

THE MANITOBA

Teacher

DECEMBER 2013 VOLUME 92 NUMBER 3 NEWSMAGAZINE OF THE MANITOBA TEACHERS' SOCIETY

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President's Column

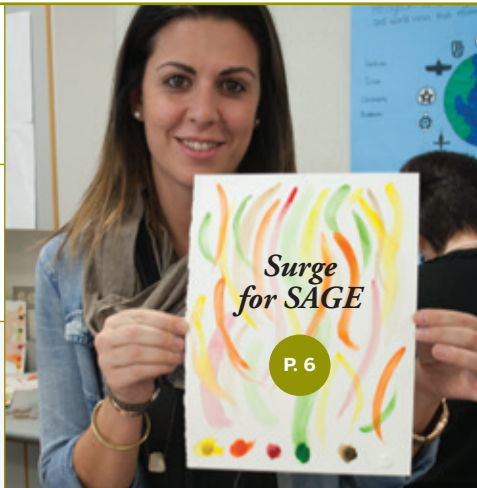
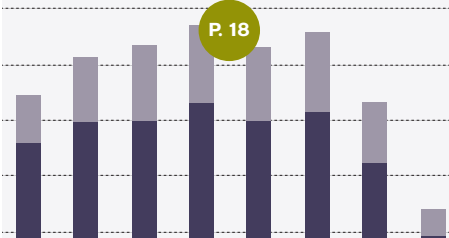
P. 4

Inside MTS

P. 5

Pension Parity Problem

Retired teachers drawing a pension will soon outnumber those paying into the plan



For some... Better is the alternative

Alternative schools allow students to work on self-motivated, project-based courses at their own pace

P. 8



Ticket to ride

Crocus Plains Regional High School students take on the restoration of a classic convertible for next year's raffle

P. 12



Brand bombing kids

Thanks to the arrival of touch screen devices, advertising more effectively targets today's most sought-after market

P. 16



*James Allum
Manitoba's new
Education Minister*

P. 15

*MTS, other groups
concerned over
Aboriginal education law*

P. 22



PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

PAUL OLSON

A Tale of Too %*\$@y

My apologies to Dickens. But it fits. Alas.

The clear message from a fair sampling of my direct contacts is that the provincial report card has been a serious headache. I am hearing this face to face, through social media, and through member focus groups and polling. Most tellingly for me, I am hearing this from 20-year colleagues who are no strangers to long hours and hard work—and they're angry.

What I don't know—yet—is the pervasiveness and the geography of the problems. How much of it is natural “growing pains”. How much is lousy implementation. How much is longing for the good old days that never were.

So, I'm hitting the road—digitally and physically—to hear from you about your experiences.

The new report card was supposed to be simpler, easier to understand, and a great conversation starter for students, parents, and teachers. School divisions and tech providers have had two years to set up the computer systems. I invested those two years in advisory committee work to help make reporting better, not worse. Our students don't get any smarter because their teachers are ripping their hair out in front of computer screens. Quite the contrary, if we're blowing time and energy on misery instead of Math (for example).

One recurring theme so far is that much of the pain hasn't actually been about the report card document per se, but about implementation issues. Computer system crashes, lost data, ludicrous interface design. Another challenge, apparently, is trying to reconcile a provincial document and direction with local directions that sometimes confuse and contradict.

Then there's the fact that the provincial report card was clearly posited as a report that would REPLACE existing reports. This has morphed into a position that sounds much like, “Any other reports you want done are fair game—just don't call them report cards, and it's all good.”

I'm going to be speaking with your association presidents, and wherever possible with you. We'll be using mbteach.org, and all-school mailings directly to the MTS contact person in your school. If you like, you can also find me directly on Facebook, or on Twitter at @MTSPaul. We're also setting up a dedicated email account. Check www.mbteach.org.

If indeed the concerns turn out to be less about the report card document as such, the problems and solutions may end up being beyond the typical mandate of government to address directly. If that turns out to be the case, heads up: this is also a year in which every teacher association will be prepping a bargaining package for the next collective bargaining round. Your next collective agreement is in the making.

Whatever your experience and working conditions are, make sure that your local president hears about them from you. To a great extent, our service and leadership are as good as the conversations you have with us.

I'll be seeing you.



The Manitoba Teachers' Society

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INSIDE MTS

KEN PEARCE, GENERAL SECRETARY

One of the critical functions of Society staff is the creation of the base on which decisions are made at the management and provincial executive levels of the organization. That base is the compilation of the wide-ranging research of our members that is done into the varied issues facing teachers in the classroom and beyond.

Last month, hundreds of our members would have been touched by just one aspect, our annual poll of members. Each year a professional pollster is hired to survey some 800 members to ask about ongoing and new issues and concerns they are facing. Among the issues our polls have recently looked at have been class sizes, provision of *The Manitoba Teacher* magazine online, violence in schools and members' rating of the job the Society is doing for members.

At the same time as this year's member poll, the Society was conducting focus groups with other public school teachers,

touching on issues that included the new report cards, union involvement and bullying. Almost every year staff will convene such focus groups to look at issues such as these to help the organization determine potential action to effectively deal with them.

The results of these examples of research have been important. For example, the discovery that teachers were growing ever more concerned about class size and composition sparked action by the Society to lobby the provincial government on this issue, leading to a response from government to limit early years class size.

This type of research of our members isn't all we do: every few years the Teacher Welfare Department provides all members with a paper survey about their workloads. The most recent example of this survey was the one conducted this past year, resulting in about 8,000 replies. We now are able to report how many hours teachers report put-

ting in during the week on teaching duties and extra-curricular events as well as how many are facing increased stress and increased workloads.

This information has already been analysed, broken down by divisions and supplied to local teacher associations to provide valid data to inform potential action.

Our group benefits area also relies on researching the needs of our members, surveying teachers who have made use of the Disability Benefits Plan. Those surveys help determine how claims are being handled and where we might make improvements as well as providing data to enable appropriate decisions to be made to enable the Plan to provide the best service in a cost effective manner.

Overall, our research aims to determine where perception and reality diverge so decisions can be made to take on the real issues, which are further examined by staff, faced by teachers every day.

 **Rock us at YHA 2014!**

Know a talented student or group who can rock our Young Humanitarian Awards? We'll be featuring three acts at our May 21st, 2014, YHA show at the Fairmont Hotel. We're looking for amazing voices, musicians and dancers.

Send your tip along with a YouTube link to YHA@mbteach.org
Must be public school students.
Honourarium provided.



AIMING AT A SURGE FOR

BY GEORGE STEPHENSON

Even as some 8,000 educators were attending the recent workshops and seminars put on by the MTS Special Area Groups of Educators discussions were underway about improving the day for next year and beyond.

The SAGE Council and MTS have been working to get more SAGE events across the province and get more teachers overall involved in SAGE-day activities.

“The SAGEs are working very hard to provide events in locations outside of Winnipeg,” says MTS Staff Officer Terry Price.

This year some SAGEs organized workshops in different locations and others provided video links from events in Winnipeg.

Price and MTS Staff Officer Lia Baksina say it is especially important now to look

at improving attendance for SAGE-organized events since the provincial government designated a day for professional development in all divisions.

Manitoba is only one of three provinces that set aside a designated professional development day for all teachers.

