Students roll the dice with seniors

Every Wednesday, even through the winter months, a group of students and staff from Springfield Heights School gathers when the lunch bell rings and walks to L&B Towers, a seniors’ residence six minutes away on Edison Avenue. These students are members of the school’s Board Game Club. They make these weekly visits to L&B Towers to play games with the residents after they’ve eaten their lunches. Springfield Heights teacher Kerri Pries got the idea from her colleague Cheryl Marsh who’d heard of a similar program being run at another school.

“The kids enjoy getting out of the school building and exploring our community,” says Ms. Pries. “Plus, it’s good social practice for them to be interacting with the seniors and they like learning new games.”

The students aren’t the only ones who benefit from this intergenerational relationship.

“The seniors have said it’s lovely to have the energy of the students in the building and they don’t often get opportunities to interact with children of this age,” says Ms. Pries.

The club is for Grade 3 students and there’s been a lot of interest, so they intend to continue it next year. The efforts are all made worthwhile when Ms. Pries sees the results.

“Right in the middle of it, I look around and see 12 to 15 Grade 3 students completely immersed in positive interactions with seniors—and loving it! It’s a wonderful thing to see.”
Murdoch student earns MSBA award

Congratulations to Mimosa Trieu of Murdoch MacKay Collegiate who was one of six Manitoba students presented with a Student Citizenship Award at the 53rd annual Manitoba School Boards Association convention on March 16.

Mimosa is in the Advanced Placement program and earned her first university credit in Grade 11 while attending Murdoch MacKay. She’s very active at the school—she’s a member in the leadership, environment and social justice clubs, and plays for the basketball and badminton teams.

Mimosa is also quite community-minded, regularly volunteering in the daycare centre at Concordia Hospital and at the Vietnamese church she attends.

“It was such a pleasure for the board of trustees to nominate Mimosa for this award; she’s very deserving,” says RETSD board chair Colleen Carswell. “She embodies the giving spirit and social responsibility that we encourage in all of our students, and the board wishes her the very best after she graduates in June.”

Dr. Tim Lewis visits for RETSD event

They were there to see Dr. Tim Lewis, who was visiting from the University of Missouri to speak about how to intensify supports in the classroom to build an environment that encourages positive behaviours.

Dr. Lewis is an expert in Positive Behaviour Intervention and Supports (PBIS), which help students improve their behaviour and academic performance while building a positive school culture. All RETSD schools make use of PBIS and have seen positive results, from a reduction in behavioural concerns to an increase in student engagement.

Dr. Lewis’s presentation focused mainly on supports needed in the classroom for students who have behavioural challenges.

“I can’t make kids behave, no one in this room can make kids behave,” said Dr. Lewis, as he spoke to the assembled group. “But we can create environments that increase the likelihood that they’ll behave and learn.”

Dr. Tim Lewis with assistant superintendent Joan Trubyk (centre) and the PBIS teachers who organized the event: (left to right) Lindsay Lawrence, Cara Colorado and Cindy Jasper.
The program called Little Green Thumbs (LGT) is an indoor gardening program that allows students to grow their own food right in their classroom, giving them an experience with agriculture, the food system, and where their food comes from. It has other benefits, as well—it encourages students to try new foods, gives them the opportunity for hands-on learning, and during the winter provides the classroom with a connection to warm light and plant life.

LGT is offered by Agriculture in the Classroom—Manitoba, an organization that provides programs, activities, and tools for teachers and their students to learn more about agriculture.

There are nine schools in River East Transcona that use the LGT program—the most of any school division in the province. Other RETSD schools have participated in AITC’s Made in Manitoba Breakfast Program, which lets students enjoy a breakfast served by local agricultural producers.

Supporting our trans community

Marcus Matheson had just started at Miles Macdonell Collegiate when RETSD released their Gender Identity Guidelines in October 2015. Now in Grade 12, the transgender student feels like the guidelines have had a positive impact.

“It’s reassuring to know I’ll be supported by the division,” he says. “I can use the washroom or change room I identify with and if something happens, the school and division will have my back.”

This is one of the intended results of the guidelines—to make transgender students and employees feel they’re in a safe and caring environment.

Prior to their development, the division had been dealing with gender identity matters on a case-by-case basis. RETSD wanted a better strategy that would help accommodate transgender people in a more consistent way that didn’t leave anything up to chance.

“We’ve had nothing but positive feedback about our guidelines and supporting materials,” says Greg Daniels, an assistant superintendent in RETSD who oversaw their development. “Our families, schools, and student services personnel are grateful. They all seem to have a comfort level that everything is being done to provide support, to raise awareness and to make transition as smooth as possible.”

Marcus speaks highly of the staff at Miles Macdonell and the support they’ve provided. He says it’s the most inclusive and open high school of the three he’s attended.

“I’ve never received rude comments from any staff or students and I’m comfortable being open with my transgender status in my classroom and with peers,” he says. “I’m glad RETSD took the initiative to support such a vulnerable community. Questioning your gender identity can be hard and scary, but knowing that your school can be a safe haven, that’s so important.”

Marcus Matheson (pictured) will graduate from Miles Macdonell Collegiate this year.
RETSD shines at MCEC awards

Congratulations to those from RETSD who were honoured by the Manitoba Council for Exceptional Children (MCEC) at their annual awards ceremony on February 23 at the Victoria Inn.

The MCEC Yes I Can! Awards acknowledge the achievements of youth with disabilities, and encourage them to seek their highest potential.

They were presented to: Jordan Gates of River East Collegiate for school and community activities; Ashleigh Klym of Kildonan-East Collegiate for transition; and Jordan Rogodzinksi of Miles Macdonell Collegiate for transition.

Carol Conan, a recently retired teacher from Kildonan-East Collegiate, was nominated for Outstanding Educator of the Year for her dedication to her students and her commitment to collaboration and sharing of knowledge.

A Certificate of Recognition was presented to parent Joanna Byrnes, whose son attends Angus McKay School. She was honoured for her efforts to ensure supports are in place to help children with autism and their families. Miles Macdonell students Layal Hunt and Jordyn White received Certificates of Recognition for their work with exceptional youth since their early school years.

Volunteer spotlight

Swan Nguyen has been a dedicated volunteer at John de Graff Elementary for the six years her son has attended there, and if we’re lucky she’ll stick around for another six because her daughter is just about to start kindergarten. She’s been on the Parent Advisory Committee for several years, first as its secretary and now as treasurer. She also regularly helps out with hot lunches and teacher appreciation week. For more about volunteering in RETSD, visit: www.retsd.mb.ca/Community/Volunteer

2017 POWWOW

ALL WELCOME
ADMISSION IS FREE

WHEN:
April 20, 2017
4:00 to 8:00 p.m.

WHERE:
Kildonan-East Collegiate
845 Concordia Ave.

CONTACT:
Lisa Aymont Hunter or David Delorme at
204.669.9412

www.retsd.mb.ca