Learning to code and loving it

The secret is out—RETS student are learning how to code. And this code will help them unlock the mysteries of computer programming.

Code is the set of instructions that runs computers and there are a variety of coding languages. RETSD knows education needs to continuously evolve to keep up with the changing world, and teaching kids how to code develops their literacy with both numbers and technology.

They’re responding to it with a lot of enthusiasm.

Teacher-librarian Claudia Klausen, along with teachers Erin Clarke and Jenn Mehyden, started a coding club last year for grades 4 and 5 students at Dr. F.W.L. Hamilton School, and 63 students signed up. This year, students in grades 1 to 3 will also take part.

“The response has been phenomenal!” says Ms. Klausen.

Several schools in RETSD have coding clubs, others have them in the works, and all Grade 6 students at Chief Peguis Junior High take one coding class per six-day school cycle.

And they’re learning more than just the coding itself, says Ms. Klausen.

“Students are learning that making mistakes helps them to learn and persevere when faced with problems, and that working together to solve a problem requires good communication. We’re exposing them to skills that will be an integral part of their lives for years to come.”
Springfield Heights students show generosity

Babies in two local neonatal intensive care units (NICUs) received some special gifts from Springfield Heights School students who wanted to demonstrate generosity.

Olivia Sherby’s Grade 1/2 class read many books about generosity and were taught how it’s shown in Aboriginal culture. And when they learned their classmate had twin brothers who were born early and needed to spend time in a NICU, they decided to start a project so they could show generosity to babies in such situations.

They began by learning more about babies who need to spend time in a NICU, why they might need that extra care and what types of machines are used in the units, such as incubators.

They were visited by a nurse, by their classmate’s new twin brothers, and by several mothers who work at the school and whose babies benefitted from this type of care, including Springfield Heights principal Nori Dehn, whose son John was only one and a half pounds when born. John visited the class at Christmas, so the students could see that he’s now a full-grown adult.

The students then fundraised so they could buy 50 blankets and Christmas cards for babies at the Health Sciences Centre, and 30 cards for babies at St. Boniface Hospital, along with a $100 donation. They also made Valentine’s Day cards for the NICUs. A wonderful display of generosity and empathy.

Ryder (pictured) is one of the babies who received a blanket from the class. He’s out of the NICU now and sleeps with it every night.
Trustees strive to meet community’s needs

Child care is a hot topic these days because need has outstripped availability, leaving many parents searching for alternatives.

There are 37 daycares, before-and-after school programs and kinder care programs in River East Transcona schools; a great convenience for many families in those communities.

However, the division doesn’t operate these programs or have control over how many or which children are accepted into them. The division co-operates with the child care programs in many ways, but they work independently of RETSD, using space in schools while setting their own parameters in conjunction with the province’s Early Learning and Child Care Program. And because of a lack of spaces, some families are finding themselves unable to secure before-and-after school care in their children’s schools.

Trustee Jerry Sodomlak says the change in some school boundaries in Transcona really highlighted this issue for him and other trustees, as they worked to address parents’ concerns about the availability of child care in the schools their children would now be attending.

“From speaking with parents, we’ve learned that child care is the number one concern for many of them now,” he says. “We’ve met with all four of the early years schools affected by the changing boundaries to figure out how to serve our school communities.”

Trustee Sodomlak says it all comes down to space: “The child care facilities need more of it and we’re faced with real challenges in that respect.”

Government guidelines dictate that once space has been committed to a daycare or childcare facility within a school, it’s committed to them permanently, as long as they wish to operate there.

It’s part of the RETSD Board of Trustees’ job to anticipate and plan for growth in enrolment, so they’re hesitant to provide permanent space for child care that may be required for academic needs in the near future.

“Our mandate is to provide kindergarten to Grade 12 education for our communities,” says RETSD board chair Colleen Carswell, “and it would be unwise to commit space that we think we’ll later require to meet our students’ academic needs.”

If schools and child care programs could jointly use space, it would give trustees the flexibility they need to strike a fair balance.

“We’ve brought our concerns forward to the minister of education and to our MLAs,” says trustee Carswell. “We hope they’ll make it easier for us to meet all the needs of our community, including child care.”

Murdoch students excel at ethics

Congratulations to the Murdoch MacKay Collegiate students who won the Manitoba Regional High School Ethics Bowl!

The bowl is a collaborative yet competitive event in which teams analyze a series of wide-ranging ethical dilemmas. It’s presented by the Manitoba Association for Rights and Liberties, the University of Manitoba, and Manitoba Education.

After defeating the defending champions Springfield Collegiate in the semi-final round, the Murdoch team took on Fort Richmond Collegiate in the finals and came out victorious.

“The difference between our team in the first round and in the finals was remarkable,” says Murdoch teacher and Ethics Bowl mentor Brienna Street. “In the end, they were so articulate, respectful and confident.”

With their Ethics Bowl trophy (left to right), Murdoch students Karina Buckingham, Anastasia Nwakeze, Shegitu Nega, Tyler Ross and Evan Evaniuk.
Volunteer spotlight

Tasha Kettles is an example of how just one volunteer can have a tremendous impact on a school. Ms. Kettles has served on the parent council at Harold Hatcher Elementary School for several years and has been the hot lunch co-ordinator for two years. As a member of the library remodelling committee, she found people to construct furniture and custom bookshelves, and organized a spring bazaar for the last three years to fundraise for library improvements. As well, Ms. Kettles has rolled up her sleeves and helped paint the school to improve the décor and took part in initiating a school snack program. For more about volunteering in RETSD, visit: www.retsd.mb.ca/Community/Volunteer

Cold weather bus cancellations

Manitobans are hearty, renowned for being well-prepared for the elements, and bone-chilling weather is no stranger to this province. As such, the weather has to be quite cold before school divisions cancel bus service. The general rule is that if the wind chill is -45°C or colder at The Forks (as posted by Environment Canada at about 6:10 a.m.), we cancel buses for the whole day but schools usually remain open.

All metro Winnipeg school divisions follow one system, based on this rule.

“We receive a lot of calls about busing throughout the winter months,” says RETSD board chair Colleen Carswell. “It’s a challenging time for everyone, and the protocols we have in place offer the best balance of both service and safety for our students.”

On those really cold days, if you want to know whether busing is cancelled, check your school’s website or listen to the radio for an announcement. If there hasn’t been an announcement by 6:45 a.m., buses are running. Extreme cold weather can often prompt calls to our transportation department, administration offices, or the media. Our system of posting announcements and alerting the media means you don’t have to make that phone call.

www.retsd.mb.ca