Currently, just over half of the public school teachers in the province attend SAGE-day events every year and just under half belong to at least one SAGE, according to a recent poll conducted for MTS.

And the poll showed that while half of all public school teachers regularly attend SAGE activities, that hasn’t changed much over the past seven years. In 2006 a similar poll found that 73 per cent said they had attended at least four SAGE

events over five years. In the 2013 poll, 65 per cent said they had attended at least four events in the previous five years.

The poll also found that membership in special area groups has not changed significantly since the 2006 poll. Forty six per cent of public school teachers are members of one group with almost 20 per cent belonging to two. One-quarter do not belong to any group.

“We really have to improve on that,” says Price, adding that informing MTS members about what the groups do is one of the first steps taken.

Baksina says that it was found that a large number of teachers didn’t know much about the special area groups so a large portion of one of MTS’s main con-



Photos by Karen Allen

R SAGE

OPPOSITE PAGE, LEFT: CAYC-MB-Art Explorations in Kindergarten
 TOP RIGHT: MATE-Let's Make an Art Mess!
 THIS PAGE, TOP LEFT IMAGE: CAYC-MB-The Great Outdoors and More
 RIGHT: CAYC-MB-Art Explorations in Kindergarten BOTTOM: MMEA-Technical Exercises for Conductors: Gaining Gestural Fluency through Daily Practice

ferences was turned over to SAGEs. The Fab5 conference, for teachers in their first five years, turned over a half day of workshops to the groups.

Baksina and Price say that turned out to be one of many highlights.

By showcasing the SAGEs to beginning teachers, they hope that it will encourage more teachers to attend SAGE events on the designated day in October. It also might encourage divisions to allow teachers to attend SAGE-day events.

The MTS poll, of more than 800 members, found that of teachers who didn't attend SAGE-organized events, 35 per cent attended division activities. This was especially high (42 per cent) for teachers outside of Winnipeg.

Finding ways to get teachers outside Winnipeg more connected with SAGE is a major challenge with almost 80 per cent of those teachers saying that it is expensive for them to attend SAGE-day functions. Most would like to see financial help from their local divisions or associations. As well, 45 per cent of teachers outside of Winnipeg said they would be interested in sessions provided through video conferencing.

But while some teachers may find it difficult to attend events, those who do attend have high praise for the workshops and seminars.

More than 70 per cent said they always find something interesting and relevant. Almost 90

per cent said they find it a good opportunity to network with other teachers.

Price and Baksina say the poll and ongoing discussions among groups has provided a good base on which to build the strength of SAGEs and improve attendance at the October conferences. Both are trying to ensure that groups begin working now to put in place changes that would enhance next year's SAGE day.

For more information on SAGEs visit www.mbteach.org



For some...

BETTER IS THE

Alternative



BY SHERRY KANIUGA

During a meeting in his office, principal Tom Tarrant's smart-phone beeps. He glances at it and sees that he's received a text message from a student.

A text from a student? To the principal of the school?

It may be out of the ordinary elsewhere, but not here at Jameswood Alternative School in Winnipeg.

All 90-plus students at Jameswood Alternative School have Tarrant's work cell

number and they're encouraged to call or text him if they're going to miss school, or if they have a concern they need to discuss.

It's just one of the many factors that sets this school apart from most others in the province.

One of two official "alternative schools" in Manitoba, Jameswood opened five years ago with only 20 students, evolving out of a program for Sturgeon Heights Collegiate students called Second Start. The school now provides a landing spot for students in Winnipeg's St. James School Division who

can't make attending a regular high school work, whether for social, emotional, behavioural or academic reasons.

"We're the last place for these kids, who just haven't had success at their home school. Some come here because of anxiety and depression issues, or because they have an addiction and can't deal with the freedom the other schools give them. Some come because they have become parents themselves, and need a way to balance their new life," says Tarrant, noting that there are

three daycare centres operating inside the school building, offering a possible solution for young parents who want to graduate high school.

Jameswood occupies a portion of a two-storey former elementary school (where a young Tarrant was actually a student). Its four teachers run classes using a student-directed module format, allowing the students to work at their own pace as long as they complete at least one credit per quarter. A number of courses can be running at the same time in one classroom, such as web design, desktop publishing, arts, home ec, electronics and drafting.

When each new student starts at Jameswood, Tarrant asks them to identify their goal.

“They all say it’s to graduate, and that’s my agenda for them too. I tell them, we can do something to help you with that,” says Tarrant. “We sit down and we figure out together how they’re going to get there.”

Across the city, in its own building at the foot of the Disraeli bridge in downtown Winnipeg, sits the city’s more well-known alternative high school: Argyle Alternative School. Argyle got its start as an “alternative” school with a re-entry program around the early 1970s, settling in its current location and format—providing a more flexible and personalized learning atmosphere to help students successfully transition into the workplace, college or university—in 2000.

Like Jameswood, Argyle is a “school of choice”—just not typically a student’s first

choice, or even their second or third choice, says principal Pat Graham.

“We’re often their last choice, or their only choice,” she says. “We’re a small atmosphere, which creates a different set of opportunities and challenges for the kids. If high school is somewhere you want to go and hide, this isn’t a good place—with only 160 kids in the building and just two hallways, it’s impossible. For some kids, that’s exactly what they need to be successful—not to be invisible.”

Also like Jameswood, Argyle attracts students who need a more personalized learning environment than their home school could offer them. Often the students have made some bad choices and connections and they need a different place to start over again, says Graham.

“You hear about at-risk kids all the time, but what makes them at-risk? We’ve looked at kids who have had involvement with social workers, psychiatrists, all of those support people; kids who have been labelled special education (either Level I or II); kids who have mental health concerns,” says Graham. “Close to half of our students are or have been in the care of Child and Family Services, and we have a large number who are on social assistance themselves. We also have a large gay and lesbian population who struggle with gender identification issues, and kids who struggle with all kinds of things, where no specific reason is what brought them here but it’s a combination of all the challenges they have,” says Graham.

With nearly double the student body and number of teachers as Jameswood, Argyle’s larger space and budget allows it to offer more options beyond the basic academics, such as art, physical education and video production, for which the school has become a bit famous: students have produced award-winning films here over the last few years. The short film *Blood Memory*, which was written, produced and acted by Argyle students, won Best Student Film, Best Short Film and rave reviews at the Winnipeg Aboriginal Film Festival last year.

The film program is exciting for Argyle students, but it also teaches a number of important skills, says video production teacher John Barrett.

“There’s a certain amount of accountability on a film set. The students realize quickly that the group depends on them being there, that they have a part to play, that they need to work together and respect other people’s positions. These are skills that can transfer anywhere.”

Argyle also has a sophisticated science lab connected to a rooftop windmill that generates energy used to run a hydroponic system in which herbs are grown using solar energy, and then used in the cafeteria. The school’s environmental studies program incorporates an “outdoor classroom”



**If high school is somewhere
you want to go and hide,
this *isn't* a good place.**

PICTURED IN PHOTO: Argyle teacher Mark Semenek (far right) with Photography Club students



**We're the last place for these kids,
who just haven't had success at their home school.**

— TOM TARRANT

that includes a solar-powered building on a flourishing green space.

Teacher John Danko runs the science and environmental studies courses. In the nine years he's been teaching at Argyle, he has helped the school secure a number of grants to make the programs possible.

