that features members of the committee highlighting the importance of healthy relationships through song, drama and dance. This past year, CHOICES developed a presentation, drawing attention to the relationship between social media and dating violence, that they shared both at an NDHS assembly and at the ILID conference. An excerpt of this performance, a rewrite of the song "Monster" by Eminem featuring members of the committee as writers, singers, rappers and musicians, was later recorded into a video (<https://vimeo.com/133160981>).

Erin Flemming, Coordinator of the ILID program, was asked to comment on her impressions of CHOICES. She says, "In Love and In Danger has been lucky enough to work closely with the students and staff of the CHOICES group at Notre Dame High School. Whether MC'ing one of our conferences, showcasing one of the amazing social action projects for local youth and adult supporters, providing a youth voice for our program, interviewing for any number of events on behalf of our program, or collaborating with us to create a video on social media and teen dating violence, CHOICES has been a pivotal group to our program, youth and the community as a whole. The talent, creativity, passion and motivation of the students, in combination with the knowledge, skill and dedication of the staff that runs CHOICES, make this group a force to be reckoned with. There is no denying the significant impact a group like this can



make. CHOICES epitomizes the power of youth and social change."

In keeping with the spirit of the student-led nature of this group, it was felt that the thoughts and experiences of the students themselves needed to be captured in this article. The following is a summary of a recent interview with a group of CHOICES alumni.

**Q. What did you learn as a member of CHOICES?**

**JAMAL:** The main thing I learned was actually not to be judgmental of people. When I



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was part of CHOICES, we were the first group to do it and there were a lot of members in our group. And we found out that one guy, Greg, was an amazing slam poet, so it was like, yeah, we should definitely do something with that. And then we found out that one kid was really good at animating videos, so we did something with that. And then someone else was great at taking videos, so he was kind of like the producer at the back. The biggest thing I think from CHOICES that we could all agree we learned is how to work together as a team. Individually we all had our own skills, but together the sum was greater than each individual part.

**MORGAN:** We learned about dating violence and unhealthy relationship practices along with substance abuse. I think that it created awareness about things that may not happen in a typical day-to-day-life, but that you just have to know that these things do happen and you should be aware of them.

**JESUS:** I think, for me, I became more confident with myself because a big part of being in CHOICES was doing slam poetry in front of people, and that was a huge thing at the moment. I was like, wow, this is happening. I have to speak it and I have to say it confidently and

say it as though I know what I am saying, and this is what I stand for, and it was kind of cool.

**HERBIE:** For me, [there were] two major things I think being in CHOICES taught me. It taught me about equality and respect because I mean, we all go through the same things in high school so to learn from each other was good—we built each other up that way.

**AKOL:** CHOICES taught me many things like what you should do if you are in that situation and how it affects people around you and you as well.

**Q. Did you see any impact on relationships within the school environment or outside school with your peers as a result of what CHOICES has done?**

**RAMI:** I think when we shot the video and posted it to YouTube and our Facebook pages, and our school and our community backed us up by sharing it and then spreading that message on and on—I really hope it benefitted some relationships.

**HERBIE:** Also, by sharing it, it brought not only awareness, but accountability

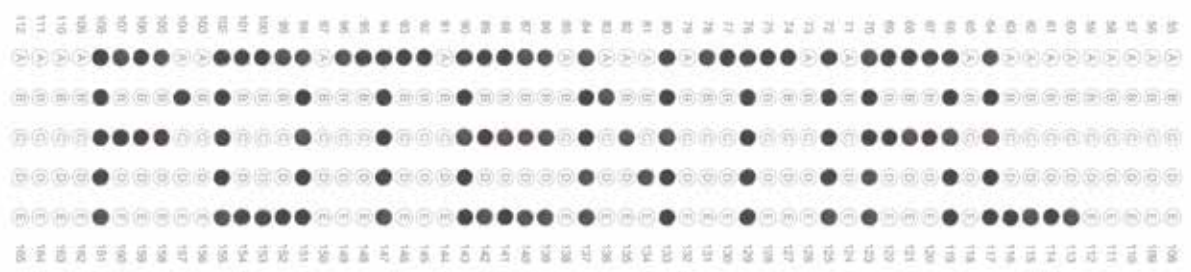
amongst ourselves to treat our significant others with respect.

**JESUS:** When we went to ILI, right after our performance, a group of girls came up to us and said that was really cool. I don't know how it impacted them, maybe in a positive way. Who knows if at some point in their lives, they remember that poem or something we said and maybe take from it and make different choices in the future?

**RAMI:** I think we opened up a lot of peoples' minds and we opened a conversation that not a lot of people want to have or are comfortable enough to open up about. Even walking in the halls, a lot of people would come up to me and say "I am definitely doing CHOICES next year," like the younger students, and that was nice to see, being a senior.

**Q. Was there a particular moment or event in CHOICES that was meaningful for you? What made it stand out for you?**


**RAMI:** I think the Kanata tour when we got on a bus and went to a few high schools.



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It was cool having students from each high school come up afterwards and thank us, and they were so into it we weren't boring them out. That stood out in our year.

**MORGAN:** There wasn't a specific moment, but it was going to the ILID conferences where we had all the schools come together. It was really great because everybody was kind of doing their own thing, and you could see other people's perspectives on the topic at hand, and then everyone could cohesively create ideas on how to spread awareness.

**HERBIE:** The way that we each spoke, you could say the same meaning, but it was in different ways, so that was interesting. There were people who did videos, some did poetry, some did dance. It was great, it was cool.

**JAMAL:** If we go back to what Jesus said earlier, it wasn't a group of girls who came up to us—it was a group of guys! Three guys from Rideau High School, after our presentation, were like, "that was really sick, really good, we really enjoyed it when he did the poem", or "the video was funny" or stuff like that. It was the first time, I think, that we presented that year, and we were all nervous

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**I think we opened up a lot of peoples' minds and we opened a conversation that not a lot of people want to have or are comfortable enough to open up about.**

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going into it and to see people react like that was a great thing, and to go back and see those kids stay at the same presentation again was like, oh, they actually liked us—it was cool and I'm still in touch with a few of those guys to this day.