"This is a great school. It allows students to have another chance," says Danko with pride. "They come from a different environment where they weren't fitting in, but they really fit in here. You can really see them grow."

The reputation alternative schools earn is not always accurate, staff insist; some people who have heard of Argyle, for example, think of it as the school for "bad kids" and dropouts. The student body is indeed colourful, but alongside students with crazy hairstyles, black clothing and piercings sit others wearing sweat pants and pony tails.

"We get the opportunity to see kids who are not always seen in society. These are the kids that if you're walking down the street you cross the street, or you sit far away on the bus, because you're not sure about them. But the reality is that these are kids who will open the door for you, carry your bags because they're too heavy, or if you look sad that day they'll ask if you're OK. You get

to see the human parts of kids that people don't always see," says Graham.

Roll call

Attendance is a big issue in alternative schools, as that was often part of the problem at the student's previous school. Following up when students don't show up is crucial, Graham explains.

"Our policy does not give a specific number of days they need to attend; our programs are based on continuous progress. Students are in a course for as long as they need to complete that course. Some need a longer time to focus on one course."

One thing on which teachers and principals at both schools absolutely agree is that in an alternative school, building relationships with the students based on mutual respect is crucial. At Argyle, each student meets with an advisor group led by a single teacher, every single day for 30 minutes. This gives the student a built-in place to belong within the school, but also helps teachers keep tabs on which students are in school that day. Another factor that makes Argyle unique, which goes back to its early days, is the tradition of students and staff being on first-name basis with each other.

Argyle also offers a leg up for young parents. The school has a built-in infant lab with room for eight babies, from two months to two years old. The student brings their baby to school in the morning, gets him or her settled into the infant lab, then returns throughout the day between classes to visit, change diapers, feed and have lunch, and put their baby down for a nap.

At both Argyle and Jameswood, each student follows a timetable that's personalized to match their specific needs. In addition to classes, many students meet with a guidance counsellor. At Jameswood, this position was only added about a year ago, but the counsellor, Sherry Ansloos, is plenty busy.

At a smaller alternative school, it's easier for counsellors to reach out to students, Ansloos says.

"With some of the higher profile students in a 'regular' school, you would know about them but it would be difficult to build connections and provide service to them. Here, because we're small, the students see me all the time and there's a level of comfort. They may not want to open up at first but because I'm always there, they begin to feel comfortable," Ansloos says. "The difference is what I'm counselling here is hard-core, heavy, real-life, raise-your-eyebrows kinds of stuff: pregnancy, violent incidents, domestic violence, mental illness, depression, anxiety, legal matters, housing, jobs, university, everything imaginable. I think that it's possible to reach those kids in other schools, but not to the same extent."

The staff at Jameswood consists of just Tarrant, Ansloos and the four classroom teachers. At Argyle there are nine and a half classroom teachers, two guidance counsellors, a full-time work experience co-ordinator, a full-time substance abuse counsellor, a half-time community support worker and four educational assistants who work in the infant lab, run the cafeteria and assist with video production.

In some situations, parents are involved in the decision to send their kids—who range in age from 16 up to 21—to an alternative school, but in many cases it's their home schools, a caregiver or the student themselves who suggest the option.

"Every year we get about 100 new kids, and this year the majority are here because they have heard from people who have attended that if it's not working out for you,

I know *way too much* about my students, because I have to.

this is a good place to be,” says Graham. “I often say to parents, we don’t really have a problem with cliques in the building, because you need at least two kids in the building who are enough alike to form a clique—and there aren’t.”

Another big difference is that in an alternative school, where students are often older and more independent, many of them work not just part time for spending money, but full-time jobs to support themselves and pay rent.

“About half of our kids have jobs, and because of the age of the students, we don’t get a lot of parental support,” says Tarrant. “It’s part of the gig I do, too—I know way too much about my students, because I have to.”

Ansloos agrees, adding that the school needs to know what’s going on in the students’ lives in order to help them, even if it’s not pretty.

“One of the things I’ll say to students is we’re not about trouble, we’re about help. So kids will disclose a lot of stuff to us that’s a lot to hold, but it’s about supporting them to get help. I think sometimes in other schools, kids are a bit apprehensive to talk to anyone represented as admin about those hard things because they’ll think they won’t be allowed in, or the issue is just too big.”

Part of Ansloos’ role at Jameswood is also as resource teacher for Learning to Age 18, a program that works with high school dropouts to try to connect them back into attending school and graduating.

“They just need a connection, a place they can come that’s safe, where they can get counseling and support towards getting their basic needs in line so they can move onto the next step, which is education,” Ansloos says.

Outside of school hours, Argyle runs occasional Family Nights, where students can bring whoever is significant in their life for a meal and an evening of activities.

“For many of the kids, there isn’t a lot they’ve been able to show their parents as being successful,” says Graham. “As much as a high school kid says, ‘I rage against this or that’, even if you want to be independent, voice your own opinion, be your own person, you still want to be part of a community that listens to your thoughts and wishes. Everyone wants to belong.”

Alternative schools can sometimes have a reputation of being loose with rules. True, students at Jameswood are allowed to wear hats and listen to iPods in class, as long as they are respectful towards teachers and



Our programs are based on continuous progress. Students are in a course for as long as they need to complete that course.

— PAT GRAHAM

each other. But there’s a structure to the day, Tarrant explains.

For a typical student, the day starts at 9:30, they attend two morning and two afternoon classes with breaks and a lunch hour in between, all ending at 3:15 p.m. During morning break, a food and nutrition grant allows the school to provide a snack, such as yogurt and some fruit, to students.

However it’s only about two out of every five students that follow a full-day schedule, says Tarrant. “Some students work in the afternoons, so they only come in the mornings, or maybe they work at night so it’s only afternoons that work for them. Some of them, we’re happy if they can make it in once a week.”

The guidance counsellor helps determine what type of specialized schedule might be needed, says Ansloos.

“Kids on my caseload have been set up specifically for success. Some of them have been out of school for a while—one girl I’m working with has been out for two years. To start, she’s putting in one hour, two days a week, for the last class of the day. That’s what I feel is something she can do; if she has success with that we’ll add more time,” Ansloos says.

With such a range of types of students at both schools, one might wonder if bullying would be a problem. But Tarrant claims the opposite.

“This is the safest school I’ve ever been in. We have almost no issues, because we are open,” he says. “The students share a lot so if things are bubbling, we hear about it, and we get there before it bubbles over.”

Bullying is a no-go at Argyle too, says Barrett, who has taught at the school for 26 years.

“We’re working with students that don’t necessarily have a lot of good work, study and attendance habits. It’s the kind of place that will allow them to succeed and learn those habits in a supportive environment, where it’s very inclusive—there’s zero tolerance for any sort of bullying or marginalizing,” he says.

At both alternative schools, the principals, teachers and counsellors all have stories to tell about students who have made amazing transformations between the time they enrolled and the day they graduated.

“Overall, they are much more confident,” Graham proudly says. “They have the ability and are much more articulate in the sense that they can now understand and say what it is that they need, and they know how to work through their frustrations. It’s great to see their confidence in their own ability to be out in the world, make good choices and be good people.”

One challenge Tarrant says he could do without is the perception that alternative schools like Jameswood are not “real schools”.