**Q. CHOICES is a student-led committee. Do you think that it had more of an impact for that reason? How?**

**JESUS:** Totally!

**RAMI:** I think the students running it know what students' want—they know what's current, what will get students' attention. The way we approached it the year we

did a rap video with a dance in it and we did slam poems all in one, it went viral! Everybody in the school was talking about it; people across the city were talking about it; it made it to CTV news because it was led by students! I'm not going to lie, maybe if it was led by teachers, we probably would not even be having this conversation right now—so I think that being student-led does affect the impact.

**JESUS:** I mean, it is just like your activity here today—talking to students. You don't know what they are going to come up with, whereas if you keep on asking the teachers, they are going to keep coming up with the same thing over and over. So, I guess it's about



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**MORGAN:** Yeah, I think that with communication amongst the students and the teachers, they can work cohesively. It's better for making ideas in general than just having the adults do it and then tell the students what to do. You have the students and the adults working together to go about it.

**HERBIE:** Yes, and it's also like a comfort thing, right? We're talking with people of our age about our experiences. And some people who, I mean you (Jamal), are the oldest amongst us, so you probably went through more experiences than some of us, and you were able to teach us in CHOICES and teach the other students as well. So, it was better, I would say, hearing it from other students because we didn't feel like there was as much authority.

### Q. Is there a moment where you used the skills you learned in CHOICES to make a healthy and more informed decision?

**HERBIE:** On the substance abuse thing, being in CHOICES kind of encouraged you to treat yourself well. I have gone from here (NDHS) to university, and there is a different

culture there, and I have enjoyed it in my own way, but it makes you really consider and make sure that you are responsible for yourself, right? Because you could be intoxicated or under a certain drug and you don't necessarily know what's happening around you—so who would be accountable for you then, right? So, you need to think beforehand. I think that to put it in a bigger picture, what you know makes you who are and what you accept. CHOICES has made an impact whether directly or indirectly on me—I appreciated my time here with CHOICES.

### Conclusion

Given the opportunity, our students can take the lead and in a very powerful way, influence the attitudes and beliefs of their peers, and the CHOICES Committee at NDHS is one such example. Their creative and innovative approach to raising awareness on healthy lifestyle choices in the Ottawa community has had an impact that continues to evolve as new members join and contribute to this important collective effort. ○

*Mary Thornton is the school social worker at Notre Dame High School. Cathy Mantel is the teacher-librarian.*



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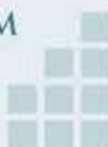
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# Social Justice for Inclusive Schools

By Bob Eslinger

**N**anaimo Ladysmith Public Schools (NLPS) believes strongly that public education is the vehicle for teaching the necessary skills to students so they can become independent thinkers and lifelong learners. The BC Ministry of Education, through its safe schools strategy, holds school districts in the province accountable for their commitment to equity, inclusion and social justice.

The two provincial resource guides, *Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools* and *Promoting Diversity in BC Schools* identified, as a major goal, the achievement of equitable access to and participation in safe learning environments for staff and students alike. These documents identify and reproduce extracts from legislation to guide the development of district policies, procedures and practices. They are directed at systemic needs and aimed at provincial, district and school administrators, or at school and community joint planning teams. *Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools* also identifies several very specific resources that address particular issues of concern for parents, students and educators (e.g., bullying, internet safety and social responsibility).

In 1995, NLPS created its Multicultural and Race Relations (MCRR) policy and procedure, and in 2010, a Sexual Orientation and Sexual Identity (SOGI) policy and procedure. The aim of these policies is focused on the recognition and acceptance of the district's inherent diversity and to use policy and procedures to make structural change, educate staff and students and, ultimately, to hold everyone accountable. However, competing priorities have made for slow progress. This year, because inclusion is truly a part of this district's DNA, the NLPS has once again proclaimed its desire to endorse and support inclusive practices in schools by hiring two part-time Social Justice Advocates.

## Social Justice Advocates

The Social Justice Advocates will engage students, staff and community around diverse issues facing the NLPS school communities. Their number one priority is to coordinate



the completion of the district's new inclusion policy and the redevelopment of the current MCRR and SOGI policies into administrative procedures, which will guide schools in better acknowledging, addressing and supporting their student, staff, parent and community diversity. The second priority is to work with staff to integrate the inclusion policy through its language, support services and curriculum.

## Social Justice, Equity and Inclusion

Social justice often pertains to cultural and economic injustices of socially marginalized groups. However, we recognize the need to also focus on the injustices based on gender identity/sexual orientation and race. Although the major accomplishment of the development of the SOGI policy helped the district move toward more of an understanding of sexual orientation and gender identity, it has been very difficult to make the SOGI and MCRR policies "come alive" in schools through the work of these committees. The social justice advocates will have a broader focus on inclusion that includes the lens of LGBTQ and racial identity as we strive to serve, celebrate and accept, rather than challenge, our diverse community.

## Inclusive Support

Students who have special needs benefit and learn best from being with age and grade peers, and generally require additional intervention(s). As they proceed through school, their learning plans, or Individual Education Plans (IEPs), specify the modifications or adaptations to subject areas or courses, use of special materials and the measures of progress. The emphasis is on designing and delivering support tailored

to helping students reach their highest level of functioning. Parents are given the opportunity to participate in the planning process, and to the extent that they are able, students are also encouraged to participate.

## Inclusive Curriculum

Curriculum documents contain a section on anti-discrimination education that encourages teachers to recognize the diversity of students' backgrounds, interests and experiences, and to incorporate a variety of viewpoints and perspectives in learning activities. The NLPS Learning Plan Framework supports teachers to ensure their curriculum addresses the topics of gender-based violence, homophobia, sexual harassment and inappropriate sexual behaviour.

Every year, each school principal, in collaboration with staff, reviews their Code of Conduct to ensure that it clearly articulates a statement of purpose, conduct expectations, unacceptable conduct, rising expectations and consequences that focus on prevention and restorative practices. The use of school climate surveys help principals assess perceptions of safety of their students, parents and staff to inform prevention and intervention initiatives.

## Inclusive Language

Language is a powerful tool for communicating inclusivity. Language is not neutral; it is closely tied to the personality of the communicator and the culture and society in which it is used. Inclusive communication that respects and includes all communities is free from sexist, racist or other discriminatory language. It does not inadvertently exclude groups and it avoids stereotyping, loaded words and patronizing descriptors. Due to our district's diversity,

we suggest asking people for their preferred descriptors and the honouring of individual preferences.