“We take being a school very seriously. We have baselines we want the students to achieve—some of them have never achieved these goals before, but they do here. They’re here to work, and sometimes, to grow up,” he says, gesturing to a hallway wall plastered with photos of former Jameswood students on their graduation day.

“What we do here shows that with some imagination, student needs can be accommodated. We all have policies we need to follow, but it can be done—just take a look at all these grads! My staff and I are not afraid to take a risk if it means a student is going to be here, if it means the student is going to get the credit. Nobody can tell me we do too much for a kid.”



BY SHERRY KANIUGA

It's a single project that will involve more than 100 students, take three school years to complete and cost about \$30,000. But the teachers involved are confident that far more than just one person will cruise away from this assignment a big winner.

By next fall, Crocus Plains Regional Secondary School students in Brandon will be putting the finishing touches on the project that's got them all revved up: the full restoration of a classic 1978 Fiat Spider 124 convertible.

And once it's done, they'll give it away. After spending thousands of hours restoring the car from the ground up, the students in the Collision Repair Technology and Automotive Technology programs will help promote the raffle that will see one lucky winner in the community drive off in their assignment at the end of the 2014–2015 school year.

"The kids all want to win the car. The minute I mention it, they all ask 'When can I get a ticket?'" says Collision Repair Technology instructor Carl DeCosse. "And it's not just the students, but also the staff, and anybody in the community I've told about the project—they've all said they'll be buying a ticket for sure."

Besides providing the students with hundreds of "achievable" to reach throughout

the project, the restoration will help showcase the skills of the students in the school's vocational programs, maximize student engagement and encourage school pride, DeCosse says.

Students in both programs will be involved in the project. The Collision Repair Technology students work on the more cosmetic components of the vehicle such as the body, paint and interior. Most of the Automotive Technology students' work will come later, on the car's drive line, including its engine, transmission and brakes.

Depending on the stage of assembly, up to eight students can work on the car at once, says DeCosse. The raffle car is one of a number of vehicles they'll work on during the year, along with theory work.

"The students in the course have a set of outcomes they need to meet by the end of the block, and I'll have 30 kids trying to reach those outcomes in different spots. I'll use this car whenever I can."

The Fiat was originally brought to the school's autobody shop for some repairs, but when the customer realized the project was much bigger than anticipated, the auto repair programs bought it using money they had made from previous repairs. DeCosse knew the car would work well for the project based on its uniqueness, but there was one deciding factor.

"It will actually fit through the double doors and into the main foyer of the school, so it will be perfect for putting on display for ticket sales during events," DeCosse says.

The automotive programs at Crocus Plains are accredited, allowing students to achieve their Level I apprenticeship standing. Some of the students have this goal in mind when signing up, while others just want to learn how to fix their own cars, says DeCosse. Along with teaching students how to do repairs, instructors also make the connection with other subjects like math and communications, sometimes having other teachers visit the shop to team teach.

"You don't just come into this trade and think you don't have to read and write and learn how to do math, so we take that teachable moment every opportunity we can, and show them where they're going to use those skills in here. You're in Grade 10 consumer math? You'll need it for estimating, and we can move it into wages and salaries and all that stuff," DeCosse says. "So it's about trying to teach the whole student; it's not just about cars."

One obstacle students bring into the program is what DeCosse calls the "Discovery Channel mentality"—they're used to watching unrealistic "reality" shows on tele-



vision where a vehicle is restored in a week. The reality is, projects like the Fiat restoration move at a much slower pace.

“It’s a huge project with a long timeline, so I have to be careful to keep things moving along and motivate the students as we go. But the kids are very excited about it and they’ve done a lot of work already—they have hundreds of hours of labour into this thing,” says DeCosse.

Many of the students recognize the uniqueness of a project of this size. “It’s great to get to work on something rare that you wouldn’t see in a shop every day,” says Grade 12 student Tristan Ricketts, who has been taking the Collision Repair Technology program since Grade 9 and plans to pursue the auto body trade after graduating. “It might not look like much when we start it, but as you get closer to the end you see how much work you’ve put into it and how much it pays off to work that hard on something. And it would be awesome to win it!”

To make the project affordable and viable as a fundraiser—DeCosse hopes the raffle will raise enough money to send a few students to the annual Skills Manitoba and Skills Canada competitions, which they do with great success each year—the school has solicited sponsorship from local companies. They’ve already secured support from Chase Autobody Supplies and their providers, 3M and Sikkens, and Century Brake Company, raising about half of their \$15,000 sponsorship goal in funds and material donations such as paint, brakes, and body repair products such as sandpaper.

Once the completed Fiat is ready to raffle, much of the next school year will be spent on promotion during functions at the school and other schools in the Brandon School Division, as well as local car shows and community events. Along with in-person sales, DeCosse plans to set up a web page for selling tickets, to which students and staff can direct ticket buyers by handing out the info on little business cards.

“It’s really about promoting the kids and the program,” says DeCosse. “It’s just a tool to get out there—there’s a gorgeous little car there, go take a look, and you’ll find out there are hundreds of kids that have worked on it, coming through the program here at Crocus. It’s a way of connecting with the whole community.”

The restoration and raffle is being modelled after similar projects done with success by Red River College, and the project is sure to instill a sense of pride in any student who works on it, DeCosse says.

“I’ll meet kids five or six years after they’ve graduated and they still talk about big project cars they’ve worked on in class. If they see the car out in the community they remember it and feel really proud. I know that with a job like this, when they see the car later it should strike some really positive memories of high school.”

It’s just a tool to get out there—there’s a gorgeous little car there... and you’ll find out there are hundreds of kids that have worked on it, coming through the program here at Crocus. It’s a way of connecting with the whole community.



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Allum from a family of educators

BY JUDY EDMOND

James Allum, who was first elected to the Manitoba Legislature in 2011 as the MLA for Fort Garry–Riverview was named Minister of Education and Advanced Learning on Oct. 18, replacing Nancy Allan who was Minister of Education since 2009.

Allum, who grew up and received his education in Ontario, moved to Winnipeg in 1996 to take a position at the City of Winnipeg Archives. In an interview for *The Manitoba Teacher* he talked about the difference he felt between Ontario and Manitoba.

“In Winnipeg, and broadly speaking in Manitoba, people are so connected to their neighbourhood. It’s the connection to people and their neighbourhoods and the central roles schools play in their communities,” said Allum.

Before becoming an MLA, Allum had a 15-year career with the City of Winnipeg. After working at the Archives, he held a variety of positions including Senior

“A classroom is really one of my favourite places to be...”

Consultant in Strategic Management and Manager of Aboriginal Initiatives in the office of the Chief Administrative Officer.

However, Allum considers himself a teacher.

“I’m an educator myself. My dad was the first member of his family to graduate from university, so it became an article of faith in my family growing up for all of us to go through school and into university. Luckily I was privileged enough that it was expected.

“My sister is a teacher. The story that I always tell about her is that she was teaching Grade 1 when I was in Grade 1 and I would bring home homework every day, not because a Grade 1 student was being assigned homework, but to take to my sister so she could use it the next day in her classroom. She was just 19.