This school year, one of the four objectives of the NLPS Learning Plan Framework focuses specifically on district-wide inclusionary practices to improve student learning, engagement and sense of belonging. Specific areas of focus include equitable access, universal design for learning (UDL), celebration of diversity and the creation of the inclusion policy.

In NLPS, we view inclusion as a philosophy through which we maximize the participation of all students and staff in our district

by minimizing exclusionary and discriminatory practices. However, because there is no single agreed upon definition of inclusion, we deem it important to clarify and create common affirmative language that defines inclusive education in terms of the acceptance of all persons regardless of race, ethnicity, disability, gender, sexual orientation, language, socio-economic status and any other aspect of an individual's identity that might be perceived as different.

The NLPS Board of Education is committed to creating an educational environment that is safe, healthy, caring and inclusive for all who learn and work within its learning communities.

The Board affirms that a learning environment that reflects diversity, inclusion and equity is essential in attaining high levels of individual growth and achievement. Therefore, the district's goal of meeting each student's unique needs is not only focused on learning and achievement, but also on feeling welcome, safe, included, respected and valued at school. ○

*Bob Eslinger is currently an assistant superintendent with the portfolio of Student Services, Diversity and Equity with the Nanaimo-Ladysmith Public School District. He is also the district's safe schools team lead.*

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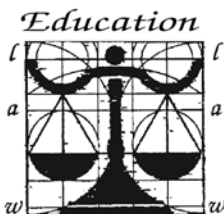


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*“All children and students will be inspired to reach their full potential with access to rich learning experiences that begin at birth and continue into adulthood, regardless of background or personal circumstances.”*

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A young pregnant teen, a street youth, a teen involved with the justice system, a dropout student only credits away to graduation—how can education be possible? Are these vulnerable youth able to believe in themselves? Will they become contributing members of society? How can we renew their motivation to learn?

Students attending the Ottawa Catholic School Board external achievement centres come from all walks of life. They arrive with the need to feel safe and nurtured, which has to be addressed before they envision the continuation and perhaps the completion of their high school diploma. For this reason, we designed external achievement centres where teachers work closely with teenagers in a differentiated learning environment that strives to meet their individual needs. These centres were developed in collaboration with our Ottawa community partners at Operation Come

Home, Algonquin College, You Turn (youth support services), and St. Mary's Home.

Our Board's current spiritual theme is “Restore one another in a spirit of gentleness.” One could say that the word “gentleness” perfectly describes the trusting relationship carefully developed by our teachers with their learners at each centre. Wrap-around supports are made available by our partners allowing the creation of learning environments that strive to respond to the individual needs of each student.

Each classroom is an extension of a high school within our system and is therefore under the supervision of a principal, while being supported by our central Student Success Department. Together, we assume the responsibility of each teacher and the students in their care. Whether these centres need supplies, technological support or resources, our system works to make these needs a priority. In return, our teachers nurture safe and non-judgmental environments, which develop the students' confidence in their rich potential. Each unique centre is strategically located in our community partners' institutions.

## **St. Mary's Home Achievement Centre**

This centre provides academic and wellness programming for pregnant teens. This partnership enables students to access multiple services on site so they have the



support they need during challenging personal times. This includes an adolescent medical clinic, education in pregnancy, parenting and attachment counselling, addiction counselling and a fully equipped 21st century classroom we call the "achievement centre."

Since its inception in 1999, 135 students have graduated with their high school diploma. Most are pursuing a post-secondary education, then a career in areas such as teaching, police academy, law clerk, social work and many more, while successfully raising their children.

"Over the course of the following nine months, I turned into an entirely new human being...I put all my effort into my school career and rebuilding the family I had so quickly torn apart. I became a woman, I learned about the world and its inhabitants. I grew out of the naivety and I developed as a person...." from *Rebirth* by Alexa Jeffery Garza (student voice), who is now serving as an educational assistant within our Board.

#### **Algonquin College Achievement Centre**

This centre provides an opportunity for those who have left high school to become familiar with the college setting while completing their diploma. The site allows students to participate in the college's activities, and to access their services and facilities. Many students take the opportunity to complete dual credits recognized by both the high school and the college institutions. Yearly, we

honour over 50 high school graduates who, for most part, pursue college or university education.

There are so many examples of students who are now contributing members of our society. This includes a registered practical nurse who works full time at the Royal Ottawa Hospital; a graduate student in psychology from the University of Ottawa who is now enrolled at Algonquin College in PR and has an internship in New York City; a graduate student from Carleton University who is pursuing a Business program at Algonquin College; a graduate from Trent University in environmental science who has recently received a grant to study in Mexico; and the list goes on.

#### **Operation Come Home Achievement Centre**

This centre provides academic support for youth who are street-involved and hoping to reconnect with the community. Located at our partner's site in the heart of Ottawa, the students have access to the breakfast program, addiction counselling and social worker support on site, while being invited to pursue studies in the classroom. This ideal location offers an educational setting opportunity for students who may be facing poverty, isolation or challenges at home.

At the graduation last year, the students and staff celebrated two high school diplomas, two GEDs (high school diploma equivalency), 22.5 credits and 17 referrals to

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WITH KEYNOTE SPEAKER:

**Donna Quan,**

Director of Education and Secretary-Treasurer  
of the Toronto District School Board

This year's conference will offer a full day of educational events including an array of practical and interactive workshops on fostering and promoting student wellness. "Wellness" can mean many things, such as mental health, inclusion and promoting diversity, physical health, and more.

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other schools, such as our St. Nicholas Adult High School.

Comments from participants include: "When I think of the achievement centre, I think about the amazing and supportive staff who have helped and encouraged me to make it past the first obstacle in my life. I am proud of myself and how far I have come. I am ready to start the next chapter of my life," (Tara). And, "Wow, I am going to graduate in less than two months. I didn't think I had it in me," (student voice).

### St. John Bosco Achievement Centre

This centre provides academic support for youth involved with the justice system as a transition to return to the regular school system. The youth have often been out of school for a few months to over a year, and often lack social and behavioural skills. They are offered the opportunity to earn high school credits at their own pace.