“My brother is a high school English teacher, he is retired now and my sister-in-law teaches in one of the toughest parts of Hamilton. And I am an academic myself. I spent 14 years in classrooms as a teaching assistant and as a part-time teacher/instructor at the University of Winnipeg.

“I would say that being in a classroom is really one of my

favourite places to be and it’s an incredible amount of fun.”

Allum has three children. The oldest teaches Grade 1 French Immersion in Winnipeg. She graduated from Brandon University, did her practicum in Kuwait and then went back and taught Grade 5 in Kuwait for a year. His other two children are in university.

When asked about his own experience in school Allum said, “When I was a kid in the early 1960s schools were a scary place. Teachers were sometimes wonderfully loving and sometimes just scary. I was supposed to skip Grade 3. In that year of transitioning I didn’t connect with the teacher and I didn’t skip. Instead, I ended up skipping Grade 6 because in the Grade 5–6 situation I did connect with the teacher.

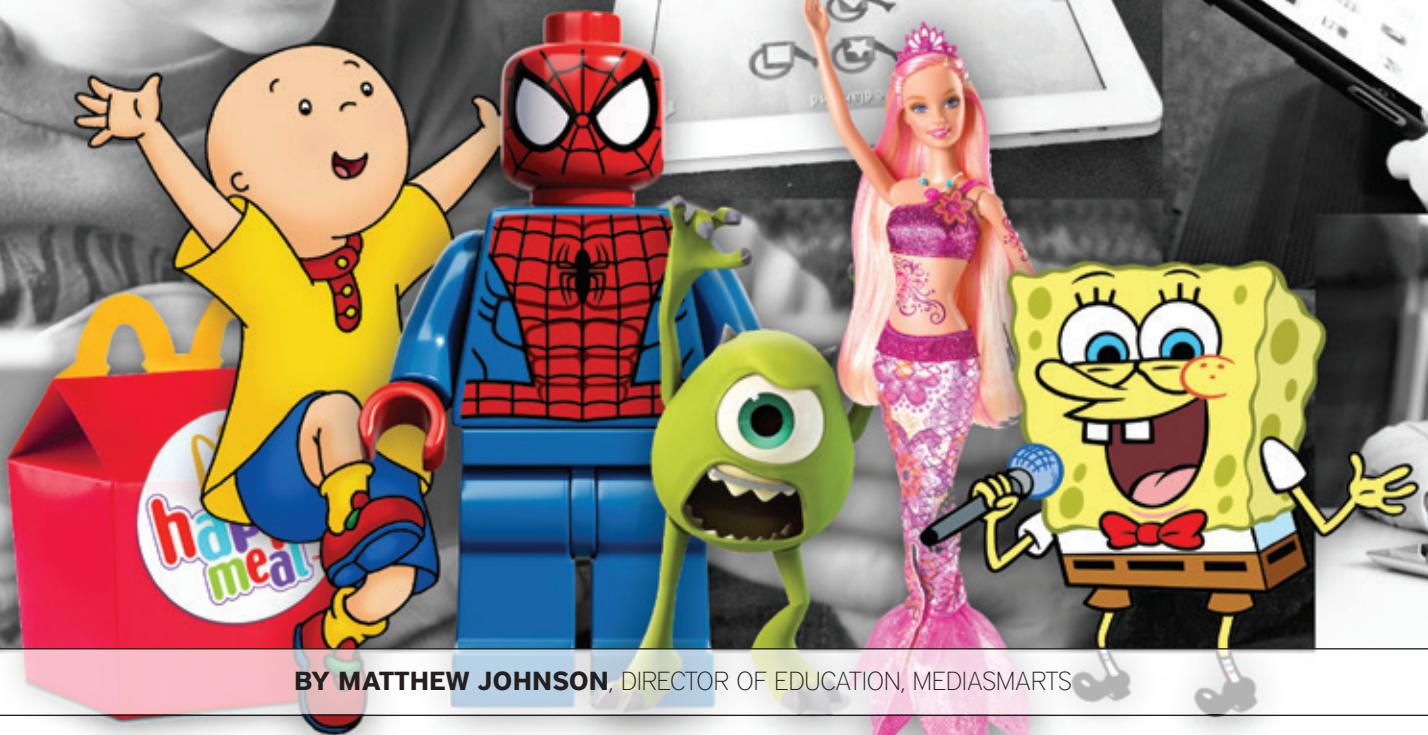
“For me, how I connected with the teacher was really reflected in how I performed. And why teachers are indispensable to making us good and productive students. That teacher was Mr. Cheeseman when I was in Grade 7. He knew I was younger than everybody. He made sure I was in a comfortable setting even though I was at least a year younger.

“I wasn’t a very good high school student. I got into Trent University on probation, because I wasn’t a motivated learner as a teenager. I got to Trent and at my first lecture and I really knew immediately that I loved to learn. It’s that love of learning that really motivated my very long academic career.

“That’s what I always want us to convey—is that love of learning. I know that teachers have, and I believe that every student has within them, the love of learning.”



KIDS FOR SALE



BY MATTHEW JOHNSON, DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, MEDIASMARTS

Of all the issues relating to young people's use of the Internet, the one that parents are least likely to be aware of is how aggressively children are marketed to online.

Studies have consistently shown that more than 90 per cent of children's websites include advertising or marketing material of one kind or another.

Marketers target kids for two main reasons. Kids now control a significant amount of spending. According to the 2013 report *Tweens R Shoppers: a Look at the Tween Market and Shopping Behavior*, children aged eight to 12 in the U.S. are thought to spend around \$43 billion a year of their own money, in addition to the roughly \$150 billion they influence through "pester power".

As well, they are vulnerable to advertising. For example, kids under six have trouble understanding the concept of advertising, and even older children often have trouble telling the difference between ads and programming: instead of looking at something's purpose, they'll look at surface features such as the presence of characters or a story.

Online marketers take advantage of this fact by blurring the distinction between content and advertising on kids' sites. While some sites contain notices that identify ads—such as the notice on McDonald's HappyMeal.com site that says "Hey kids, this is advertising!"—it's unclear how effective these notices are because even when material is marked as advertising, research has found that often kids still don't recognize it for what it is.

Some of the most successful of these sites are "branded environments" such as the popular Barbie.com where children can engage in a variety of different activities—games, chat, virtual shopping and so on—in the constant presence of Barbie and Barbie-related products. Branded sites often have "advergaming," games which use branded characters and background images to keep players engaged on the site and build brand loyalty.

Kids also receive more subtle advertising on sites like Procter & Gamble's "Being Girl" site, which mimics the form and content of teen magazines through a mix of articles, fashion tips and advice columns—all of which make frequent references to Tampax, Always and other P&G

products. Companies also use popular social networks such as Facebook and Twitter to reach this demographic. Alcohol companies, for instance, use events and fan pages on Facebook to reach youth as well as online videos featuring musicians and performers popular with young people. While tobacco companies claim not to do any marketing online, researchers such as George Thomson and Nick Wilson of the University of Otago, New Zealand believe that "indirect marketing activity by tobacco companies or their proxies" can be found on YouTube and other online video sites.

The most sought-after market, however, is not children, tweens or teens but toddlers. Thanks to the arrival of touch screen devices like the iPad, along with the "pass-back" phenomenon that sees the old model turned into a toy when parents buy the latest version, marketers have begun aggressively marketing to children too young to control any spending or ask for a particular product but not too young to develop lifelong brand preferences.