In this setting, the teacher and the youth worker support students in their care by offering hands-on courses, such as Food and Nutrition, and Integrated Technologies. On-going discussions about their progress with counselors and the probation officers involved with the youth support the building of their confidence and abilities. Students are often eventually referred to our St. Nicholas Adult High School. Former students have come back to share that they are working full time in construction, while others have graduated from our St. Nicholas Adult High School setting.

Comments from participants include: "I like it here because I don't have to think about all the other stuff.... This place is where I come for me," (student voice). And, "This is the best that I have ever done in my life. I am in school. I am clean and I got a job," (student voice).

### Conclusion

These classroom environments, which are non-traditional, offer the targeted support the students need. Because the conditions are made right, there is a focus on education where students develop their own sense of responsibility for their education while addressing other individual needs they have. Often arriving with the sense of brokenness, our students are given an opportunity for restoration as well. Many leave these centres with a sense that they are now able to give back to society in their careers and family situations.

I continue to be inspired by the dedication of our staff and students, who strive for educational success, in all walks of life. ○

*Manon Séguin is Superintendent of the Intermediate/Secondary Student Success Department at the Ottawa Catholic School Board. She is also Student Success Lead at the Board, while holding responsibility for Families of Schools in the east end of Ottawa. Manon has been an educator for 34 years, starting as a teacher, vice-principal and principal. She has been superintendent for the past six years.*



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# Mental Health: Reducing Stigma, Increasing Student Success

By Andrew Baxter, Daniel Danis, and Jodie Heywood

**T**he Calgary Catholic School District (CCSD) is the largest Catholic school district in Alberta; it serves over 52,000 students in Calgary, Airdrie, Cochrane, Chestermere and the Rocky View County. Two years ago, Calgary Catholic initiated a pilot project to increase knowledge among its students and staff in regards to mental health issues. The goals were to reduce stigma and to create clear referral pathways to specialized services.

Student wellness in CCSD is an important topic; it touches all students, staff and parents in a profound way. According to the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC, 2006, p.2), student wellness can be defined as, "...the capacity of each and all of us to feel, think and act in ways that enhance our ability to enjoy life and deal with the challenges we face. It is a positive sense of emotional and spiritual well-being that respects the importance of culture, equity social justice, interconnections and personal dignity." CCSD believes that if students do not have a positive sense of student wellness, then learning is that much more difficult.

Student wellness allows students to achieve their full potential academically, spiritually, physically and socially so they are able to promote and enjoy social justice and social responsibility. In promoting student wellness in the classroom, the Calgary Catholic School District has been part of a coordinated approach involving the whole school community, local community resources, and government initiatives and supports. Specific areas of focus have been resiliency and mental health, with the goal of creating a vibrant culture of student wellness in all our schools.

This project was developed using the following steps.

First, the entire district collaborated with Dr. Stan Kutcher and Alberta Health Services (AHS) to deliver a "Go-To Educators"

"This training really put mental health to the forefront and gives it the attention it deserves." (High School Counsellor).

"This was very relevant to helping me better understand why students may exhibit a pattern of behaviors. It gave me a better idea of how to approach these students and be a support."

"I found this workshop incredibly informative and beneficial for my professional work and finding ways to get help for my students."

"I feel more comfortable now in supporting students with mental health concerns after receiving the knowledge presented from the Stan Kutcher Mental Health Literacy PD." (Grade 9 teacher).

"Great resource and valuable information that will definitely help me in feeling more confident in recognizing mental illnesses and assisting students in my school."

program (mental health literacy), which entailed an in-depth training program. Dr. Stan Kutcher is the co-founder of the "Go-To Educators" program and the "Mental Health Curriculum Guide for Teachers." Go-To-Educators are teachers, principals and support staff who students "go-to" in times of distress.

Go-To-Educators are trained in the identification and referral for potential mental health issues. They are a resource to school communities when issues arise surrounding students' mental health.

Go-To-Educators are established in schools prior to the delivery of the mental health curriculum guide.

Training focuses on understanding correlations and causes of mental health disorders most commonly found in adolescents. Additionally, training highlights appropriate referral pathways to community and health resources for those with mental health issues.

One participant commented, "We had a great speaker who presented information on mental health in a clear manner with knowledge, skill and real applicable stories. It was

easily digestible by all professionals. This was applicable to anyone who works with children or youth in the school setting.”

Second, we delivered a “Mental Health Curriculum Guide for Teachers.” Classroom teachers (who may or may not already be Go-To-Educators) use the Mental Health Curriculum Guide to deliver classes focused on mental health to students.

The Curriculum Guide consists of six modules, designed for Grade 9 and 10 students. Modules are designed to be flexible and can be taught in any order. It has been implemented in classes such as health, CALM, biology and religion, dependent on the schools’ needs and curriculum requirements. The curriculum is also fully available online with supporting materials, such as videos, discussion boards and supportive research.

One teacher commented, “The curriculum materials were really well laid out. It’s

relevant to students and will be easily integrated into our health programming.”

In addition, the Calgary Catholic School District has invited Dr. Stan Kutcher to speak to all principals and curriculum leaders. Dr. Kutcher, who is a renowned expert in adolescent mental health and a leader in mental health research, advocacy, training, and policy, will describe the development, application and evaluation of a successful mental health literacy approach for students in middle and secondary schools.

The modules in the curriculum materials address:

- Module 1: The Stigma of Mental Illness.
- Module 2: Understanding Mental Health and Wellness.
- Module 3: Information About Specific Mental Illnesses.
- Module 4: Experiences of Mental Illness.
- Module 5: Seeking Help and Finding Support.

- Module 6: The Importance of Positive Mental Health.

This program was developed in Nova Scotia in partnership with the Sun Life Financial Chair, and the Canadian Mental Health Association. It has been adopted as legislated curriculum in Nova Scotia and in Manitoba, and all Toronto schools will be adopting it soon. Here in Alberta, the project is funded by the Alberta Children’s Hospital Foundation. AHS is hosting ongoing training at sites throughout the city. Additionally training sessions are being organized at specific schools.

Calgary Catholic School district plans on incorporating the work of Dr. Stan Kutcher with its students, parents and teachers as they continue to learn more about understanding the stigmas of mental health. ○

*Andrew Baxter, MSW, RSW, has worked in school based and community mental health for over 17 years. During his time with Alberta Health Services, he has provided direct treatment and consultation services for children and families, Kindergarten through Grade 12. Currently, Andrew chairs the School Based Mental Health Quality Improvement Committee and sits on the Child and Adolescent Addictions and Mental Health Standards Committee.*

*Daniel Danis, BA, B.ED, MA, is the Director of Instructional Services for the Calgary Catholic School District (CCSD). He has worked for CCSD for over 20 years as a high school chaplain, teacher, vice-principal and principal. He can be contacted at daniel.danis@ccsd.ab.ca.*

*Jodie Heywood, B.ED, MA, has been a Catholic educator with CCSD for 25 years. She is currently the Consultant for School Counseling with CCSD, and serves on the Student Wellness Mental Health Literacy Committee.*

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# The Poverty Challenge

By Ann Boniferro

What's it like to try to find affordable housing? How does it

feel when your kids are embarrassed and you're humiliated because you don't have enough to get by? Do you spend your limited income on food or rent? Rent or hydro? How do you choose? You may never have to make these difficult choices, but they are some of the realities of those who experience poverty. The Poverty Challenge is designed to encourage those who are not living in poverty in Canada to care about those who do.

Over 100 secondary students from Catholic, public and government schools across Hastings and Prince Edward Counties arrive at Loyalist College for *The Poverty Challenge Quinte*, knowing they will learn something about poverty issues but not sure how the day will unfold. They listen politely to a young adult keynote speaker who shares her personal story of financial struggle. They gather in classrooms to complete an activity about wealth distribution in Canada and to list common stereotypes of the poor and homeless. This all seems like a typical school day. But then, the role play begins.

Students and their teachers are each given a profile of one of several people who live in poverty. Playing this role, they must move through simulations of various social services and agencies to respond to crises that their character faces. They may need to find affordable housing, visit the local food bank, apply for Ontario Works, or access dental care for themselves or their children. Mock offices are spread throughout Loyalist College and staffed by volunteers from the school board and the broader community. As students navigate the halls of this unfamiliar building and interact with the volunteers, they experience some of the frustration of dealing with multiple agencies and systems. Comments on a graffiti wall express their aggravation. "I'm lost." "People are mean." "This is VERY difficult!"



*Students fill out applications for benefits at one of the service agency simulations.*



*Students share their thoughts on the graffiti wall.*

In the afternoon students are surprised and emotionally affected when they meet the real person whose experiences have formed the basis of the profile they have adopted. The stereotypes of poverty are shattered as students engage in conversation with these "poverty experts" who courageously share their stories. The final event of the day gathers groups of students to discuss possible solutions to issues they confronted during the role-play. At the same time, teachers meet to consider how they might extend the learning in their classrooms. With a new awareness about poverty, both teachers and students are invited to take what they have experienced and learned back to their schools, their friends and their families, and to decide how they can work for justice in their communities.

The Committee for Social Justice of the Algonquin & Lakeshore Catholic District School Board has hosted The Poverty

Challenge Quinte annually since 2013. This complex effort is organized by a committee of ALCDSB educators and trustees, community partners and social service agencies, with the generous support of the United Way of Quinte, Nicholson Catholic College Foundation, Hastings Prince Edward District School Board, Loyalist College, and Food for Learning. The event is based on a toolkit provided by *The Poverty Challenge*, which began with high school students in Kingston in 2009 and has expanded to include events for Queen's University students in the Faculties of Education and Medicine.

For more information go to [www.the-povertychallenge.org](http://www.the-povertychallenge.org).

*Ann Boniferro is Coordinator of Religious and Family Life Education for the Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District School Board, and chair of the board's Committee for Social Justice.*

SPECIAL FOCUS



# Empathy as the First Step in Social Responsibility

By Terry Freeman,  
and Reagan Weeks

“According to Tim Brown, design thinkers start with human need and move on to learning by making.” Students at Elm Street School in Medicine Hat, Alberta do just that. As one of the only Design Thinking School in Canada, students use the Design Thinking Process in their learning. Empathy is the first stage in this approach. It is also essential to understanding civic and social responsibility.

The flood of 2013 had a significant effect on the students, families and neighbours of Elm Street School. It is not difficult to be empathetic when you are the one suffering from the calamity. However, social action can be a difficult step. How can young students impact their community? Elm Street School found several ways.

What do you do when your friends and neighbours are hungry? You build a greenhouse to grow food to give away. Despite the fact that the greenhouse was vandalized three times, you are responsible to your community. Grade 4 teacher, Susan Nelson, and her students produced a “living wall” to grow herbs and spices. These were used to create a variety of products that were sold at a *maker faire*. In the product development stage, students prototyped, interviewed potential customers, observed behavior at markets and then iterated. Students collaborated with business and education students as well as local entrepreneurs to create business plans. Students demonstrated empathy, ideation, iteration and implementation.

Why would Grade 5 students want to care about their local wetland? Teacher Meagan Freeman let her students “play” in the area for an hour. At the end of that time they gathered as a class. Students noticed the garbage and pollution. They now “cared” about this space. They felt responsible for doing something to protect the wetland. Students generated driving questions based on the research, observation

*Students were asked,  
“What does home  
mean to you?”*



and interviewing of experts that took place during the expedition. They shared their learning with the larger community while looking for solutions. As a result, students developed a bias for action and implemented ideas to contribute to the preservation of their local wetland.

Can the little ones demonstrate civic responsibility? In April 2015, Elm Street School students in Kindergarten and Grade 6 worked with the City of Medicine Hat Planning Department to design, plan and build their own city. They needed to consider the environment, employment, safety, access to food and transportation, recreation and community connections. Each child created a blueprint that they presented to the city for a development permit. The “approved” permits were then used to create their structure and plan their city, which they unveiled in a installation at our local City Hall. City officials, dignitaries, teachers, parents and students attended the exhibition.

All of Elm Street School embarked on a design, thinking of “HOME.” The driving question behind the students’ work was, what does home mean to you?

Students wrote ethnographies to develop empathy and understanding regarding another person’s point of view of home. Understanding different perspective is key to creating community impact and meaningfully contributing to society. Children do not learn empathy from receiving it but rather from giving it. This project was one way to develop empathy skills.