Research has found that children as young as six months can recognize branded material such as mascots and logos, and that this brand awareness persists as they get older.



Tips for taking action

At the end of the day, very little can be done to prevent kids from encountering online advertising. The best approach is to teach them, from an early age, the purpose of advergames, branded characters and commercial websites. Here are some suggestions for what parents and teachers can do to help.

- **Take a tour.** Spend some time exploring the online worlds your children use. If you're not satisfied this is a good place for your children, look for another site that offers a similar experience without the issues you find concerning.
- **Ask questions.** Children generally can't tell the difference between programming and advertising, and online advertisers take advantage of this. If a site is free, ask your children how they think the site's owner stays in business; ask them why an imaginary world would have ads or surveys for real products.
- **Think critically about commercial websites.** Kids need to be educated about online marketing and how to recognize when they're being sold to. Teach them that while commercial sites may be fun to visit, they exist to make money. The contests, quizzes and surveys are there for a reason: to collect personal information from kids and use it to create marketing strategies to reach other kids.
- **Be willing to say no.** Children on virtual worlds are subject to constant "upselling." Decide before you allow your child to visit a virtual world how much you're willing to invest in it and stick to your guns.



Marketers have begun *aggressively marketing to children to develop lifelong brand preferences*

One study using MRIs found that just looking at logos for fast food companies caused parts of kids' brains associated with pleasure to light up.

Constant exposure to advertising and marketing images can also make kids more likely to embrace consumerism: one study found that exposure to TV ads make children more likely to agree with statements like "It's important to own expensive things" and "Buying expensive things makes you happy."

Many of the virtual worlds popular with kids foster consumerism through what's called the "freemium" strategy where basic content is offered for free but you have to pay to access other content. For instance, in Club Penguin it costs nothing to play the basic game but if you want to have your own igloo to decorate you need to subscribe. In other cases the added content comes as fee-for-service: for example, some free online games charge you for special weapons or items. In these sites the pressure of socializing and competition can be very powerful and make it hard to resist paying for what was supposed to be a free experience.

What's most striking about the commercialization of kids' online lives is how we've come to accept it as normal. One reason may be the near-total absence of public non-commercial spaces online—for children or adults. Instead, the Internet is dominated by "pseudo-public" spaces like Facebook and Club Penguin, which often bill themselves as communities and are generally treated as such by their users. In each case, though, their true nature is much more akin to a theme park than a public park. Both are privately owned, and their continued existence is not guaranteed: aside from its contracts with advertisers, there is nothing preventing a site from going permanently offline tomorrow. Similarly, to participate in Club Penguin or any similar kids' site, users must agree to the Terms of Service, which often involve giving up rights to privacy, intellectual property and freedom of expression.

Like many digital issues, online marketing has no easy solution. Increased awareness and more—and better informed—parental supervision of young children would definitely be an improvement, especially when

it comes to apps and spaces where content and advertising are fully integrated. But the fact is that even if we steer our kids away from the most overt form of advertising, it's almost impossible to avoid marketing and consumerism in online spaces for kids or adults. Unless as a society we are willing to invest in high quality, non-commercial online spaces for kids—ones that can compete, in terms of entertainment and production quality, with the commercial spaces that exist—the majority of kids' online experiences will continue to be spaces where marketing is the main imperative. In the meantime, teaching children media literacy skills for recognizing and decoding advertising is one way to mitigate the effects of advertising: for instance, one study found that children who recognized the commercial purpose of advergaming were much less likely to be persuaded by them. This is just one more reason why traditional media literacy skills are more important than ever as kids' media experiences are increasingly happening in unregulated, unmediated and unsupervised environments.

P A R I T Y

PENSION

P R O B L E M

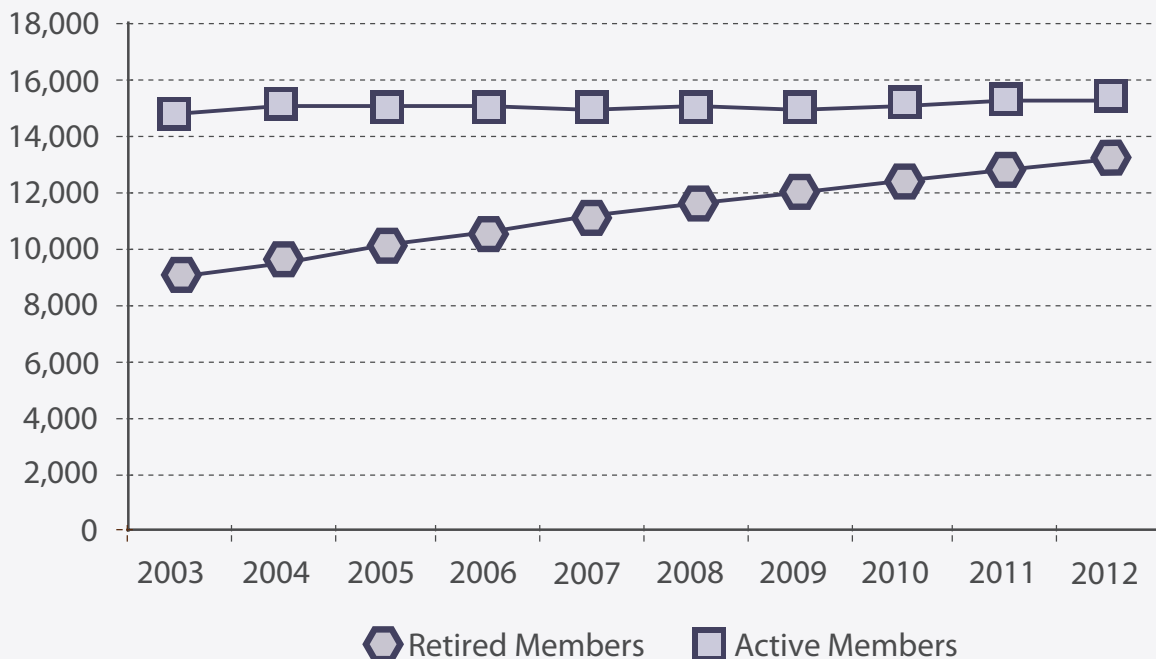
BY GEORGE STEPHENSON

S ometime in the next couple of years the number of retired teachers drawing a pension will exceed the numbers paying into the plan. Over the past dozen years the number of active teachers has increased only slightly, from 14,000 to 15,400. During the same period, the number of retired teachers has gone from less than 6,000 to more than 13,000.

And, in about 2015, those two lines will cross. MTS as the representative of pension members has the responsibility to lobby government for changes. It's not a disaster, but it does heighten the need to make decisions now, says the person who has guided the teachers' pension plan—The Teachers' Retirement Allowances Fund—through both good times and bad.

Jeff Norton, the former president and chief executive officer who left the plan in October, says having more members taking money out of the plan means decisions have to be made on increasing contributions or decreasing benefits. "As the contribution pool goes down, the ability to raise funds decreases. But, you don't want to over collect today."

Membership Trends



It is a common problem among teachers' unions—and some others—where the numbers of members has remained about the same while the number of retirees has grown because they are living longer now. The effect is that the benefits flowing out of the plan are increasing much faster than the contributions flowing into the plan. MTS along with other teacher unions need to be in constant discussion with government to review the plan document to ensure that the contribution rate is adequate to fund the basic benefit.