Teachers designed a series of provocations, interviews, storyboarding, dramatic



*Students displayed their cities at City Hall.*

experiences and documentation. Students began the process by thinking about what home means to them and then brainstorming interview questions. Homelessness is a major societal issue across our country and one Medicine Hat was attempting to eliminate. Some students conducted ethnographies with former homeless people and clay representations of their narratives were displayed in a large public exhibition at Medalta, a local museum.

The school has fostered a culture of care and responsibility. Students and staff care about each other and demonstrate that daily. The oldest school in Medicine Hat lives some old time values—empathy and responsibility using new instructional approaches like design thinking. ○

*Terry Freeman is Director of Programs and Instruction for Medicine Hat School District No. 76.*

*Reagan Weeks is Principal of Elm Street School.*



# Developing Social Responsibility and a Sense of Purpose Through “Design for Change”

“Sorry, but I don’t like school really, in general, so this inquiry project is kind of like a beacon of light in a dark cave.” – Grade 7 Student

By Doug David, Catherine Manson, and Christine VanderRee

**F**our years ago, nine teachers from across School District 71 (Comox Valley) formed a professional learning community. What brought us together was our shared concern for student engagement: How could we empower our learners with a greater sense of meaning and purpose in school?

Early in our partnership, a teacher involved in the collaboration shared a link to the TED talk where Kiran Sethi teaches kids to take charge, and encouraged us to view it. Sethi’s “I Can” initiative begins with a process of inquiry, inviting students to articulate what they feel strongly about. We wondered, would setting aside time for such inquiry spark increased student engagement, better prepare our students to be self-directed learners and increase their sense of personal and social responsibility?

Kiran Sethi’s words filled us with inspiration. Suddenly we had a project! We initiated an inquiry, encouraging our students to think deeply about real issues, guiding them with examples of young people becoming change-makers in their own communities, both locally and globally. We empowered our students to identify issues that they were concerned about, to imagine solutions, and to take action.

The students were then given the Learning Intention: *I can engage in a self-designed project that makes a positive impact in our community.* Each developed an inquiry question based on personal interests that drove their project and focused their learning. Each student presented their learning to peers, parents and guests, and reflected on their learning.

Using the *BC Social Responsibility Performance Standards* as an assessment tool, we focused particularly on the strand “shows a sense of community and an interest in



Students involved in the District Showcase had a variety of projects that included tackling invasive Scotch Broom, teaching seniors how to use technology, leading school clubs, raising awareness for Autism, animal abuse, and the environment.

making the world a better place; tries to follow through on planned actions.” So began an incredible journey of shifting mindsets, our students identifying their own ideas to make a positive difference, thinking globally, but acting locally.

Our Design for Change work here in School District 71 continues to grow and evolve. We have seen authentic evidence of engagement and sense of purpose from our learners. Students appear proud of their accomplishments and engaged in sharing their stories of change. When asked questions framed with the *Feel, Imagine, Do* design thinking model, our students can confidently express why they were drawn to their identified issue and why it is important; they are able to describe if and what other people are doing about the issue locally and globally, and they are able to share what they hope to accomplish with their actions.

We are now connected to Design for Change, the largest global movement designed to give children an opportunity to express their own ideas for a better world and put them into action. As part of this global network, we create the conditions for our learners to be change makers following an inquiry design-thinking model of *Feel, Imagine, Do and Share*. The value of being involved in Design for Change is magnified

as we enter an era of curriculum and assessment changes. The shift to using core competencies and “big ideas” within B.C. gives us more room to fully embrace this project and promote what we believe is valuable. The combined outcomes of this project continue to inspire, expand and overcome obstacles. ○

*Doug David is a Curriculum Support Teacher, supporting teachers across Comox Valley School District in their development of curriculum, assessment practices and classroom instruction.*

*Catherine Manson is currently a teaching Vice Principal in the Comox Valley. She is passionate about educating students to dig deeply into real world issues and set their own goals.*

*Christine VanderRee is a principal in a Comox Valley Elementary School. She enjoys empowering her students to take action on issues that “bug” them.*

## Resources

To view the Kiran Sethi TED talk, go to: [www.ted.com/talks/kiran\\_bir\\_sethi\\_teaches\\_kids\\_to\\_take\\_charge?language=en](http://www.ted.com/talks/kiran_bir_sethi_teaches_kids_to_take_charge?language=en).

For more on Design for Change, go to: [www.dfeworld.com](http://www.dfeworld.com).



# Social Responsibility from the Beginning

By Carol Durnford, and  
Genevieve Tarnawsky

**W**hat does it mean to be socially responsible? To us, it means that people and organizations are behaving ethically, with sensitivity toward a variety of social and environmental issues, and are being culturally sensitive to social and ethnic differences.

In the Edmonton Catholic School District (ECSD), "An Excellent Start to Learning" is a valued philosophy and our goal. Helping us achieve this goal are a number of programs, including the 100 Voices program, in which children as young as three and four years of age are welcomed to their learning journey. The program name itself sets the tone for the value placed on children beginning their school careers. 100 Voices has been drawn from the philosophy of Reggio Emilia, in which the many "expressive voices" of children is valued and honored.

Genesis Early Learning Centre, the early learning department within ECSD's Learning Services Innovation department, brings social responsibility to our youngest of learners and their families through the support of multicultural animators (MCA).

The MCA role emerged in response to the increasing cultural diversity in our early learning classrooms and evolved from a previous position that had supported our French Immersion programs in a similar manner. The MCA position was modified to suit the multicultural context for children in early learning programs with language delays or limited exposure to language.

In January 2014, the first animators began with the district, each specializing in a foreign language and a specific cultural group. Currently, the MCA support children and families in 12 languages: Spanish, Punjabi, Vietnamese, Tagalog, Gujarati, Malayalam, Cantonese, Hindi, Urdu, Tamil, Marathi and French.

The early learning MCA bridge the child's dual language learning, introducing the family to Canadian culture and



*Students in the 100 Voices program show off traditional clothing at a classroom event.*

facilitating the celebration of different cultures in the classroom, as they nurture diversity and awareness of cultures throughout the early learning programs.

The MCA provide rich language and listening opportunities for the children in their first language. The main objectives of the MCA include strengthening oral language, listening comprehension and literacy skills in home languages; facilitating language and cultural interpretation; and increasing appreciation of multiculturalism.

The support of the MCA for our early English Language Learners (ELL) is invaluable. According to TESOL (*Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages*, Inc., 2010) young English language learners (ages three to eight) benefit from early literacy programs in which oral language and literacy development is supported by the student's native language. By leveraging the first language, they can continue to build language skills important at this developmental time, and not lose "ground" while learning the new language.

Additionally, to support young learners who have identified language learning needs, the MCA work alongside the teacher, multidisciplinary team, and early learning facilitators to support the identified goals of speech and language.

Beyond the language benefits provided by the MCA, the recognition of the first

language and culture provides a positive validation that helps in the transition to a new cultural and language experience. Parents of these young learners feel more supported and valued as their culture and language are not being left out of the new learning experience.

The fringe benefit is that other students in the early learning classroom learn the importance of a common way to communicate and develop empathy for the challenges of learning a new language and culture. At the same time, they experience the diversity in language and culture, and the richness of the many voices of children and people in the world. ○

*Carol Durnford (B.Ed., M.Ed.) is currently a research specialist for Edmonton Catholic Schools with a focus on early learning. Her background in ECSD includes: teacher, enrichment coordinator, school-based administrator, science-inquiry consultant and project lead for the curriculum redesign prototyping project K-3. She has also been an educational technology consultant and writer, and career development specialist.*

*Genevieve Tarnawsky (B.Ed.) is currently an early learning consultant with Edmonton Catholic Schools. Her passion is to enrich all aspects of literacy and language learning. Her background experience includes teaching in all elementary grade levels, Learning Team Coordinator, Leveled Literacy Intervention, ESL Designate, Technology Coach, and Learning coach. She continues to develop the MCA role in ECSD.*



# The “Great (Un) Equalizer”: Using the Bourdieuan Lens to Understand the Paradox of Education

By Victor Brar

In the 1800s, Horace Mann, the Massachusetts Secretary of Education, described education as the “Great Equalizer,” which would enable children from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds to ascend the socio-economic ladder. Mann argued that education was a neutral and objective ranking mechanism that operated meritously so as to enable children from all socio-economic backgrounds to be able to claim their piece of the American, or, in my case, the Canadian “dream.”

In hindsight, the promise of education as being an equalizer remains largely unfilled for the children of low SES backgrounds, such as those who attend the inner-city Canadian school where I currently teach. This unsettling paradox works to establish, perpetuate and legitimize classrooms of haves and have-nots in which there is a significant achievement gap between inner-city children and their more affluent peers. As an inner-city practitioner, I want to find a generative and transformative heuristic that will help me to understand and respond to this problem that I must contend with on a daily basis as an inner-city practitioner.

My journey to explain the paradox of education landed me on the door-step of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984, 1993) and his theory of practice. Bourdieu successfully marries the economic metaphor of capital with sociology to provide deep insight into how the distinct social class traits of children has a significant impact on their ability to succeed within the school system. Bourdieu’s theory of practice is summarized by seeing how its core concepts of cultural capital, habitus, field and symbolic violence work together to create and perpetuate educational inequality.

His theory starts with the idea that an individual’s level of academic achievement

is a function of their cultural capital, which is unique to each social class. Cultural capital accumulates to form a person’s habitus, which becomes the specific lens through which he/she views and responds to the world and which is also specific to each social class.

Next, individuals from different social classes come into the field of education equipped with different forms of cultural capital and habitus. However, not all forms of capital and habitus are equally valued by the educational field, which represents distinct domain with its own rules and expectations, and some forms of cultural capital have greater value than others.

Therefore, the degree to which an individual is successful in school depends upon whether or not he/she has the specific form of cultural capital that is required by the education field. And, when individuals do not possess the form of capital required by schools, symbolic violence is perpetrated against them, which manifests itself in the form of discrimination and lower achievement.

Given Bourdieu’s theory, it becomes evident that schools are not neutral and meritorious, but instead are unfairly oriented towards the values of the middle class (Lareau, 2011). All of the critical aspects of education that impact achievement, such as pedagogy, curriculum, linguistic register and expectations, are predicated upon and emerge out of middle class values that children from low SES backgrounds do not have. Furthermore, Bourdieu argues that most of these educational requirements are tacit and therefore hidden even to members of the middle class from whom they originate.

The net result of this situation is that the current education system operates

in a covert way and makes demands of children from low SES backgrounds that they cannot meet because they cannot see or understand them, thereby cementing their low achievement. This achievement gap, if further compounded by the fact that because schools are unfairly oriented towards middle class dispositions, then the children from higher SES backgrounds perform comparatively better, thereby widening the achievement gap between themselves and their low SES peers.

Having appropriated Bourdieu’s theory of practice, I, as a practitioner, can testify that it has been truly helpful to me in understanding the world that my inner-city students come from and how that clashes with the world of school. Bourdieu has helped to transform my praxis by enabling me to understand the achievement gap in a comprehensive manner that accurately captures the sociological complexities of this problem which have often been neglected in research. ○

*Victor Brar is an elementary educator in the Surrey School District and a doctoral candidate at Simon Fraser University.*

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SPECIAL FOCUS



# Anything is Possible at SSES!

By Rosanna Cuthbert

**S**igurbjorg Stefansson School (SSES) has been engaged in an appreciative inquiry with deeper learning, inspired by the Reggio Emilia philosophy and education for sustainability. SSES utilizes the guiding principles of the Reggio Emilia approach to frame our action research; the image of the child, the environment as a third teacher, pedagogical documentation, provocations, 100 languages of children, respect and reciprocity.

This philosophy has been a catalyst for our students to become active and engaged citizens—children are viewed as being strong, resourceful, intelligent and competent. It is allowing our students to be participatory, personally responsible and social justice oriented.

Embracing the notion of holistic education and embarking on this journey has provided opportunities for SSES staff to co-construct knowledge alongside our students. A move toward inquiry-based learning environments is resulting in curricular outcomes being “uncovered” rather than “covered.” Teachers are discovering that using the curriculum as a point of departure is not only more joyful but is unleashing unlimited potential in students and their learning.

SSES has also been involved in a global collaborative network called New Pedagogies for Deep Learning (with Michael Fullan) to gain insight on developing contemporary learning competencies, such as critical thinking, collaboration, communication, creativity, citizenship and character. Leveraging social media and information technologies is having a powerful impact on our social justice focus and presenting authentic opportunities for students to increase their understanding about digital citizenship.