Norton says that fact is just one of the balls being juggled as TRAF looks to the future. Another issue is the level at which the plan is funded.

Currently, the plan is slightly underfunded, at about 95 per cent.

“The goal is to be fully funded all the time, 100 per cent to 110 per cent,” he says. Current projections show the plan becoming fully funded over the next few years if its investments earn a return of seven per cent. On top of that is a series of contribution increases, (totalling two per cent) that will come into effect through 2015.

But if returns are only, for example, six per cent and the number of retirements grow much faster, the picture changes.

“If investments don't meet the goals, then maybe contributions will have to go up another two per cent,” he says. “That would take it from 9.4 per cent of salary to 11.4 per cent. Is that palatable? Is that acceptable?”

“They are above that in other provinces, but what we're saying is this is why we have to have the discussion now.”

While TRAF looks at contributions and investment income, it has also taken a look at the benefits being received by retirees.

“Our board has spent a lot of time looking at all aspects and benefit adjustments are on the table,” he says. “We have laid out some options to kick-start the discussions.”

Options at this point needn't be drastic, he says, pointing to possible benefit changes to items such as the early retirement benefit.

“They are not easy issues. Much might depend on the investment side.”

If the plan's investments got a return of nine per cent, “maybe the problem solves itself.” Then again, continual investment returns at that level would not be likely to last.

Norton points to the past where investment returns helped cover all the funds necessary to keep the basic benefit fully-funded. When the world economy tanked five years ago, so too did the investment returns and sparked the need for contributions to increase.

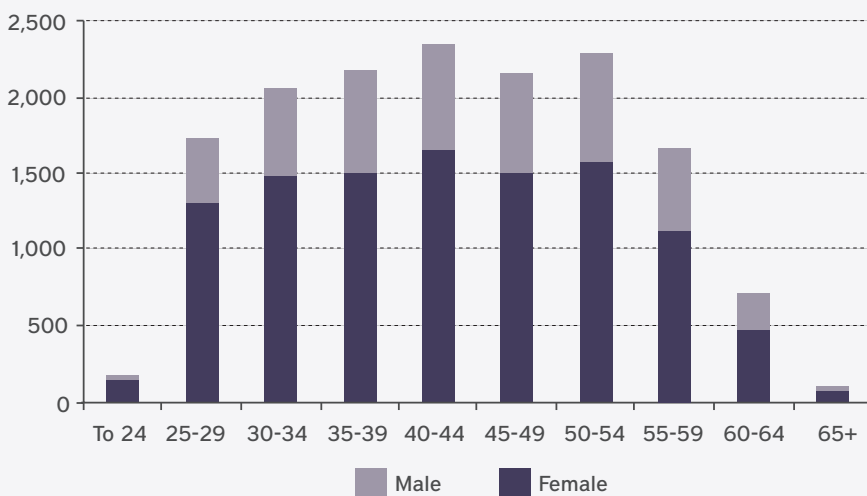
At the same time teachers who have retired are drawing pensions longer than had been anticipated, says Norton. In just the past 15 years it was discovered that projections on mortality among retired teachers were out by as much as three years. And, it was found, that teachers live longer than the population in general.

It means that many teachers will collect pensions for a longer period than they

taught. At the moment, TRAF has more than 1,000 retirees over the age of 85.

There is also a large group of teachers who could join the ranks of retirees in the coming year. Almost 2,500 active teachers were eligible for retirement this year, with just over 2,000 of those eligible for an un-reduced pension.

Age & Gender Distribution-Active Members



Retiree Profile

2012 New Retirees	Female	Male	2012 Combined	2011 Combined
Average Age (years)	59.5	59.6	59.6	59.3
Average Services (years)	25.3	30.3	26.8	27.8
Average Monthly Pension	\$2,465	\$3,088	\$2,643	\$2,657
Average Projected Years on Pension	30	28	29	29

PORTFOLIO

OUR COMMIE HISTORY

BY GEORGE STEPHENSON

Well, that ought to boost circulation

Much has been written and speculated upon about the demise of the daily newspaper. One editor, however, has come up with a new reason fewer and fewer people are buying newspapers.

It's all because of single moms, says deep thinker Chris Powell, managing editor of the *Journal-Inquirer* in Connecticut.

"Newspapers still can sell themselves to traditional households—two-parent families involved with their children, schools, churches, sports, civic groups, and such. But newspapers cannot sell themselves to households headed by single women who have several children by different fathers, survive on welfare stipends, can hardly speak or read English, move every few months to cheat their landlords, barely know what town they're living in, and couldn't afford a newspaper subscription even if they could read. And such households constitute a rising share of the population."

Then again, maybe those crazy readers want facts, evidence and reasoned arguments.

So, the Harper Government (formerly known as the Government of Canada) is plunking down over a million bucks to build some kind of monument to slag Communism.

Stephen Harper is cranking up the way-back machine. Welcome to 1954. Or '58. Or '67.

The government has announced the creation of a memorial "to the tens of millions of innocent victims of Communist regimes around the world."

The notice has drifted by with little or no comment; nobody wants to be seen to be defending genocide or oppression or crazy Joe Stalin. It is interesting, though, that the idea has been kicking around for more than three years, spearheaded by some group called Tribute to Liberty. But, the group's fundraising efforts failed so the government has now stepped in with \$1.5 million in taxpayers' cash.

Unfortunately, the idea and the heated rhetoric around it reflect the typical black-and-white view this government has of history and the world.

When announcing the project, Jason Kenney, minister of multiculturalism, said the memorial "will also serve as a reminder to all Canadians that glorifying Communist symbols insults the memory of these victims."

Immigration Minister Chris Alexander added to the Cold War flourish, pointing out "Canada has a proud history of serving as a place of refuge and welcoming refugees as well as displaced persons, including those escaping Communist oppression."

True enough, but if these ministers of freedom had any sense of Canadian history, they would know that Communists played a substantial role in creating the country we have today. Like it or not, there have been Canadian Communists who championed, and were imprisoned for supporting many of the freedoms we have today. They don't deserve to be engraved, even indirectly, on this government's hate list.

It wouldn't be at all surprising if Alexander or Kenney or Harper have never heard of Tim Buck.

In the 1930s Tim Buck was a rock star of the working class. In 1934 thousands turned out to greet his arrival at Union Station in Toronto. A year before, the town of Blairmore in Alberta's Crowsnest Pass named its main street Tim Buck Boulevard. And, horror of horrors, he was the general secretary of the Communist Part of Canada.

Buck's arrival in Toronto came after his release from Kingston Penitentiary where he was locked up after being found guilty of sedition. His major "crime" was riling up working folks, promoting such radical ideas as employment insurance, the seven-hour work day and a minimum wage of \$25 a week.

In the Crowsnest Pass, Tim Buck and the Communists became heroes for organizing and defending miners who at the time worked in dangerous conditions and lived in squalor, all at the pleasure of the companies.

In Winnipeg, Communists were also seen as one of the few organizations willing to stand up for working people, especially in the aftermath of the 1919 General Strike.

The first Communist ever elected to any political post in North America was William Kosilnyk, a Ukrainian activist elected to Winnipeg city council in 1926.