Posting digital photos, videos and students’ reflections and ideas on our LifeatSSES blog, Twitter feed, and Edsby parent forum also help to profile this rich learning process with our school, families, community and the world. Utilizing technology to accelerate learning is helping us to make students’ thinking visible and their voices heard.



*Learning occurs outdoors on a regular basis through engagement with maintaining class gardens in the outdoor greenhouse and crop gardens, and investigating the natural world through seasonal nature walks and local field trips.*

When teachers design learning in response to their students’ wonders, curiosities and questions, deeper learning occurs. Each class begins their day with a morning meeting and often these class and buddy conversations influence the learning journey. Our “Space That Teaches” student engagement initiative involves continuous efforts to re-connect our students to nature and to create dynamic, provocative, nature-inspired and diverse learning environments.

Learning also occurs outdoors on a regular basis through engagement with maintaining our class gardens in the outdoor greenhouse and crop gardens, and investigating the natural world through seasonal nature walks and local field trips. Cross age collaborations (within the school, other Gimli schools and the community), as well as a strong parental and community presence within the school building, is helping our students appreciate the critical importance of community connections.

Monthly school assemblies are conducted too, where the principal reads books with a social justice or diversity theme, evoking the students to reflect on how their actions, no matter how big or small, can positively impact our school and our world. Empowering our students to think critically about social issues is enhancing our school community, and fostering a respectful, safe and thriving learning space.

Our school’s focus on education for sustainability has been a vehicle for students and staff to realize how living in harmony with others and the world around us enriches the quality of our lives. Weaving the three domains of the environment, human health

and well-being, and the economy encompasses the essential learnings of our education for sustainability curriculum outcomes in Manitoba. SSES was honored to be recognized as a Manitoba Education Eco-Globe “Transformational” school and to receive a 2015 Manitoba Excellence in Sustainability Award.

SSES believes in a holistic education where musical, environmental, digital and physical literacies are developed alongside the foundational literacies of language arts and mathematics. When asked to document their wonders in Music, a student drew a picture of a violin and wrote “Anything is Possible.” When asked about his illustration, Sam shared that he really wanted to learn how to play the violin and that he believed, like our school message conveys, that anything is possible. He added, “It’s also the theme of Canada really.”

In a recent note to his teacher, another student, Anthony, wrote: “In this school we laugh...a lot, we try our best, we keep our promises, we hug a lot, we learn, we stay safe, we make good friends, we help recycle. We are building a greater future but above all, we love.”

At SSES, through experiencing on a daily basis that our actions are positively impacting the world, students and staff are developing a deeper appreciation and understanding of the interconnectedness of the world in which they live. Our students are not only engaged, but invested, in their learning. Anything is possible at SSES! ○

*Rosanna Cuthbert is Principal of Sigurbjorg Stefansson School, a Junior Kindergarten to Grade 4 Early Years School in Evergreen School Division, Gimli, Manitoba.*





Photo courtesy Tourism Winnipeg & Dan Harper.

## CASSA-ACGCS Annual Conference

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Mark your calendars for the 2016 Annual CASSA-ACGCS Conference, to be held July 7-9, 2016 in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

The theme, *Hearts & Minds, Creating a Culture of Caring*, is being developed.

Check out our website ([www.cassa-acgcs.ca](http://www.cassa-acgcs.ca)) often, for updates, as they become available.

### CASSA-ACGCS Awards

Submit your nominations now for:

- The Distinguished Service Award;
  - The CASSA/XEROX CANADA LTD EXL Award; and
  - Honourary Life Membership.
- Nominations are accepted October 1, 2015 to May 16, 2016.

Awards are presented in July at the Annual Conference.

Download the nomination forms at [www.cassa-acgcs.ca](http://www.cassa-acgcs.ca).

### LCEEQ Conference 2016

The Leadership Committee for English Education in Quebec will be holding its annual conference February 8-9, 2016 in Laval, Quebec. This conference is the largest professional development event of the year for teachers, non-teaching professionals and administrators who work in English-language private and public schools, adult education and vocational training centres, colleges and universities across the province.

The theme for the 2016 conference is *Embracing Diversity, Supporting Equity* and will focus on various issues that serve to marginalize students due to learning differences, social-emotional learning, cultural and socioeconomic diversity as well as sexual orientation. Keynote speakers include Dr. Russell Quaglia, Rick Lavoie, Dr. Doug Willms, Dr. Lisa Lande, Dr. Thomas Armstrong, and Ainsley Rose. For more information, visit [www.lcee-q.ca](http://www.lcee-q.ca)

### Lester B. Pearson School Board awarded Peace Prize

On September 21, 2015, the International Day of Peace, the YMCAs of Québec awarded a Peace Medal to the Lester B. Pearson School Board (Dorval, QC) for its contributions to Quebec society. More specifically, the award celebrates the work of the Family and School Support and Treatment Team (FSSTT), which promotes inclusive practices for students with behavioral and social-emotional difficulties.

The YMCA Peace Medal is the second honour to be bestowed on the FSSTT. In May 2014, the FSSTT was presented with an Award of Excellence in Education from the Quebec English School Boards Association.

Learn more here: [www.ymcaquebec.org/en/About-Us/Newsroom/2015/The-YMCA-s-2015-Peace-Medal-Recipients](http://www.ymcaquebec.org/en/About-Us/Newsroom/2015/The-YMCA-s-2015-Peace-Medal-Recipients).

### New Assistant Deputy Minister of Education in Quebec

In October 2015, Anne-Marie Lepage assumed the role of Assistant Deputy Minister with the Quebec Ministry of Education, Higher Education, and Research. Her dossiers include the English-speaking and aboriginal communities of Quebec as well as cultural diversity. Ms. Lepage's involvement in education is extensive, having been a classroom teacher and Director General of two Quebec school boards. Most recently, she served as the Director of Labour Relations leading the contract negotiations for the English-speaking school boards of Quebec.

**Boards, districts and schools are encouraged to submit their news for the Summer 2016 edition! Email [ssavory@matrixgroupinc.net](mailto:ssavory@matrixgroupinc.net).**

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