Joe Zuken was a beloved folk hero in the city right to his dying day in 1986. And all this dreaded Communist did was, as a lawyer, defend trade unions; as a school trustee fight, for the creation of kindergartens and call for free textbooks for students and higher salaries for teachers and as a city councillor campaign for public housing and hospitals and care for the poor.

Damn Commie.

A MEMORIAL TO

VICTIMS OF
COMMUNISM
MEMORIAL

Y IGNORED

The government would no doubt argue that the memorial in Ottawa has nothing to do with these, and many other, Communists who fought for human rights, dignity and freedom from oppression in Canada.

But, really. That wouldn't square with the attitude of this government.

So, what of the victims of capitalism, then? How about a memorial to those men, women and children who died in the mines and factories and forests and on fishing boats, working in dangerous conditions for little pay with no benefits because there were no laws to protect them?

It could even be argued that if capitalism had cared about the workers who turned the gears, the seeds of Communism never would have been planted. There have certainly been, and still are, grim excesses of despots, killers and tyrants operating under many different labels and philosophies, including conservative.

But such details add complexity to the simplistic government narrative, however outdated, that all Communists were and are evil. It is the George W. Bush worldview.

Indeed, the anti-Communist monument idea doesn't even appear to have come from those dusty minds in Ottawa.

Bush unveiled his own monument in Washington in 2006. Of course, it is called the Victims of Communism Memorial and the Canadian one will be called A Memorial to Victims of Communism.

Totally different thing.



Speaking of facts

You would be hard-pressed to find another newspaper in the world that does a more fastidious job of correcting its mistakes than The New York Times.

It recently:

- Corrected an article that suggested penguins were indigenous to Louisiana. It meant pelicans.
- Corrected an article that misstated the length of time E.B. White wrote for *The New Yorker* as five centuries.
- Admitted an error in a story about parents being victimized by purported costs of going to college. The error was in a chart showing the costs of going to college.
- Recalibrated the elevation of Colorado Springs. It turns out it is only 6,000 feet above sea level, not 6,000 miles.
- Showed that it can address, and have some fun with, even long-time mistakes with this: "An article on May 5 about a new four-part PBS series, 'Constitution USA,' rendered incorrectly the name of a fairy from the *Peter Pan* story. She is Tinker Bell, whom the show's host, Peter Sagal, equated with the Constitution—not Tinkerbell. (Since 1980, *The Times* has referred to "Tinkerbell" at least 229 times with nary a note from a reader—or a peep from Ms. Bell's publicist.)"



In my day we walked 10 miles to and from school... uphill, both ways

A new reports says Canadian school kids may be getting healthier because they are increasingly being driven to school.

The report by Active Healthy Kids Canada gave Canadian youth a "D-" for physical activity levels.

Entitled *Are we driving our kids to unhealthy habits?*, the report suggests children are being driven to and from school with increasing frequency, while other methods such as walking and cycling has decreased in recent years.

"By driving our kids to and from their destinations, we may be robbing them of an important source of physical activity, and contributing to lifelong unhealthy habits," said Dr. Mark Tremblay, chief scientific officer of Active Healthy Kids Canada.



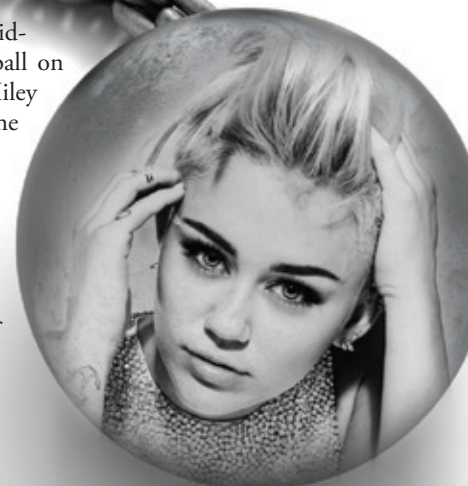
And the Internet mourned

A university in Allendale, Michigan, decided to remove a piece of artwork—a giant ball on a chain—after students began copying the Miley Cyrus video *Wrecking Ball* and sending out the results on social media.

Officials at Grand Valley State University said students always swing on the ball at the beginning of the year—but now they're doing it nude.

There have been no reports on whether the university has locked away its sledge hammers.

Students have begun protesting for return of the ball.



MTS, other groups concerned over **Aboriginal education** law

BY GEORGE STEPHENSON

The executive of The Manitoba Teachers' Society will be examining the federal government's controversial plans for a national First Nations Education Act.

First Nations across Canada have criticized the plan and teachers' organizations are also raising concerns about the proposed legislation.

Under the draft legislation, band councils would operate schools as many do now. They could also purchase services from regional or provincial school boards or the private sector.

First Nations could also form education authorities that would oversee one or more schools in a region, much the same as public school divisions.

The federal government, however, would set and enforce education standards on reserves and could still take over a school or school authority.

The MTS provincial executive has raised the issue and was to discuss it in more detail in December.

MTS President Paul Olson says the issue is important to all educators and all people interested in improving Aboriginal education.

"The voice of First Nations leadership must be heard loud and clear on this matter, and we must also ensure we in the public system have a clear idea of the implications of this legislation for public schools. 'Trust us it'll all work out' is no basis for decision-making in any legislative process."

The British Columbia Teachers' Federation is already on record as opposing the law, writing to Prime Minister Stephen Harper, pointing out the original blueprint on which the legislation is based was not in the spirit of reconciliation and was inconsistent with First Nations' rights.

"Reconciliation means all Canadians have to work together so we don't re-

peat the mistakes of the past," said BCTF President Jim Iker.

The BCTF says the government should act by:

- Committing the funding needed to support first Nations Education.
- Not undermining agreements reached in British Columbia by unilaterally imposing new legislation.
- Fulfilling the promise made in the Residential Schools Apology to forge a new relationship with Aboriginal people by abandoning its unilateral agenda for imposing legislation.
- Working with First Nations to ensure that all 203 First Nation communities and organizations supporting First Nations education can participate in development of the legislation.

Tyrone McNeil, president of the First Nations Education Steering Committee in B.C. says the law will take away the right of First Nations to govern their own schools.

"The Harper government says this new legislation will give greater control to First Nations. That is bogus ... if anything the minister becomes superintendent of First Nations schools."

The draft legislation does not outline how schools will be funded. Aboriginal Affairs Minister Bernard Valcourt has said reform must come before funding.

Derek Nepinak, grand chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, has said funding details must be part of any legislative package, given that reserves do not receive as much funding as provincially-governed schools.

"Mr. Valcourt, the minister, can talk all he wants about not funding a broken system, but who broke the system to begin with?" asked Nepinak.

Valcourt has promised the government will listen to all parties on what should be included in the final package.

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Benevolent, bright and bold

Our province is home to many public school students who make a difference in the world through acts of compassion, creativity and courage. If you know of an individual or group of students who exhibit these qualities, nominate them for a 2014 **Young Humanitarian Award**.

Nomination forms can be found at: mbteach.org/yha/yha.html

Deadlines for nominations: Tuesday, April 1, 2014 at 4:00 PM.

Individual students and groups will be honoured at the awards ceremony on Wednesday, May 21, 2014 at The Fairmont Hotel.

